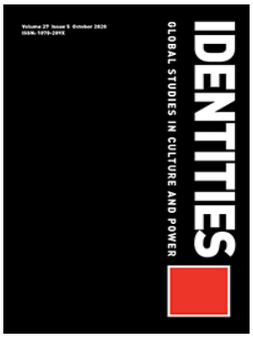

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Local identity and the reception of refugees: the example of Riace

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ABSTRACT
A strong local community identity often goes together with the rejection of refugees and other migrants. However, there is also the possibility that such a local identity actually stimulates the reception of refugees. Based on the social identity perspective and our ethnographic fieldwork we examine this possibility in the context of the small town of Riace in Southern Italy. The analysis demonstrates that there is a local identity of hospitality that is construed as a continuation of the town's past. This identity of local hospitality is enacted and maintained in various ways in the life of the town in which the mayor as an entrepreneur of the local identity plays a critical role. However, there are also some challenges to the future of the local identity of hospitality that relates to available financial resources and competition over local opportunities.

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In the first eight Months of 2017, 130,000 asylum seekers arrived in Europe by sea, of whom about 100,500 arrived in Italy (UNHCR 2017). The high number of asylum seekers has led in many European countries to negative public attitudes towards refugees and protests against their reception (e.g. Simmons, Stoke, and Wike 2016; Squires 2015). Because of their different cultural and religious (Islamic) background, the continuing arrival of these refugees, it is argued, would threaten national identity and undermine local communities. Identity threat and a strong national identity often goes together with negative attitudes towards newcomers and a strong local identity tends to lead to the rejection of refugees and other migrants (Schildkraut 2014; Wagner, Christ, and Heitmeyer 2010). Group identity involves boundary drawing with a stronger identity leading to stronger processes of social exclusion (Wimmer 2008, 2009).

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However, there are many examples of individuals, groups and organisations providing help and support to refugees and newcomers, and trying to include them into their communities (https://humanitysheart.com/initiatives/). Humanitarian concerns and feelings of empathy with the plight of refugees explain part of these intentions to offer help and support (Bansak, Hainmueller, and Hangartner 2016; Newman et al. 2013). In addition, and as we will try to demonstrate, there is the possibility that a strong local identity actually *stimulates* helping behaviour towards refugees. The reason is that local and other group identities not only vary in the intensity of the reactions that they arouse but also in the nature of those reactions (Turner and Reynolds 2001). The content of the local identity defines the norms, values and beliefs of the community that provide community members with a direction for how to think, feel and behave, and this content can be prosocial. Thus, when a community defines itself in terms of hospitality and support for the unfortunate, people who identify with that community are inclined to act in that way.

An example is the town of Riace that has gained international attention for being the village of 'accoglienza', of hospitality. In this small Southern Italian village of about 2000 inhabitants, the local community created an extensive reception and integration program for up to 400 refugees. This raises the question of how this welcoming attitude and genuine inclusion and support for refugees is generated. There are, of course, various economic, demographic and political factors involved in this (Rinaldis 2016; Sasso 2012), but our current aim is to examine how the people in Riace celebrate and enact a local identity of hospitality. Our analytical interest is in identifying and analysing the type of 'identity work' that the Riace inhabitants and the local leadership are involved in, and how this relates to the reception and support of refugees. Specifically, we focus on the ways in which the local identity of hospitality is socially construed and made to matter. Additionally, we consider some factors and processes that pose a challenge to maintaining this local identity of hospitality. Theoretically, we use the social identity perspective (Reicher, Spears, and Haslam 2010; Tajfel and Turner 1979; Turner and Reynolds 2001) for understanding the processes involved in the creation of a local identity that promotes a welcoming attitude towards refugees. Empirically, we draw upon our extensive ethnographic field work in Riace conducted from 2015 to 2017.

