Foreigners, Immigrants, Host Cities: The Policies of Multi-Ethnicity in Rome. Reading Governance in a Local Context
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Summary

This paper reviews the experience of Rome in dealing with the challenges posed by a multi-ethnic society.

A central feature of the local political strategy is the “Pact of Integration”. The adoption of the Pact proposes governance as a model of participation including many actors, namely immigrant communities, in the comprehensive development of the quality of life of the city and not only in the decision-making mechanisms of local powers. The Pact represents a contract by which the social and political acceptance of foreigners in the local environment is perceived as benefiting both the foreign and autochthonous communities. On one hand, immigrants are incorporated into their local environment, following from the recognition of foreigners’ rights and needs for solidarity. On the other hand, foreigners are considered agents of local development insofar as they are both consumers and producers. The multiethnic society can then be a source of development.

The preface by Franca Eckert Coen provides an overview of the city’s experiences in managing religious differences.

Keywords: Immigration, Governance, Multi-ethnicity

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Preface, by Franca Eckert Coen

My role in the Municipality of Rome as the Mayor’s delegate for multiethnic affairs is quite new for our city and for Italy in general.

As a matter of fact, up to now the Department of Social Affairs has been in charge of all the problems related to immigration, and consequently also of all the matters regarding integration. That is one of the reasons why an immigrant has always been considered as a weak subject requiring social assistance instead of a person with everyday practical problems—that is, a home, a job, education for his children and of course, if necessary, also assistance from Social Services.

The Mayor, through his delegate, had in mind to provide the means by which immigrants might be granted the dignity that human being deserve, giving them the capacity to speak for themselves and not through interpreters (e.g. mediators or associations); providing them with the opportunity to express their own culture in such a way that Italian citizens may understand and interact with them; educating them about Italian laws, language and traditions so that they may find their way in overcoming the boundaries between their culture of origin and that of the country in which they are living and acquire not merely a new identity, but reinforce that of their country of origin, meanwhile learning and accepting the rules of the new one. In a nutshell, this means pursuing the aims of a pluralistic society.

The city of Rome has approximately 2,500,000 inhabitants, about 250,000 of whom are foreigners coming from a country outside the European Union. Rome has evolved from a city of transit into a permanent home for immigrants. The number of foreign inhabitants is expected to grow by the end of the year.

The policy I have studied in order to obtain a peaceful and improved multiethnic or intercultural society has three main components:

- To promote the active participation of foreign people in the local cultural and political life;
- To foster the development of enterprises in the public and private spheres, thus favouring the occupation of singles as workers, managers and consumers;
- To favour the growth of a multiethnic city that is worth-living in from an urbanistic, social and cultural point of view.

Some projects have already been developed in this direction.

The first project is to elect councillors from foreign countries that are not members of the European Union to the City Council. These “Adjacent Councillors” are foreign residents’ representatives democratically elected by the legal foreign residents in the city; there will be four on the City Council and one in each of the 19 municipal town councils of the different districts in Rome. Elections are scheduled to take place by the end of March.

We are striving, together with foreign communities, to make it possible for them to elect a broader assembly comprising various communities that may support the councillors’ endeavours.
The second project is named “Rome, City of Peace.” It is based on a series of regular meetings taking place in City Hall, each of them addressing a theme related to integration, identity and interculturalism, intended as starting points for new projects such as “The Council of the Religions of the City of Rome.”

A third project, called “The Welcome of Culture, the Culture of Welcome”, has already been repeated three times in different museums with the purpose of generating a cultural exchange with foreign communities through a guided visit to the “Musei Capitolini”. The event is organised by non-European citizens and is accompanied by a performance and a tasting of typical food offered by the communities.

I have launched, in cooperation with the Institute of Psychoanalytic Research (IPRS), the “Observatory on Discrimination in the Service Sector of the Municipality of Rome”, whose aim is to survey possible discriminatory behaviours by municipal employees.

Religious faith is a significant component of everyone’s culture. The diversity that religious belonging creates may be either positive and enriching or lead to fights and wars, especially if manipulated for political purposes.

In a world that is increasingly interconnected, we need to explore new ways to respect our religious differences while forging peaceful bonds based on our common humanity. We believe that the Scriptures of each religion teach the path to peace, but we acknowledge that our Sacred writings have often been used to justify violence, war and the exclusion of others.

