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Local Immigrant Incorporation Pathways in Small-Scale Cities. Pakistani Immigrants in a Province of Northern Italy

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Local Immigrant Incorporation Pathways in Small-Scale Cities

Pakistani Immigrants in a Province of Northern Italy

by Paola Bonizzoni *and* Roberta Marzorati

1.   Introduction

In this paper we will explore the local incorporation processes of Pakistani immigrants in Central Brianza (a highly industrialized area in Northern Italy), in the light of some key characteristics of the small-sized towns in which they have rooted their lively networks. Following Çağlar [2007] and Glick Schiller, Çağlar and Guldbrandsen [2006], we investigate the social fields established by immigrants in terms of forms of social relations conveying crucial resources for their local incorporation process. Incorporation pathways can take, as we shall see, ethnic or non-ethnic forms, depending on the degree to which they build on social relationships with claims to common culture, descent or history, articulated within more formally organized contexts, but also woven into everyday spaces of proximity.

As a growing number of studies have shown, local receiving contexts – according to urban size and type, levels of superdiversity [Vertovec 2007], local economies and political cultures – can deeply influence immigrant settlement processes [Ellis and Almgren 2009; Glick Schiller and Çağlar 2009; Marrow 2005].

Central Brianza – a highly industrialized, densely urbanized and populated area north of Milan – represents, in this respect, a privileged observatory. Since the early 1990s, Desio (a town with some 40,000 inhabitants in the area), has played the role of "micropolitan gateway city" [Singer 2004; Wahl, Breckenridge and Gunkel 2007] for a transnationally mobile Pakistani community. From its very beginning, the Pakistanis

bypassed the near – and well connected – metropolitan city of Milan. Pakistani migration patterns initially involved single male migrants who found employment in the local industrial sector, at that time experiencing a radical restructuring after the shutdown of large metalworking plants. The presence of a strong (mostly Catholic-oriented) non-profit sector and the hostile attitude of local governments towards migrants (especially Muslim ones) are relevant contextual factors for understanding the opportunities Pakistanis were able to access, and the forms of incorporation they could develop. These can be better understood focusing on the more or less explicit processes of (mutual) selection characterizing both organized and informal processes of local incorporation. While their economic insertion has been a much less problematic issue for local administrations, their social and cultural incorporation have been instead a challenging and contested issue.

In this article we draw on extensive ethnographic observations that took place in Desio and its surroundings between 2010 and 2013. Fieldwork entailed repeated conversations with both Italian and Pakistani gatekeepers. This led us to select 34 qualitative semi-structured interviews, carried out with Pakistani residents,[1] Municipal and civil society actors,[2] as well as experts and other key informants.[3]

2. Immigrant Incorporation Pathways in Small-Scale Towns: How Do Local Contexts Matter?

A renewed attention for the specificity of local contexts of integration [Ellis and Almgren 2009] has been triggered by recent developments in North American immigrant geography, characterized by the increased relevance of the immigrant (especially Latino) population in new – and often small, rural and predominantly white – areas [Kandel and Parrado 2005; Marrow 2005; Massey 2008; Singer 2004; Wahl, Breckenridge and Gunkel 2007; Zuñiga and Hernández-León 2005]. While old gateways – as New York or San Francisco – still host in absolute numbers the majority of the immigrant population, growth rates in new destinations are much higher, envisioning a new demographic scenario in which concentration (in old con-

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[1] The selection of Pakistani interviewees (19) was aimed to obtain a diversified sample, including men and women, first and second generations, well-established families and newcomers, members of different ethnic minorities. Seven interviews had been instead carried in 2011 out for a study funded by Orim/Fondazione ISMU and Caritas Ambrosiana, coordinated by Maurizio Ambrosini [Ambrosini and Bonizzoni 2012].

[2] We carried out 11 interviews with the most relevant organizations dealing with immigration issues in the area, and also with Council officers and members of the local police.

[3] A local historian, a cultural mediator, a teacher, a journalist involved in local politics and immigration issues.

texts) and dispersal (in new destination towns) coexist [Simpson, Gavalas and Finney 2008].

This recent development has fuelled a debate about the extent to which immigrants' local incorporation pathways[4] can be influenced by a varied set of contextual conditions [Çağlar 2007; Ellis and Almgren 2009; Marrow 2005]. These include demographic trends and local levels of superdiversity [Vertovec 2007], relevance and strength of ethnic communities and institutions (such as ethnic churches, shops, associations, etc.), local political cultures and ideologies [Varsanyi 2011], as well as local labour and housing markets. Also relevant – while often downplayed – is the extent to which city dimension and type of (sub)urban context can differently shape immigrants' incorporation experiences [Dreby and Schmalzbauer 2013; Glick Schiller, Çağlar and Guldbrandsen 2006; Schmalzbauer 2009].

Research on small-scale[5] towns is, however, seriously complicated by under-theorizing both in urban and migration research [Bell and Jayne 2009] since most studies have been focused on big, global, gateway cities [Tosi and Vitale 2011]. City dimension and issues of scale can, however, bear a relevant impact on ethnic and non-ethnic incorporation pathways and on patterns of network formation [Dreby and Schmalzbauer 2013; Glick Schiller, Çağlar and Guldbrandsen 2006; Glick Schiller and Çağlar 2009; Glick Schiller 2008; Rogaly and Qureshi 2013; Schmalzbauer 2009].

According to Glick Schiller and colleagues [Glick Schiller, Çağlar and Guldbrandsen 2006; Glick Schiller 2008] ethnic incorporation pathways can prove to be more difficult in small-scale cities as these contexts might lack some features which are often taken for granted in research on ethnic groups settled in large-scale cities. For instance, a critical mass of migrants of a single ethnic group, resources for ethnic organizing, an ethnic niche economy and specialized agencies providing migrants with opportunities to develop careers as "culture brokers." In this respect, small-scale and downscaled [Glick Schiller and Çağlar 2011] cities could be especially relevant locales to observe non-ethnic forms of social settlement and connec-

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[4] Pathways are meant as "process of building or maintaining ongoing social, economic, political, and religious relations so that an individual or organized group becomes a participant in multiple and diverse social fields of uneven power composed of networks of networks" [Glick Schiller and Çağlar 2011, 190].