The social identity perspective

The term 'social identity' refers to the sense of self that is derived from a particular group membership and the meanings associated with that membership. According to the social identity perspective, when people's sense of self is bound up with their membership of certain social groups, they start to behave in terms of what this group means and stands for (Tajfel

and Turner 1979; Turner and Reynolds 2001). While the level of group identification determines how strong people react, the identity content determines the way in which people act. Social identity definitions have behavioural consequences which implies that different definitions encourage different forms of action (Verkuyten 2018). Importantly, this means that identification with one's local community does not necessarily lead to the exclusion of outsiders but can also be associated with openness and inclusion (e.g. Levine and Manning 2014). Whether the former or the latter occurs depends on how the local identity is defined and the normative meanings that emanate from it. Prosocial behaviour, such as hospitality and helpfulness, may also be a consequence of how a community understands itself.

National identity, for example, is not necessarily linked to anti-immigration attitudes or prejudices towards immigrant minorities (e.g. Hjerm 1998; Smeekes, Verkuyten, and Poppe 2012; Wright, Citrin, and Wand 2012). It can also go together with more acceptance of newcomers, depending on how the national identity is presented and defined. For example, it has been demonstrated that a national identity defined in terms of cultural diversity leads to higher acceptance of minorities and immigrants in Canada (Citrin, Johnston, and Wright 2012) and a national identity defined in terms of historical tolerance to higher acceptance of Muslim minorities in the Netherlands (Smeekes, Verkuyten, and Poppe 2012). Further, Reicher et al. (2006) present a social identity analysis of Bulgarian resistance against the deportation of Jews in World War II. Using historical documents, they show that Jews were helped because 'we are the kind of people who help others'. Bulgarians were described as a historically generous and tolerant people and anti-Semitic measures would go against the national character and therefore was construed as something 'we simply do not do'.

These examples show that 'our' reaction towards newcomers is closely linked to how 'we' understand ourselves. Hospitality and supporting those in need can define 'who we are' and can be the very dimension along which a particular community distinguish itself positively from other communities (Tajfel and Turner 1979). Additionally, the examples indicate the importance of understanding how exactly a prosocial community identity is socially construed: how the local identity is defined and enacted, and the role of local authorities in this.

According to the social identity perspective, people will use community leaders to seek out the associated meanings of the local identity and will act on the basis of these meanings (Haslam, Reicher, and Platow 2011). A community leader must be a skilled 'entrepreneur of identity' who represents and embodies what the community stands for and thereby is able to mobilise people to create a future in accordance with this identity. Effective leaders are able to craft a particular sense of 'us' and make us matter (Haslam, Reicher, and Platow 2011). Leaders shape the shared understanding of who we

are by showing community members that their behaviour reflects and embodies the self-defining community norms and values. Additionally, community members are prepared to act upon the leader's vision when he or she is perceived to promote the interests of the community, as 'doing it for us' instead for his or her personal interests.

Research setting

Riace is located in the southern Italian region of Calabria, an area that for decades has been characterised by waves of emigration. Due to poverty and depopulation, combined with a corrupt political system, complicated laws and the traditional power of the 'Ndrangheta mafia, Calabria remains underdeveloped and attracts few investors. The area has a high unemployment rate (21.6 per cent according to the Eurostat report, 2018), an ageing population and a lack of social services (Driel 2016). In this context, an innovative approach to the reception and integration of refugees was developed in Riace. This started in 1998 when 300 Kurdish refugees landed at the Ionian coast and received support from local inhabitants.[1] Ever since, refugees are hosted in houses that were abandoned by local emigrants looking for work abroad or elsewhere in Italy and leaving behind an impoverished 'ghost town' mainly inhabited by elderly people.

One year after the arrival of the first Kurdish refugees, a group of young people including the current mayor Domenico Lucano founded the association *Città Futura Puglisi*, named after a Sicilian priest who was murdered by the mafia. In collaboration with the municipality, the association started to combine the reception of refugees with restoration and sustainability projects aimed at the revival of local ancient crafts and solidarity tourism (Altra Locride n.d.).[2] The main goal of Città Futura is to create a local place characterised by a culture and economy of welcoming refugees and solidarity tourism that actively combats economic exploitation and social exclusion of migrants. Over the years around 6,000 refugees have passed through Riace, and about 100 of them are currently living or working there permanently (Comuni Italiani, 2016; Tutti Italia, 2014). Others stay for about one to three years, until they receive the decision on their asylum application by the Territorial Commissions for the Recognition of International Protection.