First of all, the policy of each community must be flexible and inclusive, and continually strive to make a renewed effort to properly educate its own adherents to the values and beliefs of other faiths. Such inter-religious education, which makes a serious commitment to understanding other religious traditions, is essential for communicating the message of peace to new generations. The challenge is to remain faithful to our own faith without disparaging or distorting that of others. We are now living in a secular world, which means that religions should increasingly belong to the private sphere. If only a few years ago we could be talking of the existence of a mosaic of religions, nowadays, with the expansion of the European Union and the rapid flux of immigrants, we should more correctly refer to the changing kaleidoscope of religions.

Furthermore, each religion is characterised by internal divisions due to the fact that people belonging to the same faith—but coming from different countries—often practice different religious traditions. This obviously leads to a multiplicity of rites inside the community that in turn makes it difficult for the Municipality to recognise a representative official body.

We recognize that in the interrelated context of our contemporary lives, inter-religious co-operation is no longer an option, but a necessity. Paradoxically, one could say: “to be religious today is to be inter-religious”.

Religion will have a peacemaker role in this century insofar as we can maintain a sense of community amongst people embracing different faiths or no faith at all, but who work together as a human family.

On these premises, together with the most important fact that only the State can provide the assurance of laicism, I signed an agreement between the Municipality of Rome and the main 16 religious groups currently present in the city of Rome, that is “The Council of Religions in Rome.” Most religious orders have asked to become members, with the exception of the Vicariate, the local institution of the Catholic Church. In Italy, the
Catholic Church is accustomed to a state of hegemony, due to the overwhelming percentage of Catholics in this country. The Church is accustomed to playing a leading role in inter-faith dialogue and the promotion of religious values. In addition, the Church has a central role in giving social and healthcare support, which is manifested as charity by its institutions, entrusted by political authorities and financed by public sources.

The agreement of the Council of Religions in Rome is based on the Italian Constitution, specifically articles 7 and 8:

Art. 7: The State and the Catholic Church are, each in their domain, independent and sovereign. Their relations are regulated by the Lateran’s agreements (Patti Lateranensi).

Art. 8: All religious confessions are equally free in front of the Law. The religious confessions different from the Catholic one have the right to organise themselves according to their own statutes, as long as they do not contrast with Italian laws. Their relations with the State are regulated, by law, on the base of special agreements between their representative and the State.

We deemed it necessary to limit the number of religions in the Council of Religions to those that are present in the territory of Rome and are recognised as legitimate by the State according to articles 7 and 8 of the Italian Constitution as well as the current laws on religious freedom. Furthermore, we accept those religions that have not these qualifications but are able to demonstrate they are representative and established in our town. A larger assembly would also include inter-religious associations and would respond to the problems of non-believers.

Our main goals include the following:

• To organise any activities that might help get acquainted, in the right perspective, with different traditions,

• To give direct and correct information and check information on media,

• To train personnel in different working fields starting from employees of the Municipality (schools, hospitals, security service, prisons),

• To verify the existence of necessary structures so that every religion may maintain its own traditions (separate places for prayer and burial),

• To compare our initiatives with those of other cities in Italy and Europe.

What have we accomplished up to now?

We have organised several meetings, most of which were held in the City Hall. We believe that speaking from the Town’s House has a great value for all citizens. Amongst the meetings it is worth mentioning the “Media and Truth” meeting, a two-day international event co-organised with the WCRP. The meeting “Religious Liberty in Italy from 1848 to the European Union” has also been particularly enriching.

The celebrations in occasion of the “The Chinese New Year”, “The birth of the Bahai”, “The end of Ramadan”, “The New year and the Sacred book of the Sikh” gathered wide participation and generated great interest by the media. The idea was to show to the Roman citizens that “Natale” means birth but not necessarily the birth of Christ, that there is not only one date for Christmas or New Year’s Eve, and that the concept may enshrine different meanings. Of course, it is important for the different groups to make
their voice heard from City Hall, and indeed, on this occasion the Chinese ambassador said: “Finally I feel as a Roman citizen”.

