The Capability of 'Models' to Withstand Change
The Bologna Area in the Wake of Law 132/2018

Stefania Spada
Alma Mater Studiorum – Università di Bologna, Italia

Abstract   This essay aims to reflect about the impact of the recent Italian Law 132/2018 and its effects on the reception policies for asylum seekers in the area of the Metropolitan City of Bologna. Starting to the fact that the system of developed in Bologna is considered a model of excellence, this contribution aims to examine its ability to deal the erosion of rights for asylum seekers provided by recent legislation. Will the integrated territorial system of reception and services react to the restrictions in access and protection imposed by Law 132/2018? The contribution is intended to give back the evolutions of the territorial system, trying to bring out the ambiguities and the founding causes of the criticalities that have become structural. Is it appropriate to speak of a model? If so, with what risks arising from the bureaucratic action that characterises the system at the apical level? A last paragraph will also be dedicated to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the territorial reception system, having affected the dynamics exposed in the essay.

Keywords   Reception system. Fundamental rights. Asylum seekers. Welfare. Model. Bologna area. Law 132/2018. COVID-19.

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1   Introduction

Will the system survive? This was the question circulating among social services workers in the Bologna area in the autumn of 2018, when the so-called 'Security Decree' was announced.[1] Everyone who had experienced/enacted/managed/endured the reception system in whatever way wondered how the new legislation would impact all the hard work carried out over the years to develop a reception system worthy of the name. The system for identifying and processing applicants for international protection has indeed been built slowly,[2] and constant legislative modifications[3] have made workers' unflagging efforts to meet European standards even more laborious. Not only has the system been subject to constant change, there are also deep-seated critical issues stemming from both older regulatory dictates[4] and improper interference by the Minister of Interior Salvini beginning as early as the beginning of the summer 2018.[5] The new legislation had been trumpeted[6] for months before becoming law. Professionals in the sector feared its pragmatic consequences because many knew it would represent the disintegration of the system and the erasure of all they had achieved over the last twenty years. The Metropolitan City of Bologna area, and the Emilia Romagna region in general, has gained recognition over time as a virtuous example of a reception system. Since 2012 the label 'Bologna model' has been

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1   Decree 113/2018 converted into Law 132/2018. For a detailed commentary on the modifications introduced by Law 132/2018, see https://www.asgi.it/decreto-immi-grazione-sicurezza-1/. For a critical analysis see Masera 2019.

2   It was only in 2015, with Law 142, that Italy finished implementing the main revision rules set by the Common European Asylum System. Before this change, there was no real organic system in this field. For more information, see https://www.asgi.it/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Scheda-BREVE-recepimento-direttive-asilo_pub-blicazione-sito_1-ottobre1.pdf.

3   Law 46/2017 proved to be particularly delicate in terms of recognition procedures, annulling applicants' second chance for appeal and allowing the possibility to replace a hearing before a judge with the video footage of the hearing before the Territorial Commission. For a critical analysis, see Gargiulo 2018.

4   The crime of illegal immigration, introduced by Law 94/2009, has always created problems from the point of view of implementing international protection legislation, undermining the possibility for applicants to access the status recognition procedure; in fact, the crime of illegal immigration triggers a short circuit resulting from the absence of documents to/from entry.

5   A Ministerial Circular dated 4 July 2018 was sent to the Territorial Commissions, asking them to issue fewer residence permits for humanitarian reasons; this represented serious interference by the Minister of the Interior in violation of the Commissions' independence.

6   Since issuing the circular on 4 July, the Minister of the Interior did not miss any chance to threaten the system with an imminent change in the direction of greater restrictions; the term 'trumpeted' is intended to underline the Minister's usual style of communication.

used to emphasise this system's success in setting up a reception system whose elements are distributed throughout the area and ready to implement integrated projects together with various local actors and service providers.

In an attempt to answer the opening question, this chapter maps a part of the (ongoing) process of constructing/demolishing/reorganising the reception system for international protection applicants in the Municipality of Bologna area according to the precepts of Law 132/2018.

To do so, my discussion is organised into four parts: the first focuses on the most salient and problematic aspects of the new legislation while the second is dedicated to charting the evolution of the Bologna area reception system, focusing on the specific characteristics that have distinguished it as a model. In the third section, I try to outline the material impact of Law 132/2018, considering both the effectiveness and the efficiency of the local reception system.[7] The fourth section offers a critical reflection on the concept of 'model' in view of the ambiguities that continue to appear in the local area.[8] Given how seriously the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the reception system, I also offer a concluding section outlining its most critical repercussions in the Bologna area in the initial emergency period (up to June 2020).

The reflections presented in this chapter derive from long-term ethnographic research[9] focused on the protection of the fundamental rights of international protection applicants in the Emilia Romagna region.

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7 I evaluate the concrete impact of the legislation by problematising four intertwined facts, identified as central in the local process: the impossibility for international protection applicants to be listed in the municipality's registry lists, the history of the Mattei Centre, the behaviour of the managing organisations in relation to the new tender conditions, and the historical link between civil society and workers in the reception system.

8 It should be noted that, even at the moment of writing (end of June 2020), the overall impact of the new law cannot really be quantified because some processes are still ongoing. First among these is the definitive exclusion international protection applicants categorised as 'ordinary', without vulnerability indexes, from reception programmes. Furthermore, the COVID-19 emergency has 'frozen' the situation, having extended the deadline for reception projects (originally set for 30 June) to 31 December 2020.

9 The research started in 2010 and is still ongoing. This chapter has been updated to June 2020. Given length limits I cannot fully specify all the steps and turning points in this research, but I will outline the main methodological lines. The analysis was based on daily ethnography, semi-structured interviews, informal dialogues, document ethnography, and interviews with privileged informants working in the reception and territorial protection system in various roles, as well as a long-term diary as an active member (Adler 1991) of the system from August 2009 to March 2015.

2   A Critical Analysis of Law 132/2018

Much has already been written about Law Decree 113/2018.[10] To avoid unnecessary repetition, I intend to address the most salient aspects of Law 132/2018 through an analysis of the October 2018 hearings in the Senate. In the process of converting the legislative decree into law, the chambers were inundated with hundreds of amendment requests. 'Trepidation', 'illegitimacy', 'unconstitutionality', 'inadequacy', 'instrumentality' and 'unreasonableness' were the terms most used by the organisations trying to intervene in the debate[11] in an effort to field arguments to support these requests by concerned parties. On the basis of specific data and experience, all of the experts and organisations involved in the discussion asked lawmakers to 'rewind' the process and 'reassess' the draft legislation before its final conversion into law. However poorly and hastily framed and written,[12] the proposed package of rules was sure to be extremely effective in impacting the material conditions of existence of all the people seeking international protection and hosted by the reception system more generally. And such implications were not limited to the individuals directly addressed by the legislation; they were much further-ranging, beginning from the contradictory – almost oxymoronic – relationship between the declared objectives of the new legislation and the real effects it would produce. The new rules denied applicants for international protection access to reception services, limiting their chancing of obtaining any form of status recognition while at the same time reducing their capacity to claim fundamental rights;[13] in so doing, the law allowed the Minister of Interior

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10   See the articles (in particular since 2018) in *Questione Giustizia* and *Diritto, Immigrazione e Cittadinanza* available, respectively, at: https://www.questionegiustizia.it/riviste; https://www.dirittoimmigrazionecittadinanza.it/. See also Santoro 2018; Omizzolo 2019; Amnesty 2019.

11   My discussion here covers the hearings of 15, 16, 17 October 2018. These were attended not only by professors from various universities, with experience in this field, a representative of ISTAT, the Prefects, the President of the Prevention Measures of the Court of Rome, and the Police Union, but also by third-sector and private social organisations, specifically Ciak-Parma, the Asylum Table (which brings together 20 organisations), UNHCR, IOM, ARCI, the Community of Sant'Egidio, Oxfam, UNICEF, Emergency, ANCI, Caritas, Centro Astalli, Acli, CILD, Libera and the National Coordination of Welcoming Communities.