[5] In this contribution we use the term "scale" to refer to the relative position of a city, reflecting how flows of political, cultural and economical capital are shaped at a local level [Glick Schiller and Çağlar 2011, 7]. Desio is a "small-scale" city compared to Milan, a metropolitan Italian "global city," gateway for relevant migratory flows. Desio, with its 40,000 inhabitants is also a small-sized town within the Italian context (and definitely so compared to Milan). As in other contributions in this special issue we highlight a relation between the small scale and the small size of the city, and will make explicit use of the latter term in those cases when issues related to the city dimension become relevant in the analysis.

tion which might hinder (or flank) ethnically-driven forms of organization.[6] It has also been observed that issues such as gossip and social control can be more strongly perceived in small-scale and rural settlement areas [Dreby and Schmalzbauer 2013; Dreby 2009]. The relational worlds of immigrants vary greatly across sites, depending on location factors influencing their actual opportunities to develop routine or serendipitous encounters in more or less ethnicized places, including workplaces, schools, markets, churches, associations and neighbourhood facilities [Camina and Wood 2009; Dines *et al.* 2006; Forrest and Kearns 2001; Marques 2012; McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook 2001; Wimmer 2004; Witten *et al.* 2009]. These "micropublics," places of "everyday social contact and encounter" [Amin 2002, 959], do not guarantee, however, forms of meaningful interaction and inter-ethnic understanding. While spatial proximity can also lead to parallel lives or turf wars, social inequalities in the access to economic and cultural resources – essential to sharing conviviality and leisure – should also be taken into account [Valentine 2008]. While some urban spaces can progressively become less "mixed" and more ethnically characterized (due to processes of residential segregation or to the rise of ethnic shops and businesses) the ambivalence of immigrant "visibility" [Brighenti 2010] – in terms of public recognition, resistance and control – can further alter the conditions in which concrete forms of encounter are made more or less possible and desirable.

Italy qualifies as an especially suitable context to explore these emerging issues, as the presence of migrants in small-scale towns has been relevant from the beginning of its migratory history, becoming, however, even more significant over time [see Barberis and Pavolini in this issue]. This can be explained by Italy's polycentric urban structure, with its backbone of medium-sized towns (especially in the northern and central part of the country, where most immigrants reside) and the relevance of local economies characterized by several industrial districts and small enterprises [Ambrosini 2013; Mingione 2009; Andall 2007]. Even in the Lombardy Region, a growing territorial sprawl has undermined, over the last ten years, the role of Milan's metropolitan area, which had traditionally been crucial in attracting and concentrating transnational migration flows.[7]

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[6] As Glick Schiller and Çağlar [2011, 198] argue: "In downscale cities ethnic communities would seem to be a much less viable pathway of incorporation. This is not only because these cities may not contain ethnic concentrations but also because they cannot afford ethnically organized social services. There are not the political constituencies, the available funds, or the interest of local charities necessary to sustain ethnic organizations."

[7] While the foreigners residing in Milan counted, in 1993, for more than 40% of the whole Regional foreign population, the rate dropped to 19% in 2013. Data also show a general decrease of the

Due to the Italian peculiar geography in terms of immigrants' settlement, several studies have actually been carried out beyond the main "gateway cities" of Milan and Rome. Most of them, however, focused on very specific issues (e.g. labor market dynamics in industrial districts [Barberis 2008; Ceschi 2005; Mingozzi 2005], urban transformations [Bressan and Tosi Cambini 2011], especially problematic and "weak" local contexts of reception, such as rural areas [Osti and Ventura 2012]), while everyday (both ethnic and non-ethnic) local incorporation processes were often overlooked. Studies, moreover, seldom explicitly theorize how (and why) specific local factors – and especially city size and scale – can influence local incorporation dynamics [Sinatti 2008; Cancellieri 2013; Salih and Riccio 2011] and why contexts of "different urbanity" can influence the configuration of specific social fields [Barberis and Cancellieri 2012; Bertolani 2012].

In this paper, we will show that issues such as city dimension, level of immigrant (super)diversity, overall numbers and spatial concentration patterns of the (immigrant) population, as well as local economies and political cultures, can play an extremely relevant role in accounting for different incorporation patterns. These local conditions, in turn, impact differently on the immigrants' population according to factors such as ethnicity, gender and generation. The case of Desio and Central Brianza demonstrates that also small-scale local contexts, due to their specific local economies and immigrant demographic composition, can play the role of (micropolitan) gateway cities, favouring the settlement of newcomers and the development of lively transnational networks. In this respect, also small-scale cities can favour the emergence of ethnic incorporation pathways, through the emergence of relevant services and institutions (religious centres, ethnic shops, etc.) and the promotion of "cultural brokers." Local contexts of reception bear, however, a different impact according to migrants' ethnicities and perceived public identities. As this study will show, the strong anti-immigrant stance expressed by local governments was especially directed towards the Pakistani minority. Pakistani claims for cultural recognition were strongly contested and thus for them the – often assimilation-oriented – support received from non-ethnic organizations was especially crucial.

The article is structured as follows: in the next section (§ 3) we sketch the processes of Pakistani settlement and employment patterns in the Lombardy Region with a specific focus on the Monza-Brianza Province; next (§ 4) we draw the attention to the economic and political specificities of Central Brianza. In the second part

foreigners residing in main Provincial towns (capoluoghi di provincia) (from 51.4% to 30%) reflecting the increased relevance of medium-small scale context for the Italian geography of immigration as also shown by national data (authors' elaboration on data available at demo.istat.it).

of the paper, based on empirical data, we describe how Desio has evolved into a social and symbolic point of reference for the Pakistani population in Brianza (§ 5), where non-ethnic resources, namely the role of local associations and NGOs, have favoured ethnic incorporation pathways through the organization of effective initiatives aimed at favouring immigrants' local integration processes (§ 6). Finally (§ 7), the ambivalence related to such forms of incorporation are outlined and discussed. Concluding remarks close the article.

3. Pakistani Territorial and Employment Patterns

Similarly to other national and ethnic groups,[8] Pakistanis show distinctive economic and territorial patterns of settlement. They are strongly concentrated in Northern Italy (77%) and especially in the Lombardy Region (42%), mostly in the Provinces of Brescia (where 42.6% of Lombard Pakistani currently live), Bergamo (11%) and the Milano/Monza-Brianza Provinces, hosting together more than one fourth (27%) of the Pakistani population living in the Region. The Monza-Brianza Province is characterized by a pronounced dispersal of the Pakistani immigrant population in medium- and small-scale towns, as just a very small share of them (3%) are living in the provincial capital city of Monza. The first Pakistanis arrived in Central Brianza early in the 1990s. National data on permits of stay[9] reveal they were a relatively small community during the early 1990s, which progressively grew over time, showing some especially pronounced "peaks" in 2004 (as an effect of the mass regularization held in 2002) and in 2009 (as an effect of the quota decrees issued in the period 2006-2008). As displayed in Figure 1, the main hubs characterizing current Pakistani territorial patterns (in the north-western – Central Brianza – and north-eastern – Alto Milanese – parts of the Milan metropolitan area) were already well established in 1993. In 2011, the five Municipalities of the Monza-Brianza Province with the highest number of Pakistani residents[10] hosted more than double (2,249) of all the Pakistanis living in Milan (1,036).