It is with this purpose in mind that we are preparing a multi-religious and multi-ethnical calendar (2004). In the coming months we will publish a “Directory on the Different Religions in Rome” with a map showing various worship sites in town.

We are monitoring the draft of the Law on Religious Freedom.

Regarding the cemeteries, the Municipality has just acted on our request to set aside a space for lay ceremonies, and is going to dedicate a space for scattering the ashes of the dead. Furthermore, we are investigating different cemeteries in order to find out if there are suitable structures for different burial rites.

With regard to places of prayer or meetings, we are inquiring at the Property Department of the Municipality.

Regarding inmates’ affiliation to religions other than the Catholic faith—which is the only one represented in jail--we are studying a project of the Rome Municipality, “The Council of the Prisons.” We know that prisoners do not receive adequate treatment concerning special diets prescribed by their religious laws, or places of prayer apart from Catholic chapels. Children are baptised at birth, and when people pass away, they receive the Extreme Unction by a Catholic priest unless otherwise specifically requested. In this domain, Muslims face the greatest problems.

Regarding schools, the Educational Department of the Municipality organised an inter-religious committee wherein different religions were represented. On request of the teachers, members of the Committee go to different schools to answer the questions of teachers and students.

In order to have a real dialogue, people and Communities must enjoy equal dignity: This should be the very goal of Public Administration.

Franca Eckert Coen
Foreigners, Immigrants, Host cities: Policies of Multi-ethnicity in Rome. Reading Governance in a Local Context

Rome is an important point of reference for issues regarding multi-ethnicity in Italy. The largest city in the country counting the greatest number of foreigners, Rome is the center of the Italian government institutions, along with the FAO, the Vatican and all Catholic religious orders.

Since ancient times, Rome has been providing hospitality to many foreigners (pilgrims, explorers, artists and scholars) but it has only within the past few years that the city has acquired the consciousness of being the permanent home of people with diverse geographical, historical and cultural origins. Indeed, Rome has become a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural city.

The history of this self-awareness began in about 1990, when Italy became a recognisable country of immigration, and Rome itself developed from a city of pilgrims, tourists and diplomats, into one hosting immigrants from all over the world: the Mediterranean, the Balkans, Africa, South America and the Far East (e.g. Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India, China and the Philippines).

Since the 1990s, the awareness of a city culture on immigration has developed alongside the process of approaching multi-ethnicity in the local government.

Initially, an emergency approach was adopted and was directed at covering basic needs. It soon became evident that Italy, with Rome certainly being no exception, was not only a country of transition as official and scholarly views had tended to endorse. On the contrary, many immigrants were choosing to stay in Italian cities, and this in turn called for an increased need for services. With this in mind, the autonomy of immigrants became a goal worth achieving in order to prevent their becoming a drain on the welfare system. Improved services were needed: In 1993, the Centralised Special Immigration Office was established. Operational since 1995, it launched the first three-year programme of services for foreigners' integration. Activities were formalised, including the promotion of employment, cultural integration, and non-scholastic education for young children.

In 1998, the concept of integration came to the limelight. For the first time, a law on the condition of foreigners was aiming at achieving integration. However, the law was actually rather limited in that it essentially recognised the usefulness and legitimacy of the initiatives that several cities had organised to respond to the needs of their own immigrant population. For the second three-year programme, which lasted until the middle of 2001, Rome transformed its activities into integrated services (reception with integration services; the promotion of employment activity amongst the immigrant population; the integration of immigrant children; the reinforcement of the culture of origin for immigrant children; cultural mediation in city services; experimentation of complex initiatives of cultural integration between foreigners and Roman citizens).

From a policy point of view, the peculiarity of the period between 1993 and 2001 lies in the fact that the local government, apart from some general proposals in the first few months of 1994, did not elaborate its own specific policies on these themes. On the contrary, it chose to depend upon the policies endorsed in the service strategies, which, as we have seen, had made headway. Such choice showed that the local government was not conscious that the city was becoming multi-ethnic and multi-cultural.
It would take the election of Walter Veltroni as Mayor and the current City Council to accept this new scenario and acknowledge the city’s role. Objectives and policy strategies again focused on services. The logic of integrated services, left over by the Mayor’s predecessor, evolved in the recognition of local citizenship. Foreigners (including both immigrants and non-immigrants, and those living in good and bad conditions) were entitled to city services precisely because of their choice to live in this city and not simply to satisfy their needs. They were authorised to access both the government and the city services, and were allowed to participate in decisions regarding both.