12   As many observers have pointed out, there were no grounds to justify an urgent decree (Articles 72 and 77 of the Constitution), unless the aim was to circumvent the democratic discussion guaranteed by the ordinary legislative process.

13   Space limitations prevent me from commenting in detail on all the changes introduced by the new law but, for the purposes of my argument here, it is worth pointing out the main ones that have affected the reception system indirectly (accelerated border procedures; the list of safe third countries; the abrogation of the permit for humanitarian reasons) and directly (banning international protection applicants from being

to grant form to the 'immigrant problem', materially constructing it as a privileged vehicle for his relentless pursuit of electoral support. The application of his proposed law would create enormous pockets of irregularity, both in migrants' status (thus condemning them to invisibility) and in the operation of a separate, extraordinary channel of reception, exempt from the regular system's reporting, monitoring and standards.

Indeed, such illegality and unconstitutionality were immediately apparent in Art. 5, c. 6 of Legislative Decree 286/98, whose abrogation of certain procedures violated Articles 2, 10 and 117 of the Italian Constitution,[14] thus paving the way for a significant increase in appeals (potentially at the European level as well). In addition to the direct attack on constitutional Article 10, therefore, the proposed law also dismantled the SPRAR system of decentralised reception – replacing it with SIPROIMI[15] – in favour of large centres[15] and direct allocation,[16] with new tender contracts[17] in which fewer resources were allocated to integration activities. What most worried social workers, however, was the measure excluding those applicants for protection defined as 'ordinary' (i.e., not vulnerable or belonging to categories attributed additional protection). This exclusion would eliminate the opportunity to take preventive action by identifying and dealing with various kinds of problems.[18] At the local level, pro-

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processed in the dedicated structures, with these latter restricted to status holders and minors; cancelling automatic registration for protection applicants, with the result that they cannot access local social and health services).

14   These are the articles of the Constitutional Charter specifying the obligation to recognise the inviolable rights of man (both as an individual and in social collectivities) and that internal rules must comply with those of generally recognised international law, specifying that the legal condition of foreigners is regulated by law in accordance with international rules and treaties and, finally, the binding nature of the Charter itself as a primary legal source.

15   Which are not obliged to meet minimum standards of quality and economic transparency, contrary to Directive 2013/33/EU.

16   With direct assignment, i.e., without dedicated calls for tenders, it is no longer possible to assess the managing body's ability and preparedness to implement suitable projects.

17   See Virzì 2017 for an analysis of the critical structural issues of the new tendering procedures for awarding reception service provision contracts.

18   There is not enough space here to examine in detail the importance of preventive-type reception projects; however, it is important to underline that the eliminating reception for ordinary protection applicants precludes the protection of many migrants during the extremely lengthy waits for the status recognition procedure and makes it impossible to identify physical and psychological injuries resulting from the migratory journey. Moreover, it makes it impossible to recognise types of vulnerability other than those categorised and, potentially, any conditions that might become worthy of some form of legal protection not included in the two cases of international protection narrowly defined (political refuge, subsidiary protection). In short, this move represented an attempt at invisibilisation with important implications for the protection of the primary, fundamental rights of all individuals.

posed Article 12 eliminating the automatic registration of asylum seekers in the municipal population register constituted a further attack on the system's ability to protect and care for asylum seekers.[19] What might seem to be nothing but 'bureaucratic nonsense' actually represents a channel of unwarranted discrimination in violation of Article 3 of the Italian Constitution[20] in that it obstructs applicants in the local area from exercising their fundamental rights, *in primis* the right to health. Additional elements, such as the prevalence of a logic of detention (with doubled durations) and the implementation of accelerated procedures at the border together with restrictions on access to the reception system, reveal the legislator's underlying rationale: that most applications for international protection are instrumental and manifestly baseless, and therefore that most of the people seeking international protection are 'fake refugees', economic migrants not worthy of recognition or, consequently, of protection and reception.

Law 132/2018 is the second-to-last act (followed by Law Decree 53/2019, the law approved by the Senate on 5 August 2019) in the *suspicious regulatory interventionism* that has characterised the management of the migration phenomenon from the beginning.[21] Even while replicating the rationality characterising the specific legislation in this field through deep continuity with the past,[22] it is unique in its capacity to profoundly erode the current rule of law, operat-

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19 Although the research is updated to June 2020, it is necessary to insert an episode that occurred immediately after writing. The Press Office of the Constitutional Court issued a communication on 9 July 2020 pronouncing the Law Decree 53/2019 article relating to municipality registration unconstitutional, for two reasons: its intrinsic irrationality, in that the norm in question does not facilitate the pursuit of local surveillance and safety that is the declared purpose of the security decree; and unreasonable disparity of treatment, since it makes it unjustifiably more difficult for asylum seekers to access services that are also guaranteed to them. The press release is available at http://images.go.wolterskluwer.com/Web/WoltersKluwer/%7Bb301c170–810e–42c3–9f20–318e7caca314%7D_corte-costituzionale-comunicato-9-luglio-2020.pdf. In the near future, it remains to be seen if municipalities will bring their daily practice into line with this verdict (in particular for applications rejected before the Court's decision).

20 "All citizens have equal social dignity and are equal before the law, without distinction of sex, race, language, religion, political opinions, personal and social conditions".

21 For a detailed mapping of the legislation and policies implemented since 1989, see Giovannetti, Zorzella 2020.

22 There is an interesting tendency to focus on clearly problematic norms while obscuring the precedents that have enabled them to appear legitimate. While the reforms introduced by Law 189/2002 are easy to critique, it is more difficult to identify the many counterproductive elements that were already included in the first single text of 1998, Law 40/1998. It is as if only the tip of the iceberg was visible, while its foundations and the enormous layer of ice below the water level remained invisible. In the same way, immediately – even before its conversion into law – the distortions introduced by Law Decrees 113/2018 and 53/2019 were found, but it was hard to admit that many of the processes exasperated by the former Minister of Interior had been released by previous regulations, *in primis* the Law 46/2017 and the Memorandum with Libya dated 2017.

ing almost impertinently, brazenly, to consolidate stereotypes and criminalising imagery and, in so doing, producing widespread social insecurity.[23]

The new law has indeed displayed impressive operational and strategic efficacy in its ability to take certain distortions of thought and forms of inefficiency (chaos, professional leeway, differential treatment, stereotypes, acceleration, and securitisation) and render them systemic. Specifically, the proposed legislation undermines a clearly subjective right – recognised, not granted, by the law – by legitimising practices that prevent workers from meeting obligations set forth by primary legal sources.[24] In so doing, it would destroy the reception system as it had been created over the years. As the various interlocutors speaking at a Chamber of Deputies hearing in October 2018 pointed out, the new law would have weakened the system's capacity to safeguard applicants for international protection in terms of both recognition and reception, with serious repercussions for everyone involved, workers and migrants alike.

The concern shared by the organisations called to participate in the hearings thus became 'fear' and 'profound anxiety'[25] for those enacting the system on an everyday basis. In the next section I will try to describe the evolution of the Bologna area reception system and then the impact – not yet complete – of Law 132/2018 on this system.

3 The Origins of the 'Bologna Model'

In recent years the term 'Bologna model' has been used to indicate the reception system for international protection applicants developed in the Bologna metropolitan area, a system characterised by small-scale centres spread out throughout the territory and the integration of services with their respective institutional and social providers so as to implement projects ensuring the effective and efficient care of migrants.

Before reflecting critically on the underlying pitfalls of the model concept as a paradigm of action and basis for evaluating projects, it makes sense to first chart the stages through which the Bolognese

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23 Openpolis uses the formula 'safety of exclusion' in two 2019 reports (Openpolis 2019a; 2019b).