Ethnographic fieldwork

The current analysis is based on data collected by the first author during three stages of ethnographic fieldwork from October 2015 until February 2016 (5 Months), from August 2016 until September 2016 (2 Months), and in August 2017 and 2018 (2 Months). Throughout the fieldwork, the first author who speaks Italian presented herself as a foreign academic researcher who

wanted to understand the local town and the successful 'Riace model'. This aim might elicit self-presentation motives among the local inhabitants which affect their responses. However, the three periods of fieldwork made it possible to develop close relationships which resulted in locals expressing not only the popular positive imagine of Riace but also being more critical regarding, for example, the alleged local corruption and nepotism and the 'immigrant business'.

In trying to become involved in the community life, the first author volunteered to be an English teacher for the youth. This enabled her to build relationships with locals and project staff who, in turn, introduced her to other inhabitants. The effectiveness of such 'snowball sampling' (Silverman 2010) depends on the skills of the researcher and the social networks of the informants and therefore raises the question of selectivity. However, the small size of Riace and the traditional hospitality made it possible to get acquainted with a large number of residents. Even small encounters, for example informal dialogues at the local bar, often resulted in invitations to people's homes or workplaces which were common places for locals to gather. Informal interviews and conversations were held on a daily basis with a variety of residents including refugees, representatives of institutions such as social workers, and the mayor. The talks took place in various formal and informal settings ranging from the hospital and schools to celebrations of religious holidays at homes of refugees. This allowed us to talk to a diverse sample of the population in terms of age, gender, occupation and nationality. And to ensure that we included different perspectives we deliberately contacted a variety of institutional representatives and locals. Specifically, we conducted in-depth interviews with twenty local residents, sixteen institutional representatives, the mayor, and ten refugees benefiting from the reception program. It was always explicitly indicated that people could end a conversation at any time and it was repeatedly checked whether locals felt comfortable when discussing more sensitive topics (e.g. corruption, nepotism). Furthermore, it was explained that research ethics requires that all information is treated confidentially and made anonymous. Finally, we also collected written resources such as local media, posts on Facebook pages, 'whats-app' messages of local inhabitants, documentation obtained from local authorities and photographs taken during the fieldwork.

Analysis

Analysis is based upon open coding, axial coding and selective coding of observations, fieldnotes, notes about interview, and transcripts of interviews that were tape-recorded with permission of the interviewees. Regular interim and preliminary analyses of the data were performed to provide

focus, direction for further data-collection and triangulation purposes. The daily fieldnotes included observations, informal conversations, possible interpretations, and personal and methodological notes and reflections on one's position and role as a researcher. For example, the mere presence of a foreign researcher might stimulate a tendency to present Riace in a favourable way or rather to more openly express doubts and criticism.

The current analysis is informed by the social identity perspective and focuses upon the construction of the local identity of hospitality. Specifically, the analysis has four steps. First, the subjective reality of this local identity and the way in which it is construed as a continuation of the past is discussed. Second, we consider how the identity of local hospitality is enacted and maintained in the life of the town. Third, the critical role of the mayor as an entrepreneur of local identity is investigated. Fourth, some challenges to the future of the local identity of hospitality are discussed.

Findings

History and hospitality

The large majority of local inhabitants supports the reception program and considers the hospitality towards refugees an integral and defining part of the identity of the town. They are 'orgoglioso' (very proud) of the ways in which *their* Riace and *their* mayor (Domenico) support refugees and simultaneously stop the socioeconomic decline of the village, and thereby forms an example for other towns:

> We, guided by Domenico are somehow really an "avant garde". A small town, that serves as an example of hospitality towards migrants, of different ways to create a social and fair economy. To revive a town. Of this, I am very proud. (male inhabitant, 28 years)

Most people strongly identify with the local community which is demonstrated by the fact that they explicitly express their pride to belong to the 'village of hospitality' in everyday interactions and on social media. When the locals are asked about their town, they almost unanimously answer to be proud of their Riace, the town of hospitality (see also Barilla 2017; Rinaldis 2016; Sasso 2012). This feeling of pride relates not only to being a positive example for others but is also grounded in a historical narrative.