In my opinion, partaking of this logic would mean that political power and the local administration are completing the transition indicated in the first page of this workshop’s programme, which reads: “from government, a top-down mechanism in which an elected body imposes its will, to governance, which endorses a participatory strategy to include the underrepresented members of society”.

We now shall examine what this has produced in terms of policy objectives and concrete actions, bearing in mind that we are only at the beginning.

Most importantly, we must emphasise the fact that “rights” do not substitute “needs” but are added to them. Immigrants whom for whatever reason are victims of hardship, whether it be material or psychological, continue to receive social assistance like any other resident of Rome. The difference is that today immigrant residents express social needs that are not necessarily linked to the fact that they are foreigners. It is estimated that 250,000-260,000 foreigners live in Rome. If all of them were truly living in hardship, as the association between immigrant and neediness would have us believe, then the system of assistance would have been in crisis for quite some time now. We can therefore conclude that the “Social Regulatory Plan,” which includes various integrated city policies, is satisfying the various needs of its users, including immigrants.

As a consequence, the political motivation underpinning the local government’s interest in foreigners is no longer the simple expression of solidarity with those who are in need, but is a recognition of the foreigners’ rights, which have only been partially fulfilled. This justifies the city’s initiatives to take into account the rights of foreigners in governance processes. Foreigners are recognised as agents of local development as they are consumers and producers of economic goods, and not only because they fill gaps in the labour market that Italians are no longer willing to cover, or because they pay taxes.

These ideas have led to an institutional re-design: The Mayor not only delegated a councillor of multi-ethnicity, but the City Council also unanimously approved the councillor’s plan of action.

This Plan is a synthesis of the afore-mentioned principles. Called “Rome in the Future: a Pact of Integration --Guidelines and Opportunities For Sustainable Multi-ethnicity,” this title represents an interpretative key for understanding how to conceive multi-ethnic policies. Key concepts include future, pact, integration, opportunity and sustainability.

- Future: The way multi-ethnicity is approached in the city today will influence the future development of local society, and therefore the quality of life in Rome.

- Pact: It is impossible to conceptualise and carry out policies without involving interested parties; thus, multi-ethnic policies must be carried out through agreements between the local powers and immigrant communities.
• Integration: To integrate does not necessarily mean to host, assist, sustain, or even facilitate; it is something more, which necessarily foresees the direct participation of subjects needing or wanting to integrate.

• Opportunity: Multi-ethnic policies represent an opportunity for the development of the local political, economic and social system, and not only an ethical or solidarity-driven chance.

• Sustainability: Multi-ethnicity ought to be sustainable precisely because it is an opportunity for development, since it is harmonious with general policies on citizens’ development.

The “Pact of Integration” represents an interpretation of governance understood as a model of participation of actors—in this case, immigrant communities—in the comprehensive development of the quality of life of the city and not just in the decision-making mechanisms of the local powers.

To make the immigrant communities interact with Roman citizens means understanding that multi-ethnicity includes everyone and is for the good of everyone. This involvement goes beyond solidarity and the tools of representation in conferring a sense of collective responsibility on Italians and foreigners with regard to strategies and development initiatives.

In putting together the elements of this Pact, our purpose was to go beyond this idea of governance and touch on the theme of integration. As there is no national model of integration in Italy, each local power is free to choose its own model. On one hand, this has allowed for absolute freedom in adapting policies to local situations; on the other hand, the public administration was largely unprepared to deal with such an innovative theme, and policy-makers were lacking a trustworthy point of reference. As a consequence, our Pact ends up constituting also a model of integration destined to accompany the local society towards the changes that an emerging multi-ethnic society is witnessing. This model is founded on three elements: participation; valuing foreigners’ presence; and the influence of multi-ethnicity and multiculturalism on all residents’ quality of life.

“The Pact of Integration” is accomplished through contracts with citizens, with the following corresponding goals and strategies:

“The Contract with Foreigners”: governance of multiculturalism as a function of the city’s multi-ethnicity.