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[8] As shown by Istat [2011], the territorial concentration of the immigrant population varies consistently according to nationality, especially in terms of urban/rural settlement: for instance, Filipinos, Ecuadorians, Peruvians are especially concentrated in provincial capital cities (respectively 80.1%, 62.3%, 56.9% of them live there) and strongly concentrated in the service sector. On the contrary, Indians, Moroccans, Albanians and Tunisians are especially dispersed outside main provincial towns (respectively 82.2%, 77.8%, 72.9% and 70.3% of them live outside of them), being frequently employed in agriculture, farming and fishing.

[9] http://demo.istat.it/altridati/permessi/.

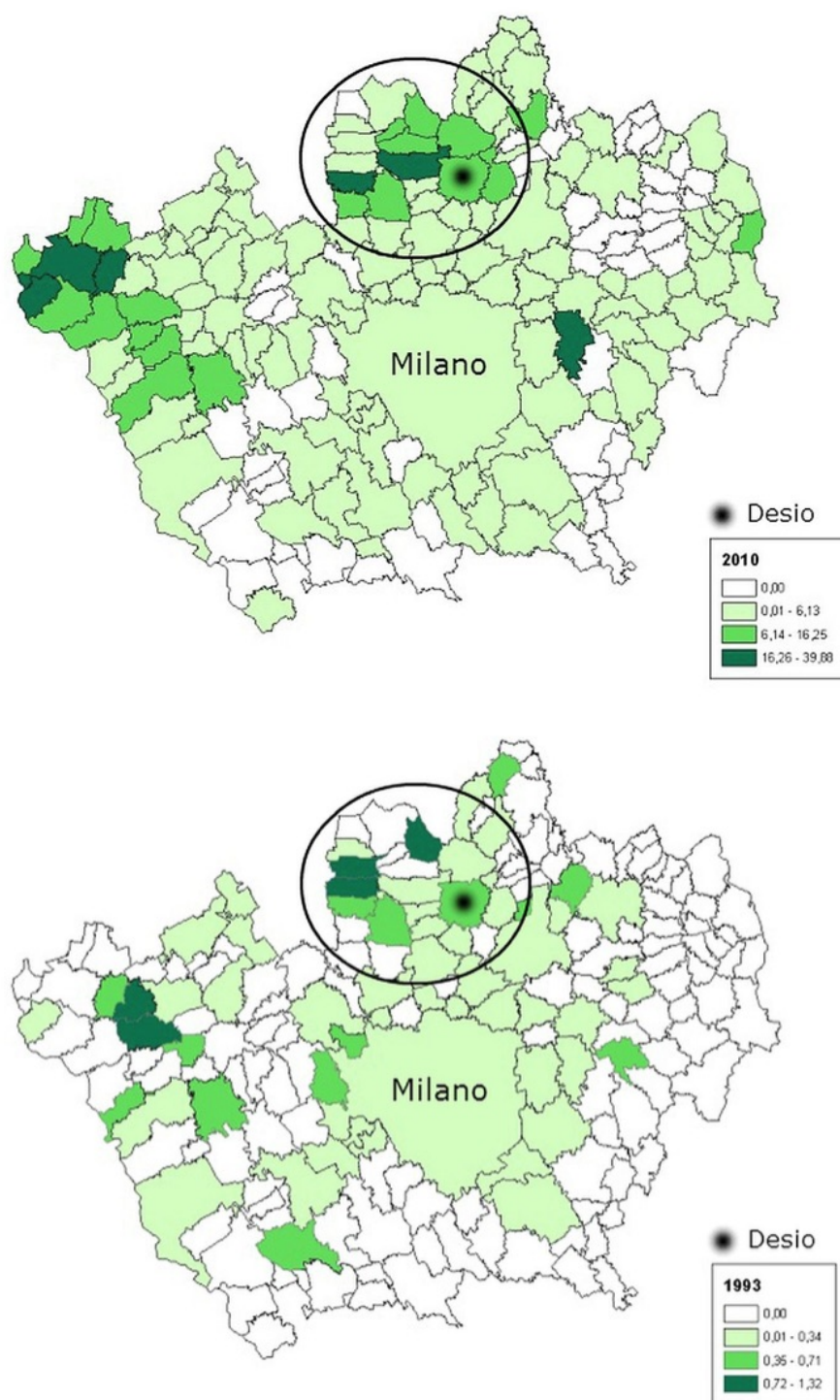[10] Cesano Maderno, Desio, Seregno, Limbiate, Lissone.

FIG. 1. Incidence of Pakistani population in the Provinces of Milano and Monza-Brianza (years 1993 and 2010).

Source: Own elaboration of data on registered residents provided by ISTAT.

As shown in Table 1, Pakistanis represent as much as one-fifth of the whole immigrant population in the area, while at the Provincial, Regional and State level (and even more so in the city of Milan) – their incidence is negligible.

As confirmed by our interviews, Pakistanis often arrived in Desio directly from abroad[11]: once there, they sponsored the migration of other countrymen attracted by the economic opportunities offered by local labour markets. Later on, also through the strategic use of the quotas and through transnational marriage strategies, Pakistanis created well-structured transnational networks connecting the Pakistani Punjab[12] to the Brianza area.

TAB. 1. *Incidence of the foreign population on the overall population, incidence of the Pakistani population on the foreign population, Pakistani residents (absolute numbers) and overall resident population in the territories considered (pre-census data, 1st January 2011).*

	Foreign population/ Overall population	Pakistani population/ Foreign population	Pakistani population	Overall population
Municipality of Desio	8.0%	20.2%	655	40,661
Municipality of Cesano Maderno	8.9%	20.5%	682	37,291
Municipality of Seregno	6.3%	11.0%	313	43,163
Municipality of Limbiate	10.0%	8.5%	301	35,168
Municipality of Lissone	7.6%	9.2%	298	42,474
Province of Monza and Brianza	7.6%	5.4%	3,496	849,636
Municipality of Milano	16.4%	0.5%	1,036	1,324,110
Lombardy Region	10.7%	3.1%	33,174	9,917,714
Italy	7.5%	1.7%	75,720	60,626,442

Source: Istat (www.demo.istat.it).

These transnational networks spread across a larger area bypassing, from the very beginning, the close (and well connected) Milan metropolitan area. The roots of this phenomenon can be found in the territorial economic vocation of the Monza-Brianza area. Actually, Pakistani immigrants settled in areas where employment niches in the industrial sector were available [especially in the Lombardy Region: Ministero

[11] From Pakistan, but also from other European (such as Germany and Switzerland), and non-European countries (e.g. Libya, Turkey, or the Gulf States).
[12] Punjab is the most developed and populous Province of Pakistan, located in the north-eastern part of the country. Most of the Pakistani in Desio come from the northern part of Punjab, and from the district of Jhelum in particular.

del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali 2013]. In the next section we will move our focus to the economic features of our case area to better clarify what especially attracted Pakistani immigrants there. We will also outline some key features of the local political culture which have played, as we shall see, a critical role in shaping Pakistanis' local incorporation pathways.