24 Mainly undermining constitutional guarantees, and in particular those established in Legislative Decree 142/2015, which adopts European directives. A particularly controversial issue is the introduction of safe third countries which, although provided for by European legislation, changes the burden of proof for the applicant.

25 Terms used by lawyers and sector professionals in informal conversations in the period running up to the introduction of the new law.

system evolved up to the approval of Law 132/2018, contextualising it in relation to the wider regional context. i would like to clarify, however, that the critical analyses proposed here are not intended in any way to disrespect all those whose daily work of managing institutions and social work professionals has engaged in tackling critical issues in the effort to ensure a high quality service. Rather, my humble intention is to 'support' this work of uncovering the system's weaknesses, critical points that affect its participants personally. In fact, although some management and planning systems have been created in recent years that deserve the status of models, I seek to show that, alongside these, there are others that have benefited from this overall definition without really deserving it. As will become clear in the course of this chapter, I also propose to focus on the structural weaknesses that prevent, or at least hamper, the creation of models in the full sense of the term.

Like the national asylum system that grew out of activity in the voluntary sector after the 1990s crisis generated by the Yugoslav wars, the regional system of protection for international protection applicants developed gradually and spontaneously. It was only the physical presence of migrants with different legal statuses[26] that drove the local government to take care of them. In the first years of 2000 when the national system took its first steps,[27] dedicated networks and services began to develop in the regional area, particularly Parma, Ravenna[28] and Bologna. These were mostly voluntary projects launched by religious and secular organisations, as well as migrant communities themselves.

Increasingly structured services began to develop[29] in keeping with the *modus operandi* typical of the region, namely social cooperatives dedicated to safeguarding disadvantaged people working alongside the charitable organisations – usually religious – that nor-

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[26] Coordinated projects by voluntary organisations and dedicated services were launched in the region in keeping with the earliest rules regulating the stay of non-citizens in the local territory. In fact, although diverse migratory flows had been coming into the region, and its bigger cities in particular, since the Seventies, it was only in the Nineties that dedicated programmes for asylum seekers were established. These were mostly run by religious organisations, Caritas in particular.

[27] The first National Asylum Plan is dated 2001. The following year, SPRAR (Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees) was created, with 2,500 ordinary places (gradually reaching 3,000 by 2012). Following the 'North Africa Emergency' in 2010, 25,000 further places were set up.

[28] For a critical analysis of the reception system developed in the Ravenna area, see Sorgoni 2011.

[29] Services have always arisen in response, sometimes belated, to the problems of everyday life. For a detailed mapping of the system's history and changes over time, please refer to the annual reports produced by the SPRAR-SIPROIMI system, available at https://www.sprar.it/.

mally provided services for migrants.

These services, created to compensate for the yawning gaps in public welfare services coverage (mental health, disability, social exclusion), have helped to reinforce the role of private social sector actors as dedicated service providers and boosted their institutionalisation.[30]

With the beginning of the new millennium, professionals in this sector developed a new awareness of the importance of service quality. They realised they had to break with the humanitarian logic of 'doing good regardless of skill level'[31] and become specialised services instead. This transition was actually rather complex and littered with obstacles, many of which have yet to be fully overcome.[32] One of the first of these was the difficulty of having work in the field of reception recognised as a skilled profession, and indeed this process remains incomplete. Nonetheless, this transition paved the way for the development of increasingly well-informed and competent services with the competencies to implement dedicated projects at higher and higher levels. Another noteworthy aspect of the recent historical process is the regional choice to develop integrated services rather than investing in dedicated services. A diverse array of skills can be embedded in these integrated services so as to meet the needs of a 'multicultural' population of residents and thereby prevent such programmes from being ghettoised and stigmatised as 'second-class' services. It was in this context that the foundations of today's system were laid in the early 2000s.

The current integrated system (SPRAR) was institutionalised in

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30   What Donati (2001) has defined as a welfare mix has developed in the local area, i.e., an interrelation among different service providers: public, private and third sector.

31   This was the mantra of the early 2000s among services for migrants, a sort of 'anyway, it's better than nothing' logic. This way of thinking stalled the technical improvements needed to produce competent and appropriate projects.

32   I remember that in 2004, during a meeting of the work group coordinating local welfare programmes (in which I took part, as I was carrying out Voluntary Civil Service in my municipality of residence under the auspices of Caritas), there were two main kinds of actors chosen as migrant services providers: either recently-established institutional actors that had never dealt with the phenomenon before, or – almost punitively – organisations that had previously made mistakes in their respective sectors of structured services. In general, specific projects for migrants were perceived as thorny problems or even sources of 'disturbance'. This logic of playing to the lowest common denominator in entrusting services and planning affected the development of many organisation that have become important players in the services for non-citizens sector over the years. These were years of improvisation, dominated by the need to 'plug the holes'; more or less anything was fine, and the most important consideration was doing something (not the quality of the service). Immanence and contingency have always dictated the evolutionary processes of service structuring. However, the area of migrant services shows even more clearly that, even with the best of intentions, providers without adequate training and the right motivations run a high risk of making mistakes and causing damage in the long term (forming what could be called 'system failures' or 'structural weaknesses').

2004 through the "Memorandum of Understanding on Asylum Seekers and Refugees" aimed at setting up qualified and widely distributed reception services, thus facilitating access to local welfare systems. The first example of a structured network was the *Emilia Romagna terra d'asilo* (Emilia Romagna land of asylum) project launched in 2005, coordinated until 2009 by the Province of Parma and then by the region. In 2011, following the so-called 'North Africa Emergency',[33] policymakers drafted the "Pact for the reception of applicants for international protection in Emilia Romagna" in an effort to move beyond the prevailing logic of emergency response and safeguard fundamental rights.[34] Finally, the SPRAR project was activated in 2017 by the Metropolitan City of Bologna. By coordinating with Bologna ASP and third sector partners, SPRAR has generated synergies between the reception system and other services in the area while also providing dedicated services.[35] Following this reformulation and reallocation of management responsibilities,[36] the region also set up additional specific programmes for the protection of vulnerable subjects: Start-ER, SPRAR DM-DS,[37] and a service for unaccompanied minors. The goal was to create an integrated network capable of jointly administering projects, so as to use a multidisciplinary approach to identify situations of vulnerability while still at an early stage and thus match up services with users in a way that was tailored to their specificities and needs.

This goal of establishing an integrated system was reaffirmed on 20 May 2019 through an agreement between the Emilia Romagna Region and ANCI[38] subsequently adopted via Regional Council res-

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33 For more information on the impact of the so-called 'North Africa Emergency' created by the Arab Spring events on the local reception system, see https://www.citt-ametropolitana.bo.it/sanitasociale/Engine/RAServeFile.php/f/Documenti/DossierENAcompleto.pdf.

34 Between 2011 and 2012, following the Arab Spring and war in Libya, the number of migrants crossing via the Mediterranean route started to increase substantially. Only after this significant change – significant both quantitatively, in terms of the size of the flows, and qualitatively, in terms of their mixed composition – planners began to set up the system at the regional level.

35 The Bologna metropolitan SPRAR project aims to continue the strategy of integrated reception through programmes co-designed by institutions, public authorities, the private social sector and local communities.

36 For instance transferring the good practices enacted in individual local areas to render them systemic, i.e., practised at the regional level, thus extending beyond the capacity of individual municipalities and provinces.

37 Start-ER is the acronym for the project *Salute Tutela e Accoglienza per Richiedenti e Titolari di Protezione Internazionale in Emilia Romagna* (Health Protection and Reception for Applicants and International Protection Beneficiaries in Emilia Romagna) launched in 2017; SPRAR DM-DS is the acronym for the project dedicated to asylum seekers with mental or physical health issues, launched in 2018.