“The Contract with the City”: socio-economic development with the participation of foreigners and valuing the multiculturalism that their presence confers on the city.

“The Contract with all Citizens”: the quality of life in the multi-ethnic city, both from foreigners’ viewpoint (cultural visibility, equal opportunity, non-discrimination) and the Roman citizens’ perspective (quality of multicultural services destined for all citizens).

Regarding the “Contract with Foreigners” (the governance of multiculturalism as a function of the multi-ethnicity of the city), we specify that the objective is to reach a sufficient level of transparency, comprehensiveness and trust between the administration and foreigners. The lack of these elements may create a sense of mistrust, disappointment and disinterest in citizens. In this sense, policy-making must adjust to multi-ethnicity and be examined according to principles that are at the basis of any political or administrative action. These principles include openness, participation,
responsibility, efficiency and coherence. In order to accomplish the goals of the contract, we are working on the following:

Concerning the themes of openness, responsibility, efficiency and coherence, we are working on the launch of an internet site that may be combined with that of the City of Rome. This will provide foreigners with information on all the activities that different city structures provide for foreigners, along with information on who is responsible for these policies. Another space will be created for other departments of the public administration, diplomatic representatives and institutes that offer reliable research and statistics. A third space will include information produced by foreigners’ communities.

With regard to the theme of participation, we are organising the first election of advisors (without voting rights) who will represent foreigners living in Rome. The election will be open to all legal foreigners. Their role will be to bring foreigners’ voices to the government. We are also planning to design the constitution of an assembly comprising the representatives of ethnic groups and locals. The objective is to create a connection between the administration and the ethnic community advisors. There are currently various working groups made up of foreigners that work with the administration on specific issues: Councillor elections, the constitution of the Assembly, the participation of the communities in initiatives to which they are particularly dedicated, the identification of professions with an intercultural character to be of use in city services, and the identification of contents for the multicultural training of city employers.

The Contract with the City (socio-economic development with the participation of foreigners and the valorisation of the multiculturalism that their presence confers on the city) has the objective of showing that the economic, civil and democratic development of the city can be influenced by foreigners insofar as they are producers and consumers who have chosen to live in our city. The “Pact for Integration” values the roles that foreigners are likely to exercise in the development of the city instead of simply considering them as weak citizens. Indeed, this is a new area for city government, whose role in these issues is limited to a power of intervention in orientating and facilitating the involvement of various subjects in local economic development. To this end, the Mayor’s developmental strategy has three components:

• Support of the re-launching of production. We are currently studying the creation of a single mechanism for the professional accreditation of intercultural mediators working within the city services. We are also exploring the economic soundness of offering an intercultural mediation service for all city offices. This includes agreements with local entrepreneurs, artisans and vendors for the employment of foreigners in function of the increase and improvement of production.

• Support for the increase and regularisation of foreign employment. Foreign workers in the labour market have incomes that contribute to the development of the local economy, and emerging businesses create new employment opportunities for everyone. Supporting these dynamics means upholding regular employment and the emersion from the underground economy, which would otherwise be destined to become an inevitable choice. At present three initiatives have been undertaken in this direction. The first one, which has already begun, regards the formal recognition of intercultural professions, along with the support of professional internships in this area. The second one, which has also begun, provides young immigrants with scholarships to take intercultural courses at university. The last one concerns the intercultural training of employment orientation services and professional training in other competent public entities.
• Support of the internationalisation of culture. With this term, we do not mean the capacity of the local economy to attract foreign investments, nor the competitiveness of Rome with respect to other European metropolises, nor the circulation of highly trained workers deriving from international management or diplomats. Conversely, we refer to the complex system of competencies that differ from collective conventions that may create valuable occasions of innovation. As a consequence, we expect that in the short and long-term, the promotion of commercial contacts with countries of origin, facilitated by both information technology and the modern transportation system; the development (which is in the initial phases in Italy) of forms of “equal and joint” commerce; the use of know-how from cultures of origin in the conceptualisation of goods and services, manifested in new intercultural professions and the education and training of young immigrant children in the languages and cultures of origin; the use of these linguistic competencies in international commerce.