4.   Desio and Central Brianza: Economic Structure and Local Political Culture

Desio and its surrounding towns belong to the multi-sector industrial district of Brianza, an area characterized by an especially strong concentration of small, artisan (and often family-run) firms, in the furniture, metalworking, textile and plastics industries. These have contributed to make this area one of the most prosperous regional economies in Europe [Ghezzi 2003; 2007]. Consistent with the small-scale industrialization model [Trigilia 1986], this local economy is embedded in a historically Catholic local culture, which highly regards family values, reputation, esteem and work skills [Ghezzi 2012], outlining what Ghezzi has defined as "familismo imprenditoriale di matrice cattolica" (Catholic entrepreneurial familism).

The presence of big factories was also relevant in Brianza until the 1980s, when a crisis in the industrial sector led to the shut-down of many of them; yet, this process has not led to a severe recession, but rather to the restructuring of this sector, through the birth of several spin-offs which have allowed the continuity of industrial production, also limiting the creation of fractures in the social milieu [Butera *et al.* 2006]. In this respect, from the 1990s onwards Brianza has become a privileged locus for the establishment of a post-Fordist production regime, in which financing and service activities of the Milanese metropolitan core have been integrated with local manufacturing activities [Bonomi 2012]. While the global economic crisis of the late 2000s has harshly hit this territory (and its manufacturing sector overall[13]), the Brianza area has apparently suffered less than other parts of the country [Giubileo, Parma and Zoller 2013], still maintaining a quite lively labour market [Camera di Commercio Industria Artigianato Agricoltura di Monza e Brianza 2010].

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[13]   For instance, from 2011 to 2012, new hires in the manufacturing sector in the Province of Monza and Brianza decreased by 16.5%, losing more than 3,000 jobs. As far as the foreign population is concerned, between 2011 and 2013 new hires show a clear fall in the manufacturing sector (from 19% to 14%), a lighter decrease in the building sector (from 16% to 13%), and a growth in the tertiary sector (from 65% to 71%) [data from Monza-Brianza Labour Market Observatory, http://www.provincia.mb.it/lavoro/osservatorio/index.html].
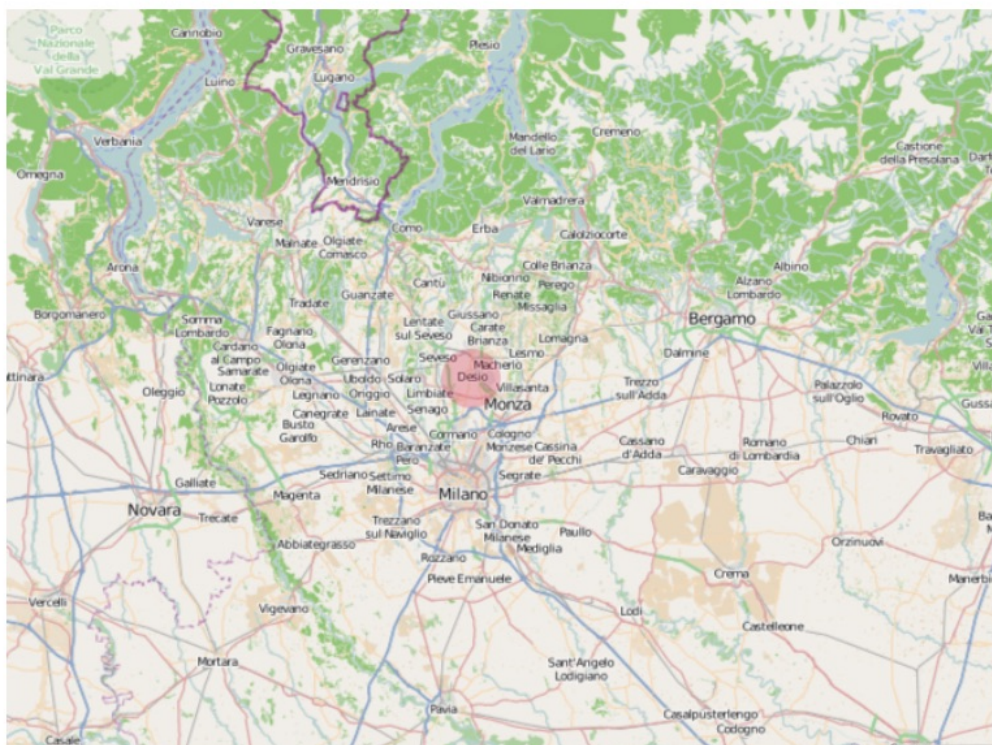
FIG. 2. Case study area in the Milanese metropolitan area, and Monza-Brianza Province. *Source:* Own elaboration from QGIS map.

The socioeconomic relevance of this area and its scalar position in the Milanese metropolitan area (tied to complementary economic activities in the urban core) favoured the insertion of immigrant workers in the local labour markets. Today, manufacturing is still the most relevant economic sector in terms of employees[14]: while the service and construction sectors are more heavily ethnicized (in 2011 more than one worker out of four was a foreigner[15]), immigrant workers are also well represented in manufacturing (nearly one worker out of ten is a foreigner). More specifically, as we shall see, manufacturing represented a viable economic niche for the growing local Pakistani community.

As regards Desio, when its large industries shut down, the city faced a profound social and identity crisis [Novak 2004]. Yet, some of those medium-small enterprises (which were subcontractors for large automotive industries) survived and reconverted, becoming the backbone of the current local post-Fordist industrial system. In

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[14] In 2011, in Monza-Brianza Province, 35% of the workforce was employed in manufacturing, while only 16% in the Province of Milan, and 27% in the whole of Lombardy [http://censimentoindustriaeservizi.istat.it/].