38 Acronym for the 'National Association of Italian Municipalities'.

olution no. 812.[39] This agreement laid out experimental actions that would be taken to improve the quality and efficiency of the reception and integration system for applicants and beneficiaries of international and humanitarian protection. The last key step in this process of structuring the system at the regional level was the accreditation of *Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria* (CAS, 'Extraordinary Reception Centres') centres within SPRAR. This accreditation began in 2017 in conjunction with the birth of the metropolitan SPRAR (what has been called the 'SPRARisation process'). The aim of this move was to raise the level of reception provided regardless of the type of reception officially recognised to the managing organisation: even a small, extraordinary centre could provide widespread reception by reproducing the standards of the SPRAR system in terms of management and project implementation.[40]

Thanks to this process of erecting and organising services laboriously carried out over the years, it has become more and more common to use the label 'Bologna model' to indicate integrated, mutually reinforcing activity on the part of institutions and managing agencies, two actors that are theoretically indistinguishable from the point of view of their objectives.

The Mattei Centre (informally referred to as 'il Mattei') also played fundamental role in this historical process as one of the first reception centres; indeed, this institutional space can be considered a functional (or dysfunctional?) lynchpin in the development of the entire regional reception system.

The centre's institutional status and function have changed over the years, but its appearance remains the same: the former Chiarini barracks in the San Vitale neighbourhood on the outskirts of the city were identified in 1999 as a suitable place for creating a Temporary Residence Centre for irregular migrants awaiting expulsion. In 2000, management of the centre passed from the Municipality of Bologna to the region, and the latter allocated funds to convert the former bar-

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39 The experimental project *Emilia Romagna terra d'asilo*, due to expire in December 2020, is aimed at both ensuring the technical coordination of SIPROIMI projects – including work tables on specific issues – and effective communication to spread good practices. It is also designed to monitor the impact of the regulatory changes.

40 This is not the place for an in-depth reflection on this aspect, but this point is interesting because it represents in itself a way of rethinking the classic emergency-response logic. In spite of the emergency conditions stemming from large numbers of clients in need, this *ex post* accreditation process shows that it is possible to provide a different type of reception services. The capacity to provide such services obviously depends in part on the organisation's experience and competence in dealing with the phenomenon and meeting people's needs, and represents a sort of innovative re-orientation in service provision beginning from an awareness of problematic elements (the structural weaknesses of large centres and their consequent failure to achieve set objectives).

racks into a CPTA[41] with room to serve just over 90 users. In January 2002, just before the renovation work was completed, a large group of activists burst in to the Mattei to dismantle the fixtures that had been installed, hoping that this protest might drive the institutions to realise that the space, more similar to a prison than a temporary accommodation centre, was not suitable for detaining migrants.[42] This direct action delayed the opening of the centre by a few months; it ended up opening in May 2002 but from the beginning it garnered criticism for its massive and sweeping violations of the fundamental rights of its detainees.[43] Over the years, several protests have targeted this facility.[44] In the meantime, it has been converted into an Identification and Expulsion Centre. The centre was closed in 2013, but reopened in July 2014 as a regional HUB for 'sorting' applicants for international protection.[45] In an attempt to adhere to the narrative of the Bologna model and thus create a space of first-stage reception, the centre in its function as a HUB is represented – and in part reconfigured in practice – as capable of overcoming the problems stemming from the physical structure of the facility; it is therefore framed as a 'good centre' despite the structural logic of detention underlying its design and its large dimensions.[46] It could be said that centre's structural deficiencies have been compensated for by its functional purpose: a large, first-stage reception centre the existence of which allows planners to set up a second facility according to parameters of quality and efficiency. When the Law Decree 113/20218 came into force, therefore, the centre was run using practices conceived to rectify the negative image that had distinguished it for years.

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41 Acronym for 'Temporary Residence and Assistance Centres'.

42 https://www.bibliotecasalaborsa.it/cronologia/bologna/2002/assalto_al_cpt_di_via_mattei.

43 https://www.meltingpot.org/Bologna-Un-anno-dall-apertura-del-CPT-di-via-Mattei.html#.XqllrWgzbIU.

44 The main protests by external actors took place September 2004 and March 2007; protests carried out by internal actors, the detained migrants themselves, included a hunger strike in April 2005 as well as demonstrations and escape attempts in September 2010. For more information, see https://www.meltingpot.org/Bologna-Violata-la-zona-rossa-del-CPT-di-Via-Mattei.html#.XqlmhWgzbIU. The main focus of protests has been the conditions under which migrants were detained, primarily overcrowding, and a lack of respect for people in vulnerable situations, as well as violent repression by law enforcement (the most well-known is the police action that took place at the beginning of March 2003).

45 The centre in its 'new institutional form' was designed to accommodate a few hundred people, but in 2015 the number of detainees exceeded one thousand. Despite the change in the function of the facility, the problem of overcrowding in the centre has been worsening over the years and has always represented its main problem, together with the fact that the building is physically set up for control and detention rather than real reception.

46 http://www.givemeshelter.it/tag/centro-mattei/.

On Saturday 8 June 2019, however, something happened that was unthinkable for the Bologna area. It came as a surprise even though several closures of large reception centres had been carried out in various parts of the country in the previous weeks, closures that even caught the attention of mass-media daily news outlets. That morning in June, sector authorities were informed that the Mattei Centre was about to be shut down. The justification given for this closure was that the facility needed to be renovated, and so the 162 'guests' present at the time would be subjected to obligatory transfer.[47] In this case as well, however, civil society and reception system managing organisations spoke out in protest and were able to prevent the forced displacement of migrants, managing to preserve the continuity of the reception and integration projects that had been launched in the area.[48]

The story of the Mattei Centre thus speaks to resistance – on the part of civil society and actors in the local system – against state moves to shift the governance of migrants detained in the centre. This aspect is quite significant in that such local resistance has become a salient feature of the narrative on the 'Bologna model'. Such tension has never really evaporated over time; rather, actors have remained always vigilant and ready to point out potential problem areas. Indeed, the issues surrounding the Mattei Centre clashed with the institutional – but at the same time 'embodied' and consequently enacted by many participants – formula of *Emilia Romagna land of asylum*. The intertwined story of the Mattei Centre and the development of the local reception system seem to reveal a persistent ambivalence characteristic of the local area (ambivalence that can be seen clearly in the reforms imposed by Law 132/2018): inclusion and integration on the one hand, but confinement and detention (along with differential inclusion [Mezzadra 2007; Mezzadra, Brett 2013; Mezzadra, Neilson 2013] more generally) on the other, as I try to describe in the next section.

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[47] https://www.rivistailmulino.it/news/newsitem/index/Item/News:NEWS_ITEM:4781; https://www.cgilbo.it/2019/06/12/hub-mattei-cgil-bologna-bella-pagina-di-storia-fatta-di-solidarieta-e-integrazione.

[48] For the details of this case, see the chronological report written by 'Le lavoratrici e i lavoratori dell'accoglienza di Bologna' (The reception workers of Bologna), available at https://www.meltingpot.org/Bologna-Tra-lotta-e-accoglienza.html#.XrK-TpagzbIU. Only 35 people hosted in this centre have agreed to be transferred to the Caltanissetta centre.