Before these initiatives have a real structural basis, we think that it is necessary to create the conditions for spreading awareness and acceptance of foreign cultures. It is with this in mind that we organised a series of presentations on the religions, customs and difficulties of the integration of foreign communities in a centre as significant as the Campidoglio, the headquarters of the City Government. A series of meetings has also begun on the occasion of holidays such as the Chinese New Year, the religious festival Sik, museum visits for foreign communities, encounters in museums in which the foreign communities display features of their own cultures. Alongside these initiatives offering immediate visibility are those which are more structural in nature: the experimentation, already underway, of a multi-functional centre of intercultural services, which permits all citizens to know each other through cultural and educational initiatives on the Italian language and culture, and the languages and cultures of the countries of origin. This would also involve their meeting by means of common professional training programmes. Following the example of other European cities, an “International House of Culture” would function as a point of reference for all citizens, especially foreigners’ associations. This integrated network would involve the promotion of editorial and artistic works of foreigners living in Rome. Eventually, the contract for development does not imply separate, special policies reserved exclusively for foreigners, but implies treating foreigners as workers, entrepreneurs, consumers and producers of culture, just like all other citizens. That of course legitimates their full participation in the development of the city of Rome.

The Contract with all Citizens (quality of life in the multi-ethnic city, for foreigners--cultural visibility, equal opportunity, non-discrimination--and for residents of Rome - the multicultural quality of services for all citizens) shows that everyone lives in the multi-ethnic city - Roman residents and foreigners - and that we already know that the future will be different from the past. The issue of “how” we will live this intercultural scenario is the subject of the last contract with all citizens collectively. What is really at issue here is the need to emphasise the new and original needs of the relationships - both on a daily and more long-term basis - between Rome’s residents and foreigners, between these subjects and the providers of city services. The objective is to create a multi-ethnic city with no obstacles, interruptions and incomprehensibility, a city that in the end is at the clear advantage of both old and new citizens.

These initiatives will be extended throughout the entire territory, with the objective of stimulating contacts and guided interactions between foreigners and citizens of Rome in order to create an exchange of opinions and customs - so that foreigners feel as if their
participation in the culture of the city is an important part of their own experience in Rome as well as that of their children.

On a daily basis, foreigners living and working in Rome often get in touch with personnel of the city of Rome. We cannot forget that these interactions may hold discriminatory behaviours on the part of the personnel, despite all their efforts to the contrary. We can even say that it may very well be the case that that the city government’s own norms and procedures feed this discrimination. Precisely in response to this risk, the Observatory of Discrimination in City Services was inaugurated last June in Rome. This is a project carried out by IPRS with the goal of verifying that the efforts of the administration in promoting multi-ethnic policies have not been useless and hindered by discriminatory behaviour. Be this the case, another objective is to indicate corrective behaviours for city employees.

We have the goal of making sure that city services respond adequately to the real needs of users and the city, that they are appropriate both on a structural and organisational level, and that they are carried out with a certain know-how in serving the foreign users.

Most importantly, the separation of services--those that are “reserved for foreigners”--ought to be avoided. What is of course preferable for the Public Administration is the professional, technological and organisational reinforcement of existing services, in other words, an upgrading of services that responds to the new users. This is the case, for example, with the professionalisation of intercultural mediation, which has been requested by most city structures, but is too specific and complex to be of use by single users. Furthermore, along with the training of City personnel, types of accreditation can be experimented on the basis of the knowledge and abilities of intercultural mediators that have not been formally organised.

We must acknowledge that the involvement of the administration in this area is far from being easy and predictable. The nature of services with respect to intercultural value indeed has in its own rules and specific parameters.

Since the quality of the offer is the determining factor for the quality of life in a city, it will be necessary that as this complex plan unfolds, particular attention is dedicated to the experimentation and innovation of methodologies, processes and results, in a way that ensures the efficiency of the planning, management, organisation and results of services in terms of their multi-ethnic and inter-cultural value. These are innovations that are critical for the success of the “Pact of integration”. At the same time, they are relatively unknown, much like the future of multi-ethnicity itself.
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(lxviii) This paper was presented at the ENGIME Workshop on “Governance and Policies in Multicultural Cities”, Rome, June 5-6, 2003
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