[15] http://censimentoindustriaeservizi.istat.it/.

these factories, spread all over the area (Figure 3), Pakistani male immigrants found their main employment niche.
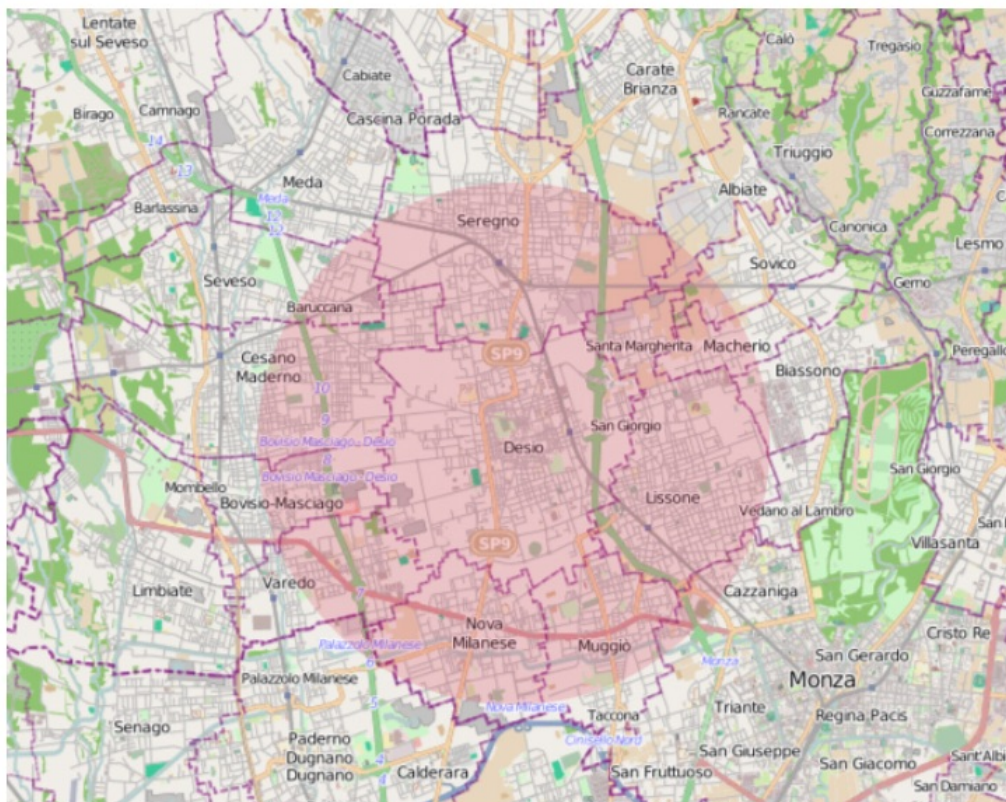

FIG. 3. Desio and surrounding municipalities in Central Brianza.
Source: Own elaboration from QGIS map.

From a political standpoint, Brianza is one of those areas in the Lombardy Region where, after a relative hegemony of the Christian Democrat party,[16] centre-right wing parties and the Lega Nord (Northern League)[17] have played a leading role from the 1990s onwards.

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[16] Yet not comparable to the strength that the party had in those areas known as the "white" third Italy [Trigilia 1986], given the relevance of leftist parties, especially the Socialist one [Biorcio 2001]. North-western Italy is defined as having a "quasi sub-culture" [Farneti 1983, in Passarelli and Tuorto 2012], that is a political identity oscillating between secular and Catholic leanings.

[17] The Lega Nord (Northern League) is an Italian political party formed in the late 1980s whose primary aim was to protest against the central Government of Rome and to promote the autonomy of the Northern Italian Regions; over the time the party has gained great power, expanding its area of influence, becoming a stable presence in the Italian parliament and assuming a clear xenophobic and anti-immigrant position, which has contributed to the production and reproduction of the diffused reticence of the Italian civil society to accept the presence of immigrants [Biorcio 2010].

More specifically, it is worth noting that in the 2000s, Brianza was a stronghold of the Northern League which was able to get here, in national elections, two or even three times more votes than in the city of Milan [Passarelli and Tuorto 2012]. However, at the local level, the political scenario is more ambivalent, as leftist parties have sometimes succeeded in challenging the power of local right-wing coalitions.[18] The Northern League is well known for its xenophobic and anti-immigrant discourse [Biorcio 2010], which often results, especially at the local level, in policies aimed at excluding immigrants from the full enjoyment of their civil, social, economic, and cultural rights [Ambrosini 2012; Semprebon 2012]. At the same time, Catholic-oriented institutions – as well as other relevant secular institutions, such as trade unions – play a central role in providing immigrants with services and support [Caponio 2005; Ambrosini 2013; Bassi 2014]. In Brianza, the deeply rooted Catholic political culture can be traced in a densely knitted network of organizations (including parishes, religiously-inspired associations, charities, etc.) marked by a certain degree of pluralism in terms of values and forms of social participation – consistently with the traits of Italian Catholicism [Giorgi 2012]. As regards Desio, a specific component of this plural Catholic realm has played a crucial role in providing Pakistani immigrants access to social and political support. In turn, this support contributed to make this small town a "micropolitan gateway city."

5.   Desio: A Micropolitan Gateway City

Our fieldwork was mainly carried out in Seregno and Desio, with a privileged focus on Desio, given its symbolic relevance for the Pakistanis living in the area. To better understand what has contributed to make the city centre of Desio the core of this "micropolitan gateway city," we have to turn our attention to the role played by local housing markets.

Due to the presence of some big industrial plants (among the largest in the area) from the 1950s to the 1970s, Desio attracted a relevant number of internal migrants (especially from Sicily and Calabria). They used to settle in old courtyard houses in the city centre, where they rented (and subsequently bought) them from natives, who had moved to more "modern" condos or single family houses. Over time, those old buildings have gone through serious decay and they have lately become shelter for the newly arrived international migrants, who have experienced serious problems in ac-

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[18]   While we are writing, the last local elections (May 2014) led to an unusual situation for this area: 30 out of 45 municipalities in Monza-Brianza Province are now governed by centre-left majorities.

cessing formal housing markets (just like their predecessors). It was Desio city centre that offered (and still does) first housing solutions to newcomers – Pakistani single men who, when living conditions improved and family reunification were planned, moved to better houses in the suburbs and neighbouring towns. Pakistanis' concentration in dilapidated (and often overcrowded) buildings in the city centre triggered processes of ethnic micro-segregation, at the level of single buildings or courtyards, while neighbourhoods at large have remained substantially mixed.

Several factors combine to reduce the chance of meaningful encounters between Pakistanis and Italians, leading to the formation of ethnically segregated circles of friends in everyday life even in such a small and provincial town, where interpersonal contacts could be more easily established. Among these, language issues, reciprocal suspicion due to perceived "incompatible" cultural traditions, as well as perceived racism and discrimination.

> "We tend to associate with other Pakistanis, because Italian people don't appreciate our company. If we work with them, they respect us, but out of the workplace… In 10 years I've had just one Italian friend […] because we don't have the chance to meet, in the streets, at the bar, only at the workplace and when we are working we don't talk that much to each other. We work, and then we go back home" (Pakistani resident, married man, #7).
>
> "I mean, there are some peculiarities if you compare them to the other foreigners… Muslim people […] they don't eat some things because there can be some pork inside, or wine… Eating together can become a source of division instead of integration, like at birthday parties…" (Key informant [teacher and activist], man, Italian citizen, #6).