4 The Bologna Model and the Impact of Law 132/2018: A Real 'Crash Test'

Before outlining the processes taking place in the region since the approval of Law 132/2018, it is appropriate to describe the context in which this reform was implemented. Indeed, the shifts introduced in 2017 by Law 46/2017 already generated a substantial local protest movement called 'Bologna Accoglie-Nessuno è illegale' (Bologna Welcomes-No one is illegal). As the events surrounding the Mattei Centre illustrate, civil society and reception system workers worked together more and more over the years to denounce the system's failures with an eye to improving it. On 27 May 2017, thousands of people marched to protest the security-oriented logics and racism of migration policies (the city of Bologna did not participate).[49] In 2017 critics of the system began to build bottom-up networks to resist the restrictive changes of Law 46/2017, and there networks have gained strength over time, especially after Law Decree 113/2018 was approved. In 2019 the protest group grew into a more institutional form and took on the name Rete Bologna Accoglie. In this latter form, the group organised a series of demonstrations in downtown Bologna (especially in front of the Prefecture) to protest cuts to the reception system.[50]

System workers and supporters knew that the 'structured' character of the Bologna system would allow it to hold up longer than others before breaking down.[51] However, they were also aware that pre-existing structural deficiencies,[52] together with the new rules, would seriously undermine the system's capacity to provide decent and effective services; in short, they feared that the 'model' might crumble and all the resistance they had been exercising 'from below' in their daily work be undercut.

In winter 2018-19, when I conducted a series of semi-structured

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[49] https://labasbo.org/2017/05/10/bologna-accoglie-no-one-is-illegal-marcia-per-laccoglienza/; https://labasbo.org/2017/05/29/marcia-no-one-is-illegal-a-bologna-stiamo-costruendo-una-strada-diversa-per-accogliere-tuttie/. The signatories and member associations participating in this call to protest are listed at http://www.tpo.bo.it/azioni/appello-alla-partecipazione-alla-marcia-del-27-maggio-per-una-bologna-accogliente-e-solidale/.

[50] For further information, see: https://www.redattoresociale.it/article/notiziario/migranti_le_proposte_della_rete_bologna_accoglie_per_condizioni_di_vita_dignitose_; https://www.edizionilalinea.it/nuovosito/it_it/intervista-rossella-vigneri/.

[51] This terminology was used by the coordinator of reception services for unaccompanied minors, part of the city of Bologna's international protection service, in an interview conducted 19 September 2018.

[52] "I think that the problem, the potential failure, is not having thought about a system and already designed it in a way that is universal for all Italians … the problem is that we do not have a real model" (Coordinator of a reception centre for women, interviewed on 6 December 2018).

interviews with various system professionals (coordinators, service providers, psychologists, lawyers, social workers) for research on vulnerability,[53] the sentiment pervading their accounts was "worry". They were palpably afraid of what effects the new law would have and especially its repercussions for clients considered more 'vulnerable': they expected these individuals to be thrust once again into a state of (institutional) invisibility.[54] The account of a coordinator of a SPRAR women's reception centre clearly convey the law's local impact for reception system workers:

> This is a job that you do, if you have a great passion, that is, you do it because you believe in what you do [...] In my opinion, at this moment, workers are asking themselves 'what does this mean' and 'what will happen'? And what will happen to the relational work they have done, work in which they have invested so much competence, so much welcoming humanity.[55]

To understand this feeling of anxiety, we must consider the period when the law was passed: in this moment, the local system was already struggling with the elevated number of asylum seekers and their increasingly complex conditions.[56] Every innovative step forward to ensure solid and effective services had been taken laboriously from the bottom up, with workers struggling day after day to overcome the system's critical weaknesses. The fact that the Bologna area provided quality services, especially as compared to other local areas, meant that it had become an attractive destination for more and more users. This led to a system overload. "We pay the price of being good enough, because especially complex cases come to us because other local areas know that we try to do things right and we have a good network of services", explained the coordinator of a service for unaccompanied minors who I interviewed in September 2018. On one hand, the attractiveness of local services reflects

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53   See for instance Spada 2020 for the results of this research.

54   In offering services and projects that are effective in terms of their high standards, the main strong point of the local system was its ability to identify the most vulnerable individuals: "The local network has the ability to recognise an instance of vulnerability or condition of need ... this ability allows us to do a good job. Of course, this does not mean that vulnerability increases due to the inability of the network; it is exactly the opposite. This ability shows that there is a network that knows exactly how to look and what for" (Coordinator of services for unaccompanied minors, interviewed on 19 September 2018).

55   Coordinator of a reception centre for women, interviewed on 6 December 2018.

56   See the report drawn up by InMigrazione, *Reception of refugees: an ordinary emergency of July 2017.* https://www.inmigrazione.it/it/dossier/accoglienza-rifugia-ti-unordinaria-emergenza. Here, the point of view of system workers is provided for the Emilia Romagna region as well.

positively on the Bologna-area system and reinforces its image as a model, as this attractiveness stems from the competence, developed over time, in dealing effectively with complexity. On the other hand, it was already a factor of stress even before the recent regulatory reform. The new law therefore struck the system at the exact moment when it was beginning to be more consolidated and – in some cases – to exceed the established minimum standards. Indeed, the main cause of anxiety among service providers was this potential of the new legislation to impact their possibilities for improvement.

The idea that emerged from my informal conversations with various figures in the regional reception system is that the new decree represented a point of no return. Before Law Decree 113/2018, workers saw a space of opportunity for acting from below to pursue forms of improvement. They felt they were able to 'act in the margins of possibility' to overcome system weaknesses, despite the difficulty.[57] After the introduction of the law, however, there was an awareness that this space had been drastically reduced. Some actors feared becoming involved in the process: for example, in the spring of 2019 several managing organisations ceased to participate in the calls for tenders.[58] The new regulations prevented or at least profoundly curtailed their ability to act appropriately, and it would have been impossible for them to go on offering services without undercutting the standards achieved locally in the last few years. "Accepting the new conditions would be taking a step backwards; they ask us to do things that do not correspond to the mandate, our role or the vision of the organisation. We will probably lose our jobs but we will be able to sleep at night. It is a joint struggle, we as workers pay together with the refugees... albeit to a different degree... for the impact of unjust laws that go against the protection of rights", one worker said in an informal conversation in February 2019. Many people involved in the reception system judged the new norms to fall below a minimum acceptable threshold, both legally and morally. Their consequent refusal to 'make a deal' became one of the main forms of resistance to the impact of the legislation.[59] Such acts of resistance therefore represented a new ingredient in the narrative of the 'Bologna model'. Despite everything, the model was trying to resist and not succumb to these

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[57] For a critical analysis of the possibility of 'going beyond' and creating spaces for change from below, see the issue of *Antropologia Pubblica* available at the following link: https://riviste-clueb.online/index.php/anpub/issue/view/12.

[58] https://www.redattoresociale.it/article/notiziario/accoglienza_bando_cas_quasi_deserto_a_bologna_una_sola_offerta.

[59] Regarding this point, it should be stressed that not all managing organisations had true freedom of choice. In an informal conversation (8 May 2020) with a coordinator and social worker employed in services dedicated to vulnerable asylum seekers, she observed, "Who can afford the privilege of saying no?".

changes. Some actors were able to pose this kind of resistance (saying no to the new tender conditions because they were considered in violation of quality standards); for everyone else, anxiety reigned. People feared that the new law would frustrate their efforts and dismantle their relationships. The network they had built risked falling apart under this destructive pressure, and the repercussions of this dismantling were felt even before the new law took material effect: "there is a whole portion in which local authorities will be alone, in the sense that, in that area, they will no longer be able to rely on a form of reception as it is [offered] today, integrated. There is considerable, considerable apprehension about that".[60]

A key concern was the issue of adding applicants for international protection to the city population registry. Article 4, § 1-*bis* of Law 132/2018 states that "a residence permit for asylum application does not constitute grounds for inclusion in the population registry". The City of Bologna registry office initially acted on this change through inaction rather than refusing applicants: to avoid potentially recording a refusal to register, it preferred to not accept applications for registration in the first few weeks of Law 132. The *diktat* managed to prevail shortly afterwards, however, when the office began to openly refuse applications. It took a legal challenge by two local associations (ASGI[61] and Avvocato di Strada), filed on the same basis as the case in the City of Florence, to bring about a different interpretation of the rule.[62] According to this verdict, authorities were instead required to include applicants for protection in their registries. This point was key because international protection applicants' inclusion in the population registry rolls is crucial for the enforceability of their fundamental social rights; it is the administrative act that makes reception system projects substantial.

The behaviour of local institutions (both the city registry office and the prefect) ended up clashing with the narrative of the Bologna model, in that this imaginary assumes that all the parts of the system collaborate harmoniously and follow shared logics. The application of the new law instead revealed the rift between top system decision-makers and those who enact it in daily life. In this case, the rhetoric of the model seems to have concealed controversial strategies on the part of the institutions, strategies which drove and fuelled the resistance and change local workers had been carrying out from below over the years. The Mattei Centre was reopened at the beginning of November 2019 as an Extraordinary Reception Centre. This

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[60]   Coordinator of a reception centre for minors, interviewed on 6 November 2018.

[61]   Association for Juridical Studies on Immigration.

[62]   In reality, only the simplified registration procedure introduced by Law 46/2017 had been abrogated.

shift went nearly unremarked as compared to the public outcry over past changes in its function and its being made over as an institution. The new status of the centre seems to underline the rift mentioned above. Now that it no longer serves as a hub for organising material reception of protection applicants, the centre almost represents a new low standard that also drags down the (few) other local authorities trying not to diminish the levels of protection they provide. With a capacity of 200 beds, the new governmental reception centre is run directly by the Prefecture and offers no integration programmes, employment guidance, language instruction, psychological support or any form of legal guidance or preparation for Territorial Commission hearings. As such, it is objectively at odds with the local philosophy of wide-ranging reception and fundamental rights protection. The question is, therefore, how such ambivalence will influence not only the material conditions of reception and access to protection for the migrants it houses, but also the city's standing as a 'model' for the virtuousness of its services: in a press release from November 2019, ASGI suggests such developments are a betrayal of the 'Bologna model'.[63]

How then to evaluate the impact of these new regulations on the City of Bologna? This area has proved itself a 'land of welcome', resistant and deeply aware of the ethical implications of working in the reception system. Sector professionals have adopted strategies to prevent all their work from being undone, although they have had to deal with significant forms of institutional reorganisation and a general reduction in protection. The crisis triggered by the application of Law 132/2018 may thus pave the way for rethinking the system and overcoming ambivalences.[64] Indeed, many sector actors are aware that they must 'move ahead' rather than simply trying to return to the way things were before Law Decree 113/2018 When the system began to erode, structural weaknesses were brought into greater focus. During the regional presidency election campaign that ended with the 26 January 2020 elections, the migrant issue was rendered almost wholly[65] invisible, transforming it into a sort of taboo

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63 https://www.asgi.it/asilo-e-protezione-internazionale/bologna-tra-disce-il-proprio-modello-di-accoglienza/.

64 "An anthropology of bureaucracy (similarly to the anthropology of modern law and more generally, the state) should take into account the double face of bureaucracy, as a form of domination and oppression as well as of protection and liberation, and all the ambivalences this entails" (Bierschenk, de Sardan 2019, 244).

65 Except for the letter from mayor Merola sent to the Minister of Interior Lamorgese in December 2019 in which the mayor requests a derogation from the new law so as to retain in the reception system the individuals already housed in local programs (according to the new legislation, they would have been excluded). The rationale was to avoid a sudden, uncontrolled outpouring of people potentially entitled to international protection from the system, thereby triggering widespread problems of safe-

subject. As this development illustrates, the local area is current-ly facing its own duplicity and ambiguous dual nature, beginning to question its assumed identity as a welcoming system with the ability to almost automatically integrate migrants. As I have tried to dem-onstrate in this chapter, there are grounds, at all levels of system governance and production, to question the validity of this assump-tion taken in an absolute sense. Unlike what the narrative would suggest, the Bologna model actually appears to be laboriously con-structed from the bottom up by workers as they oppose dysfunction-al choices made by the system's top management and institutional heads. In other words, the 'Bologna model' narrative that even lo-cal institutions hold up as a point of pride appears to be a misappro-priation of bottom-up efforts. On the contrary, the narrative almost seems to serve as a sort of shield against possible critiques, and as such it is instrumental in reproducing a *myopic archetype* which is in turn useful for maintaining the *status quo*. In fact, system work-ers know just how fallacious and counterproductive this rhetoric, de-rived from/patterned on the logic of 'ideal models', really is. In the next section, therefore, I shall try to explain the short circuits un-derlying this rhetoric.

5 The 'Model' Narrative under a Magnifying Glass, i.e. the Creation of Structural Weaknesses

If the aim is to consider in its entirety and complexity the process, described above, that generated the 'Bologna model', it makes sense to reflect on the concept of 'model'. The main characteristics appar-ently qualifying developments in the Bologna area for label of model are the development of diversified projects and the attempt to over-come critical issues and raise the quality of the services being of-fered. The Bologna-are reception system can thus be described as an active and productive (even propulsive) system. However, it seems slippery – and counterproductive – to immediately consider it *avant-garde* (a term that appears frequently in the model narrative). Indeed, *avant-garde* refers both to prevention (proceeding with an eye to safe-ty) and the capacity to diverge from established logics. The *avant-garde* usually represents a break with what came before if not an ac-tual revolution. It does not refer to the nature of ongoing 'processes', often stemming from the need to 'keep up'. Moreover, individual local

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ty. Merola's request was accepted in January 2020, extending the deadline of the dero-gation to 30 June. https://www.redattoresociale.it/article/notiziario/migran-ti_anche_a_bologna_prorogati_i_percorsi_ex_sprar. At the time of writing, the end of May 2020, the deadlines have been further extended to December 2020 due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

reception systems have often had to contend with structural under-development at the national level, filling in the gaps and compensating for the incapacity of higher-ups. The result is the fragmentation and lack of consistency characterising today's systems, elements we recognise as intrinsic features of the Italian reception system.

In truth, given the constant regulatory updates and varying intensity and composition of migration flows since the beginning of the second decade of the 2000s, 'keeping up' has always been necessary. This state of affairs has generated specific trends, first and foremost that of awarding seals of quality to projects generically identified as 'virtuous'. However, practices are labelled as 'good' based not on accurate assessments of their impact and effectiveness or, most importantly, their transferability, but simply on the mere fact of having a project. Up to 2012, just 'doing something' was seen in a positive light, regardless of the actual adequacy of interventions and programmes. In fact, the English term 'best practice' began to circulate to refer to the diverse array of programmes implemented immediately after the so-called North Africa emergency. Moreover, the logic of emergency-response favoured this process, as it is more focused on quantity than on the quality of services. Something was being done and, at least until the first decade of the new millennium, that was seen as enough.[66]

I believe it was this 'interested self-referential' attitude that gave rise to the problems that then became structural, making matters even more difficult for those trying to pursue competence and self-awareness. In fact, defining as a model something that is not yet a real model has a paradoxical effect: it impedes the refinement of practices, making it difficult to identify problems and thus take them seriously. This leads to underestimating critical issues and thereby generating a lower standard of quality. The self-referential application of the 'model' label by projects that judge themselves to be such has brought the standard down, in keeping with the 'anyway, it's better than nothing' idea. In so doing, it has hampered improvement and implicitly contributed to consolidating an imperfect *status quo*. It

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[66] "- It doesn't seem to me that accommodation in a disused old hotel, out in the middle of the countryside, in a small village badly connected to the cities and therefore to services, can be the right solution… we should think about creating, proposing, other solutions… - That is there and I think it's too much. We can't put them in the centre of the city either; people would get scared, we have already had problems with the village caffe, where they are not well received. We are making a good impression, because we have prevented the problem from exploding; we are managing it and we are making money off it, too. That facility used to be inactive, now it becomes a way to produce a profit for the cooperative and therefore to fund more hours for mediation and social workers. To do things right if we rethink it later, if we have the money to do it". (informal conversation with the coordinator of the cooperative for which I was working, an organisation that provides services in the Bologna area, fieldnotes, July 2012).

has been like benchmarking (Camp 1991) in reverse. As opposed to continuous comparison with the 'strongest competitors' in the sector through repeated assessments, programmes found it very easy to do better than nothing or the bare minimum. This tendency is also caught up with the economic aspects of service provision: as noted by Folgheraiter (2007, 43 fn. 21) the commodification of aid also entails an unconscious interest in reproducing a problem rather than resolving it. Indeed, what Illich (2008) has defined as the 'disabling professions' proceed (more or less consciously) by setting up a system that works against its own aims.