At the same time, close-knit ethnic social networks have flourished, providing Pakistanis with crucial resources for housing, work and social relations. While some Pakistani mothers could establish social contacts and forms of conviviality with other Italian families (especially through schools and informal social contacts at the neighbourhood level), most of them are strongly embedded in networks established with other Pakistani mothers. Actually, the growing number of Pakistani residents facilitates encounters among co-ethnics (and even co-villagers) in a much easier way than just ten years ago. This allows them to experience Desio as their hometown, where public spaces contribute to create a communitarian realm, reinforcing its role of micropolitan gateway for those living in the area:

> "They asked me to go to Milan, to share a flat together, but I refused."
> "Why?"
> "Because I'm happy here! This is like my own village, my own town. Milan is like… there are a lot of people from Pakistan, but not an environment like this. […]"
> (Pakistani resident, young unmarried man, #10).

However, ethnic concentration also led to an increased sense of perceived social control and gossiping, more strongly felt by women and second-generation youth, who often appreciate moving to the less segregated neighbouring towns:

> "I prefer living in Seregno than in Desio, there are too many Pakistanis there. Here we are a little bit more separated, more distant…"
> "And why don't you appreciate living so close to each other?"
> "Because for women it becomes difficult to go out…" (Pakistani resident, married mother, #8).

Over time, Desio has therefore acquired a social, symbolic, and affective relevance for the Pakistani community in Brianza, evolving into a micropolitan gateway city also in the symbolic sense. While labour market opportunities are often spread across Central Brianza, it is in Desio town centre that cheapest and initial housing solutions are still found and where a small Pakistani "ethnic enclave" (including phone centres, grocery shops, and the like) had the chance to emerge. Morover, it is in Desio that central ethnic institutions (such as the prayer room and the Koranic school) are located.

In the following paragraphs we will explore how the development of specific ethnic incorporation pathways (through the establishment of relevant ethnic institutions and the emergence of "cultural brokers") have been facilitated by an advocacy coalition of non-ethnic actors, in a local context characterized by strong anti-immigrant stances directed towards "visible" cultural expressions of the Pakistani ethnic minority.

6. Non-Ethnic Resources for Ethnic Incorporation Pathways: The Role of Local Associations and NGOs

The clash between the hostile stance of local administrations towards Pakistani immigrants (especially regarding the public visibility of their religious and ethnic identity) and the more welcoming attitudes of relevant Catholic-inspired civil society actors have contributed to shape the specific pattern of incorporation of the Pakistani community, favouring the establishment of important ethnic institutions, and providing career opportunities for "cultural brokers." Seven leading actors engaged in social and cultural activities targeting the immigrant population in Desio were observed: the Foreigners' Solidarity Group (GSSD), the local branch of Caritas, the Xaverian missionaries, the Italian School for Foreigners, the association Kiré[19] and Desio

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[19] It is a small association founded in 2007, to help some Roma families temporarily settled in Desio.

Città Aperta.[20] The local branch of the transnational, religiously inspired association Minhaj-ul-Quran is, in this respect, the only truly ethnic association active in Desio, founded in 1996 by some Pakistani immigrants.

The partnership established among these associations has been crucial in helping Pakistanis access important resources and services: while it is not easy to grasp the extent to which this can be explicitly interpreted in the light of the city scale,[21] the associational ecology of Desio, characterized by a limited number of actors and by a common political background [Baglioni *et al.* 2007],[22] has undoubtedly fostered networking between different actors, facilitating their coordination. This network has also favoured the social recognition and active involvement of selected Pakistani citizens, providing relevant, albeit inherently ambiguous, mobility channels for ethnic brokers. Through the provision of critical resources which led them to accrue their social capital and consolidating their legitimacy as spokespersons, they had become relevant reference points for co-ethnics and Italians alike. This process is well exemplified by some initiatives which will be discussed in the next sections: the welding courses promoted by the Foreigners' Solidarity Group (GSSD), the partnership established between the Pakistani association and Xaverian missionaries, and the activities organized by Desio Città Aperta.

6.1. *The Foreign Solidarity Group and the Experience of the Welding Course*

The welding courses promoted by GSSD were started on the suggestion of an enterprising Pakistani man living in Desio. At that time, he was employed as a welder in a local factory:

> "I told them: 'Hello, my name is Jamal'... I spoke some Italian at that time... [...] ...And then I said: 'With your permission I would like to ask you something [...] I have learned my job with lot of efforts and sacrifice, but now I am able to teach, as

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[20] Literally "Desio Open City" is an umbrella organization of local associations, involving – among others – the Xaverian Fathers, and the Pakistani association Minhaj-ul-Quran. The aim of Desio Città Aperta is to promote social cohesion, intercultural dialogue and reciprocal knowledge between different faiths and cultures.

[21] The weakness of migrant associations and the increased relevance of advocacy coalitions typically characterize the Italian context as a whole.

[22] While in the literature the relation between the size of cities and the kind and vibrancy of the local associational life is all but clear [Kriesi and Baglioni 2003], Baglioni and colleagues [2007] looking for (democratically relevant) differences in local organizational ecologies between large and small cities, find that two features of the associational ecology are related to city size: the absolute density and the diversity of associations (larger communities have more diverse associations than smaller communities) and the political connectedness (in small cities it is easier to maintain contacts with local government administration).

> a volunteer […] for you [GSSD] and for the Local council' […] I have asked them
> a room with electricity […] and two welding machines… second hand ones. They
> appreciated the idea […] Eventually, when welders have learned, where would they
> go? They would work in Brianza, or in Milan, everywhere… And for whom they
> would work? Always for Italian employers… Then it's good for them [the workers]
> and for the Italian factories as well" (Key informant, teacher, man, Pakistani citizen,
> #9).

Jamal, who met the organization through an Italian language course he was attending at that time, offered his skills of teacher and recruiter, taking advantage of the local Pakistani network that he developed over time, as a long-established resident. The welding course successfully ran for nearly 10 years (from 1996 to 2007) through the collaboration among GSSD, the City Council, and the Consorzio Desio Brianza.[23] Through this course several Pakistani residents acquired work skills appreciated by local firms, qualifying as a successful case of private-public partnership developed through the substantial involvement of the Pakistani local community itself.

> "Why did we choose the welding course? Because, first of all, Pakistanis had skills,
> they were willing to do it. Then, there were firms looking for these skills (…).
> Through 23 courses we cranked out more than 500 welders… the Municipality gave
> us some money, and we could organize it properly" (Local NGO's spokesperson,
> man, Italian citizen, #1).