Merton's (2000, 406; 414) reflections on bureaucracy also shed light on this landscape. Like bureaucracy in general, the reception system – especially in its upper management – has turned into "an administration that almost completely avoids public discussion of its techniques", and its officials develop a "pride of trade that induces them to resist changes in established practice". His analysis of Western bureaucracy's dysfunctions (403-21) finds that there is a "trained incapacity" which generates a dysfunctional vicious circle. The rhetoric of best practices can be considered a manifestation of this process. Using Veblen's concept of trained incapacity (407), Merton "refers to that condition in which a person's professional skills", being out of synch with a changed, flexible and new context of action, "act as obstacles or difficulties".[67]

This "more or less serious inability to adapt" (408) turns adherence to the organisation's operating rules into a general systemic dysfunction. "Adherence to the rules, originally conceived as a means, becomes an end in itself; here the well-known process of 'transposition of goals' occurs, so that an instrumental value becomes a final value" (410). This process produces the "'virtuous' bureaucrat, who does not forget only one of the rules with which his activity must comply and who is therefore unable to assist most of his clients" (411). What Merton underlines here is that professional preparation and role training can become an 'inability' to act appropriately in the system. Such inability has obvious repercussions for the objectives of the service and, therefore, the material life conditions of the people defined as service users and beneficiaries. These problems substantiate critiques of welfare: as Rodger (2004, 218) has pointed out, the welfare state has become a "monument to hypocrisy: a self-referential system that pretends not to know that all those who can afford it will do without its assistance; and that those who cannot afford it will remain trapped in a system that abandons them to themselves,

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67 Precisely because of the ever-changing 'nature' of migration flows, the context in which the system of migration governance operates will always display these characteristics.

while pretending [...] to assist them".

The reception system for international protection applicants has not been able to clearly deviate from this dysfunctional welfare logic while undergoing institutionalisation.[68] According to this logic, the subjectivity most functional to the operation of the system is one that is subjugated, dependent, and quite often domesticated.[69] The institutional (but also commonly used in informal speech) notion of 'appropriate user' and 'deserving beneficiary' is based on the same logic as medical institutions with their differentiation between 'good and bad patients'; such differentiation is made based on their docility and loyalty to the system, as well as their degree of gratitude.[70]

> In the field of social services, the theory [is] that there is always a dysfunction linked to a role conflict underlying users' requests for help: this is very true in the field of services for to migrants. The social worker proposes a service that is framed and circumscribed by cultural frames stemming from social representations, codes and languages that invite a certain kind of reading of reality, one that is often in stark contrast with the imaginary and expectations of the beneficiary who finds himself being channelled into a programmed circuit of assistance with predetermined times and spaces in which he is required to accept a pact of cohabitation. (Tarsia 2018; transl. by the Author)

The instrument through which the dysfunctional logic of welfare is transposed to the field of reception is the Welcoming/Reception/Hosting Pact, a document jointly signed by the 'guest' and managing agency. This signing of a document labelled as a pact – in formal terms, a contract – creates ambiguity in terms of rights and duties. While a contract establishes obligations between the two parties, a pact is more about trust in the good will of the other party. Amplified by the deep power disparity between the two signatories, this apparently subtle point generates a circle of expectations, and con-

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68 For a critical analysis of the reception policies (as a whole, not just for asylum seekers) enacted in the local area, see Tarabusi 2014.

69 For a critical analysis of the logic of reception camps as social technologies with specific products (i.e. domestication), see Malkki 2002.

70 "The unrequited gift makes the one who accepted it [...] inferior, especially when accepted without the intention of returning it" (Mauss 2002, 117). The implicit values of hospitality presuppose the gift, which takes place in condition of power asymmetry, will be returned. This logic gives rise to the term used to identify the migrants in the circuit: The term 'beneficiary' refers to someone enjoying concessions, quite often a real privilege, thus removing the sphere of rights and the associated sphere of legal obligations. The same approach has been further institutionalised in the rhetoric of the 'deserving beneficiary', if he or she is willing to do socially useful work (in return for a 'gift' of hospitality that obviously needs to be paid back).

sequently legitimacy of behaviour, which is unique to the field of reception. Signing should entail reciprocal empowerment. In this case, however, it entails only the so-called beneficiary's obligation to act appropriately while moving along the educational path of integration. The always-immanent threat that reception services might be withdrawn unequivocally illustrates users' disproportionate share of duties. Indeed, it is the incapacity/non-docility of the beneficiary that signals the failure of the process, as if the system for its part had no obligations beyond simply "doing what can be done in a system of constraints".[71] This point brings us back to the habit of taking minimum standards and holding them up as an example of going above and beyond the call of duty, thus signalling a shift from the legal level of meeting minimum requirements to the moral level of (potentially underserved) self-congratulations.

The standardisation and depersonalisation of relationships,[72] amplified by the intercultural character of the encounter, produces infantilisation and dependence.[73] In so doing, it reproduces the welfarist logic of aid. Although this logic is demonised in official discourse, it tends to be reproduced – sometimes unconsciously – through everyday tools and practices in this sector.[74]

This brings me to a last point, namely the use of the English term 'best practice' to talk about good practices.[75] This vocabulary is often used for specialised projects, primarily those for so-called vulnerable individuals. Good and best do not mean the same thing, but the pervasive use of English terminology to 'elevate the tone' of projects

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71 From the account of a social worker in the metropolitan area (interviewed on 29 November 2018).

72 "Another aspect of the bureaucratic structure, the emphasis on the depersonalisation of relationships, also has its influence on the 'trained incapacity' of the bureaucrat. The bureaucrat's personality is built around this norm of impersonality. This fact, together with the tendency towards 'categorisation', caused by the dominant role assumed by the general and abstract rules, are the cause of conflicts between officials and the public or clientele. As officials minimise personal relationships and tend to categorise, it follows that the peculiarities of individual cases are often ignored" (Merton 2000, 415).

73 "In practice these institutions, which would like to treat users as complete human beings, make the blatant mistake of denying that users themselves are competent to enter into the merits of their dependence" (Sennet 2004, 177).

74 In this process, a paradox occurs: migrants are only recognised if they can prove – according to our logical terms – that they are real victims. The system takes them in charge for only this reason, but then it expects them to be capable (but not too capable) victims, increasing the risk of victimising them a second time. For an analysis accompanied by concrete proposals to 'reverse the trend' of this phenomenon, see Faso, Bontempelli 2017.

75 This slippage can be seen in the report produced by the Ministry of Interior in 2017, at page 7, where the two terms are used as synonyms. Report published at https://www.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/rapporto_annuale_buone_pratiche_di_accoglienza_2017_ita_web_rev1.pdf.

has – often and quickly – concealed this conceptual slippage. In retrospect, this error might actually be seen as instrumental: it is common practice to strategically use foreign terminology, deploying the authority of specialised Anglophone terminology to increase disorientation and lack of clarity in projects and interventions.[76] In fact, such slippage between 'good' and 'best' occurs not only in the translation between Italian and English, but also in the – instrumental – debasement of standards described above, a slippage that, by casting practices as already the 'best', tends to hamper efforts at improvement.