It was quite easy to establish these training course, probably due to the "accessibility" of local governments in small-scale towns, where "associations in smaller communities tend to maintain more contacts with local government's administrations" [Baglioni *et al.* 2007, 242]. It was also favoured, however, by the social "embeddedness" of the manufacturing system, a characteristic feature of Italian industrial districts:

> "We also had good contacts with firms, they even helped us to buy some of the
> materials we needed, so that they could claim a priority on future welders" (Local
> NGO's spokesperson, man, Italian citizen, #1).

In Desio, both left-wing (until 2000) and right-wing administrations have legitimized and supported several initiatives for the local immigrant population: from emergency aid targeting recently arrived migrants to more institutionalized language courses and legal services.

However, claims advanced by the Pakistani population implying visible forms of recognition in the public space (such as obtaining spaces for praying and for Ra-

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[23] It is a local public corporation established in 1982, mainly engaged in training, guidance, and welfare services.

madan celebrations, or for playing ethnically connoted sports such as cricket) have prompted more adverse reactions [Marzorati 2015]. In this respect, local administrations repeatedly refused any support which could be interpreted as a sign of "openness" towards Muslim practices[24] – consistently with the security and anti-immigrant stance manifested in Italy in those years [Colombo 2013; Ambrosini 2012][25].

In a local political scenario dominated by the strong anti-immigrant discourse of the Northern League (part of the local governing coalition from 2000 to 2010), the support offered by Catholic actors was determinant. In the next paragraph, we will explore how the peculiar alliance between Catholic associations and the Pakistani community, while not unusual in the Italian context,[26] has proved to be especially strategic in the case study selected.

6.2. *Catholic-Muslim Partnership: Spaces for Worship and Intercultural Activities*

The first relevant step in the public recognition of the local Pakistani community was taken thanks to the collaboration of two broad transnational religious organizations. In 1996, a local branch of Minhaj-ul-Quran was established thanks to the support offered by the Xaverian Fathers (a group of missionaries active in Desio since 1947), and soon a relevant reference point was established for most Pakistani residents in the area. The Xaverian Fathers, in particular, made a space available to them for praying and celebrating religious holidays, since the small prayer room managed by the association could not host the growing numbers of devotees, especially during the major celebrations (such as Ramadan). The prayer room and the space offered by missionaries – which can hold as many as 2,000 people – were fundamental steps in the process leading to the public recognition of the local Pakistani minority.

> "We organize several things: meetings among Christians and Muslims, among women and families… we do some things by ourselves, as a Pakistani group… but without the Xaverians we couldn't do that much, without their spaces, without their moral support…" (Local NGO's spokesperson, man, Pakistani citizen, #2).

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[24] The opposition to any form of public visibility of Pakistani people went much beyond strictly religious issues (e.g. refusal to authorize a mosque or an Islamic cemetery). Other issues – such as cricket playing – were interpreted as a challenge for the (imagined) local cultural identity.

[25] Almost three quarters of exclusionary ordinances against immigrants surveyed in Lombardy by Ambrosini [2012] have been implemented by local authorities in small towns.

[26] In Italy, Catholic NGOs and volunteer groups have been the first to recognize immigration as an issue, and to elaborate on immigrant needs. Up to now, they are some of the biggest advocacy actors for immigrants [Caponio 2005; Giorgi 2012; Kosic and Triandafyllidou 2005].

The small prayer room subsequently evolved into an Islamic Cultural Center, with part of the space occupied by a library and the organization of Urdu language classes for children as well as a Koranic school. The space represents a relevant place of encounter for Pakistani families but it also aims at promoting reciprocal knowledge and exchanges between Christians and Muslims, through public debates and intercultural/interfaith activities.

The role of an active, mainly Catholic-oriented, civil society was also relevant in contrasting anti-immigrants (and especially anti-Muslim) positions which exacerbated after 9/11. This group of progressive Catholic people, reacting to local administration's signs of intolerance, gave birth to several initiatives explicitly targeted at the promotion of intergroup knowledge, including a popular language course:

> "One morning I went out and I saw all those flyers, translated in several languages […] they said "every citizen, Italian or foreigner, who is seen begging around, doing wandering jobs, selling without license or in temporary, hygienically unsuitable structures […] will be prosecuted". That really gave me gooseflesh… I told myself: where are we headed? In which kind of world are we? I mean, how a society imbued of Christianity, that went through the Enlightenment, can generate such kind of ideas? I mean, it is like saying we don't want the poor among us! [talking about the Italian language course] …I thought it should be up to the Church to provide it. Because those [she refers to the flyers] were made by them [the Municipality]. Being a teacher I knew very well all the bureaucratic procedures, getting permissions, facing the oppositions… I mean, the Church should be an open place, it is a reference point that has to give a sign." (Local NGO's spokesperson, woman, Italian citizen, #3)

Especially relevant was the constitution of "Desio Città Aperta", an umbrella organization promoting social cohesion, intercultural dialogue and reciprocal knowledge between different faiths and cultures,[27] also thanks to the role played by children and schools:

> "Our aim was to reach families… it was possible because children were involved at school, they brought their parents, to show them what they had done… And then parents came and Italian and foreign families really met each other, because on the other side there were some persons in charge of the Pakistani community who worked really hard to push their families to go out…" (Local NGO's spokesperson, woman, Italian citizen, #4).

Activities included interfaith dialogue days, multi-ethnic dinners, conferences and debates, youth meetings, cricket demonstrations on parish playgrounds. Special

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[27] Trough, for instance, the "Peace March," a yearly parade taking place in the city centre of Desio involving local residents, associations and schools.

attention has been devoted to women's participation, through cooking courses and other meetings organized on Sunday afternoons. While this support has been strategic, it also entailed an inherent ambiguity, as the public recognition and involvement of the "Pakistani community" has often been characterized by a more or less explicit assimilation stance, as will be explored in the next paragraph.

6.3. *The Ambivalence of Non-Ethnic Incorporation Pathways: Between Recognition of Diversity and Assimilation Pressure*

The forms of "non-ethnic" incorporation that have favoured the creation of the ethnic institutions described above also reveal some interesting ambivalences and tensions.

As poignantly stated by several NGO spokespersons, a lot of efforts were devoted to the involvement of the "Pakistani community" through the establishment of repeated contacts with selected individuals (both men and women) who became their "reference points," called in case of need (such as when a language or vocational course had to be started, when translators and cultural mediators had to be found for projects taking place in schools, hospitals or elsewhere). Getting involved by local associations entails dealing with native cultural codes, with relevant consequences in terms of the selection of "suitable" spokespersons and the expectations placed upon them. Values such as "openness," "transparency," and "progressiveness" are often considered relevant prerequisites for choosing the right kind of referents in the community:

> "They [talking about some Pakistani teens] are extremely willing guys who can easily tell you their stories. By the way, I also use them as cultural mediators. Therefore, they are open guys..." (Local NGO spokesperson, man, Italian citizen, #1).
> "He [talking about a Pakistani man involved in several local activities] does so many things for the Pakistani community, but for the Italian community as well. They are a really good, a very well educated family, and they're quite ahead, very different from the other Pakistani people..." (Key informant, cultural mediator, woman, Pakistani citizen, #5).
> "I have always aimed at this: let's choose, and even you [Pakistani community] choose, since it's up to you choosing some people who are able to interface..." (Key informant, teacher and activist, man, Italian citizen, #6).