It is this level, therefore, that contains the space which has given rise to the structural weaknesses of the reception system. Indeed, the system often resembles a lottery,[77] creating "precarious service workers for temporary users" (Ferrari 2017, 31). It is the precariousness of both workers and 'beneficiaries' that constitutes the *file rouge* of the relationship underlying the latest regulatory shift. Faced with a *law that creates vulnerability*, the local area will be called upon to make ever-greater efforts, both to further improve quality standards and to act with *meticulous and always vigilant resistance*. Such resistance has been subjected to intense pressure as a result of the health emergency caused by the spring 2020 COVID-19 outbreak, as I seek to outline in the brief concluding section.

6 And Now? Blessed COVID vs. Damned COVID

In his 5 March 2020 speech, Italian Prime Minister Conte made an assertion that went on to become central to the pandemic debate: "We are all in the same boat". Just a little more than two weeks later, Pope Francis – almost as if replying to the PM – said that "the storm unmasks our vulnerability. No one can save himself".[78] Both statements reflect the same intention: to raise awareness of reciprocity and focus on the importance of solidarity in the face of a common, shared situation of fragility. There is a profound difference between the two statements, however. Prime Minister Conte's words are inaccurate and, paradoxically, risk generating unwanted, contrary effects. It is not true that we are all in the same boat. In the storm currently raging, there are those sailing in a safe boat and those simply at the mercy of the waves, without even the luxury of a life jacket.

In the last few weeks, countless scholars from various disciplines

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[76] See also the name of the SPRAR communication service for Bologna: Bologna Cares.

[77] See https://www.oxfamitalia.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/La-Lotteria-Italia-dellaccoglienza_Report-Oxfam_8_11_2017_Final.pdf.

[78] These are the words of the Pope during the *urbi et orbi* blessing for Easter 2020.

have spoken out on the pandemic. At times, they have sought to underline the often-overlooked or concealed aspects that contribute to constructing the material conditions of existence that exploded in the lockdown. There has been talk of privilege, differential treatment, psychological impact, and the collapse of pre-existing systemic weaknesses. At the same time, the narrative of 'we will get out of this better' also informed such reflection: many have sought to identify some good, individual and collective, that might come of the crisis. The slogan *#iorestoacasa*, 'I'm staying home', became a fetish of responsibility and respect, but it also unmasked systemic fragilities. What about those without homes? Those living in conditions of forced proximity? Those subject to further restrictive measures?

We have all experienced for the first time the impact of restrictions on our personal freedom and the importance of technological tools for staying in touch with our 'kin' (regardless of blood ties). We have also drudged from some drowsy memory the destructive power of the logic of individuals as vectors of contagion, exacerbating perceptions of insecurity and fear. Have we really understood, however, how much individualism and the selective exclusion of categorical us/them logics represent a failure of the system?[79]

I therefore conclude by reporting the information I gathered in June 2020 about how this pandemic has impacted the Bologna-area reception system. During various phone calls and virtual meetings, I began to discern two distinct interpretative logics. There were those saying "blessed COVID", and others saying "damned COVID". The coronavirus pandemic seems to have reified the ambivalence discussed above. While it may have had some positive effects, it has also generated problematic points in keeping with the past.[80]

Indeed, the measures adopted to contain the epidemic have reinforced "what was already in the air. It blew up exclusion mechanisms and made it possible to reconfigure in inclusive terms".[81] For instance, the choice to postpone the deadline on reception projects scheduled to expire in June can be seen as a move in the direction of inclusion. The need to limit movement as much as possible, together with the need to exercise surveillance, has led to extending the pro-

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[79]   The experiences of a group of tourists from Veneto and Lombardy who were turned back from entering the Mauritius islands at the end of February 2020 are a helpful illustration of this. In the tourists' words, "It was a nightmare", "Why just us, what about the others?", "We Italians were treated like refugees, it sucked".

[80]   It is no coincidence that the 17 March 2020 'Cura Italia decree' outlines its "Provisions on immigration" at Art. 86-*bis*, showing that legislators frame the phenomenon of migration exclusively through a securitarian logic (Art. 86 is devoted to urgent measures for prisons).

[81]   Informal conversation (8 May 2020) with a coordinator and social worker employed in services dedicated to vulnerable asylum seekers.

grammes already in progress, thus prolonging the duration of protection. Moreover, many migrants in work placement programmes or intermittent employment sectors have witnessed an increase in job offerings.[82] If we consider only this level, the pandemic has certainly had positive effects, and we could almost thank it. Unfortunately, however, the accounts of other informants[83] have highlighted a host of critical issues, showing that the ambiguity I have repeatedly mentioned in this chapter remains even during the pandemic. The logic of detention, surveillance and emergency-response has gained renewed strength. The people housed in reception facilities could no longer come and go from them.[84] Of course, the same was true of everyone in the country. And yet there is an enormous 'but': not only are reception facilities not equipped to allow social distancing and other measures of individual protection, they could easily become centres of contagion.[85] Further, what about the total lack of multi-lingual communication from the central government, as if Italy were a monolingual country, leaving it up to managing organisations to provide translated materials after a prolonged delay?[86] How to explain the "differential treatment of unaccompanied minors, who could look out from the windows of their rooms and see their (citizen) peers take their dogs for walks or at least free to stretch their legs by walking around the house"?[87] What about the fact that self-certification forms allowed citizens to move around for certain necessary and urgent reasons, but the authorities did not extend this logic to cover other

[82]   Space limitations prevent me from delving deeper into this aspect, and indeed it deserves its own separate discussion. However, it is important to note that it was the most precarious and exploited individuals whose labour kept the system afloat in the very first weeks of the pandemic. In other words: staying at home is a privilege enacted at the expense of others who cannot stay at home. Specifically, in a 19 April 2020 press release, social service employees spoke out about the serious lack of protection for workers' health (Adl Cobas press release *Reception, social workers without protection asked to police users*: http://www.adlcobas.it/Bologna-Comunicato-Accoglien-za-operatori-trici-senza-protezioni-a-cui-si-chiede.html).

[83]   Informal conversation (8 May 2020) with two lawyers from the city's social services.

[84]   The 1 April 2020 circular that the Head of Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration sent to the prefectures specified that migrants housed in reception facilities had to remain inside.

[85]   On 11 March 2020, the group Coordinamento Migranti di Bologna (Bologna Migrant Coordination) launched an appeal to the institutions in charge regarding the highly inadequate anti-contagion measures in some facilities, especially the Mattei Centre. For further information see https://www.asgi.it/asilo-e-protezione-internazi-onale/coronavirus-asilo-bologna/.

[86]   To pose a provocative question, it could be asked whether state institutions' neglect to translate their guidelines for curbing the pandemic into the main foreign languages betrays an unconscious prejudice, i.e. that migrants in Italy only exist 'locked inside centres'.

[87]   As stated by a lawyer working in an international protection service run by the city of Bologna (Informal conversation, 8 May 2020).

needs? Some migrants were actually fined by police while going to help desks to collect documents or to fulfil the requirements of reception procedures because such activities were not considered necessary and urgent. And finally, the suspension of court activities has further prolonged already unreasonably long waiting times, increasing applicants' uncertainty and existential precariousness.

This chapter opened with the question 'will the system survive?', and it closes with another puzzle: 'will this pandemic situation be useful?' Will it serve to instil in us the necessary awareness of the gaps in protection services and the divergent trajectories of different groups of migrants, over-determined by categories and forms of belonging imposed from outside? Will it help those in the boat to begin to feel the respect and recognition that would make it intolerable for them to know (even before seeing) that someone else is out there alone, at the mercy of the waves? Will it make the struggle for the universal recognition of fundamental human rights less difficult? Any real opportunity for change in the midst of this crisis must be deferred to some future time. At the moment we are too busy dealing with the repercussions of a system whose constituent logic is paralysed, a system more focused on self-proclaiming itself as a model[88] – deaf to internal contradictions – than looking in depth at its own fragilities.

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88 Rhetoric immediately ridden at national level on how the country was able to cope with the pandemic.

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