Similar dynamics were observed in the spokespersons' efforts to reassure natives about the good reputation and "moderation" of their fellow countrypersons[28],

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[28] For instance, after the arrest of an alleged Islamic extremist happened in Paris (who apparently had sojourned in Desio for some time), the local leader Arshad Syed reassured

and to distinguish themselves from the more "narrow-minded" ones. Especially sensitive and repeatedly contested issues were the use of (and proficiency in) the Italian language and the one of "proper" gender relationships.

> "I've proposed them to buy some Italian books about Islam and interfaith dialogue, to be placed in the library, to be enjoyed by anyone who wanted. We bought the books but they were never placed on the shelves, because the person who managed the prayer room was not able to read Italian. He could not really understand what those books were about […] [Prayer rooms and religious centres] are "low profile" – I'm making reference to integration issues. Are they integrated in the territory, are they transparent? One of the things that Muslims have been asked is whether the activities they propose, their prayers, are understood even by those who are not Pakistani. [Talking about a recent meeting about Islamic poetry] I mean, if you are inviting some Italian people to this meeting, and then you talk in Urdu…" (Key informant, teacher and activist, man, Italian citizen, #6).
>
> "We couldn't get these mothers out [of their homes], they didn't come to the Italian course, nor to children's school, to talk with teachers…" (key informant, cultural mediator, woman, Pakistani citizen, #5).

In such a context, "involved" citizens are not merely asked to interpret and collect their fellow countrymen's needs and wishes, but also to make them aware of the requests the local institutions made in terms of "integration." These ambivalent requests (being recognized members of the community but also agents of cultural change) can lead to problematic outcomes – especially in a small-scale context characterized by dense localized networks and by a high degree of gossip and social control – as the words of this young female cultural mediator well exemplify:

> "I'm famous here, because I'm different. Our family is very well known but unpopular. I mean, they think we've become Western. My father didn't want us to stay with our fellow countrymen because he saw how they were: girls don't go to school; men are very narrow-minded. But he had a sort of double feeling; on the one hand he felt like a king… when he talked with our teachers, when he met our friends… But when he met the other Pakistani families he came back home sad, he looked quite strange" (Key informant, cultural mediator, woman, Pakistani citizen, #5).

Organized sociability – such as the one provided by intercultural activities and volunteering in local associations – provides relevant albeit ambivalent chances for both ethnic and inter-ethnic incorporation. However, it clearly involves a limited and selected group of individuals, both on the immigrant and on the native side.

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the media that the youth was unknown to the local community and that they felt "well integrated" in Desio (http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/paura-desio-pakistano-arrestato.html); after the killing of Osama Bin Laden the Pakistani community declared to be "satisfied", in the words of local the leader Ashraf Mohammed Khokhar (http://www.ilcittadinomb.it/stories/Homepage/202248_desio_uccisione_di_osama_bin_laden_comunit_pakistana_soddisfatta/).

These dynamics are probably occurring anywhere ethnic minorities need the social support of local actors. However, in our case the limited number of actors involved, their cultural homogeneity as well as the overall political climate characterized by an anti-immigrant stance played a specific role in the way pro-immigrant actors managed service provision and advocacy work: they needed immigration to look more "acceptable" according to the standards of a hostile local society.

7. Concluding Remarks

In this piece of research we have shown how a small-scale context can play the role of a micropolitan gateway city from a demographic, social and symbolic point of view. Since the first settlements in the early 1990s, the small city of Desio has acquired a peculiar symbolic relevance for the Pakistani population spread over the Brianza area and employed in the local industrial district. In its city centre, Pakistani migrants found the first cheap housing solutions and established networks and relations which progressively led to the creation of relevant ethnic institutions.

While this is a consequence of the relative ethnic concentration of the Pakistani population and their dense social networks, specific contextual factors related to Desio as a small-scale town and its local political culture have also favoured these peculiar pathways of incorporation. The two faces of Brianza's local political culture – a widespread anti-immigrant and xenophobic stance related to the role played by the Northern League in the area, and an active Catholic third sector – coexist side by side, creating the conditions for the emergence of services and initiatives in support of the Pakistani population, whose religious and cultural claims have been disregarded by local administrations. At the same time, the initiatives described were favoured by the limited number of actors on the local scene, their easy connection with local political actors, and their embeddedness in the local socio-economic structure.

If these incorporation pathways have provided the Pakistani community with religious and cultural recognition as well as visibility in the public sphere, this process is not free of ambivalences. More specifically, the social expectations of cultural assimilation expressed by local actors forced cultural brokers to manage an ambivalent position between ethnic and non-ethnic networks. Again, specific features of the local context (the limited number of actors involved, their cultural homogeneity as well as the local anti-immigrant political climate) has played a role, as they pushed pro-immigrant actors to make immigration look more "acceptable" to a hostile local society.

To conclude, the case of Pakistanis in the micropolitan gateway city of Desio shows how contextual factors (city dimension and scale, level of immigrant diversity,

immigrant population concentration and spatial patterns, local economies and political cultures) play a crucial role in the development of different incorporation patterns. While further comparative research is fundamental, in this article we aimed to expand the knowledge on an issue – immigrant insertion into small-scale contexts – which remains under-researched, notwithstanding its increasing relevance. In this respect, we also aim to contribute to a more wide and international body of literature looking at new immigrant destinations, to assess the relevance of the local conditions for immigrant incorporation pathways.

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Local Immigrant Incorporation Pathways in Small-Scale Cities

Pakistani Immigrants in a Province of Northern Italy.

Abstract: In this paper we highlight some key features of the local incorporation processes of the Pakistani immigrant population in Central Brianza, a highly industrialized territory in Northern Italy. Data show that also small-scale context can qualify as relevant "micropolitan" gateway cities in which migrants incorporate through both ethnic and non-ethnic pathways. These are shaped by the local political culture – a widespread anti-immigrant and xenophobic stance embodied by the Northern League and an active Catholic third sector – leading to the emergence of several grassroots initiatives on behalf of a population whose needs are often denied and disregarded by local administrations. These dynamics are also favoured by the limited number of actors on the local scene, their easy connection with political actors, and their embeddedness in the local socio-economic structure.

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