Locals typically explain the town's hospitality by referring to the history of Riace. For centuries people have been immigrating into the Calabrian region and the town of Riace and locals have been emigrating due to poverty, political oppression and the mafia.[3] Because of the long history of migration, the local inhabitants argue that the welcoming reception of newcomers is in their 'DNA', even when being critical about some of the migration policies.

> The history of Riace is a history of migration. In my head I have an imagery of Riace as a 'global village', a place where history and future merge. (Domenico Lucano, mayor of Riace)

> …criminality [drugs, prostitution] conducted by migrants in this area should be addressed, but there currently are few laws in Italy to arrest people without documents. I remember when I worked in Germany, it was not easy. One mistake, and they would take away your residence permit. However, most of the migrants are nice, warm, great people, escaping from war or from poverty, just like I did back in the days. I feel it's our duty to help them. Off course they should be helped. For us it has always been the most normal thing to do. I remember when the first refugees arrived, we brought them food from our land, we brought them our clothes. We did everything we could to help. (male inhabitant, 70 years, retired – used to work in Germany to escape from poverty & mafia)

The reception of refugees is presented as a continuation of what locals have always been doing. The local identity of hospitality is grounded in history making the current welcoming attitude towards refugees a continuation of who 'we have always been'. The history provides a particular meaning to the local identity that makes help and support of refugees 'the most normal thing to do'. Furthermore, the locals often point out that refugees are bringing prosperity to Riace, just as in the past when strangers brought prosperity to the town. Everyone in Riace knows these historical narratives by heart, taught by their parents and grandparents. Perhaps the most well-known and wide-spread story is the one about the local saints of Cosma and Damiano (the Santi Medici). After much suffering in Syria, these strangers landed at the Calabrian coast and are said to have brought crucial medical knowledge to the Roman empire. They are considered to have contributed to the good health of many Calabrians. For centuries and up to this day, St. Cosma and St. Damiano are honoured during a three-day festival in September. The festival has always attracted pilgrims which resulted in the exchange of goods and a thriving trade between the small village of Riace and people from many other places. Nowadays, almost every home in Riace is decorated with posters and calendars of the 'Santi Medici' and many children are named 'Cosimo', 'Cosimina' and 'Damiano'. Some refugees even named their children born in Riace after the saints, out of gratefulness for the warm reception that they received.

The narrative of Riace as having a history of migration does not only involve immigration and the reception of newcomers but also emigration to which locals often refer for explaining their hospitality towards refugees. The town's history of emigration would define a commonality with the refugees. For centuries people have been leaving the impoverished town of Riace for Australia and South America, and Northern Italy and Western Europe. The emigration reached its peak in the 1960s and 70s when many of Riace's

inhabitants moved to the industrial North of Italy. Many locals have experienced what it feels like to migrate, either directly or by the stories from parents, family and close friends who sometimes returned to Riace after retirement. Hence, 'being a migrant' provides a shared experience with refugees which works against the rejection and exclusion of these newcomers, and makes providing help and support 'a normal thing to do'.

> To me it is the normal thing to help newcomers, we are migrants as well. Last year, I remember going to Buenos Aires where we went to visit a community from Riace, a suburb full of people from my village. Me, and also my friends from Riace, met many relatives who migrated to Argentina when times were difficult. They live there all together, and even continue to honour the local Saint of "San Cosma y Damiano. (female inhabitant, migrated herself to Northern Italy but returns every year during the summer months, 28 years)

Expressing and enacting the local identity of hospitality

The local identity of hospitality, rooted in Riace's history of migration, is not only a story that is told but also enacted in specific activities and rituals and expressed in symbols throughout the town. For example, local initiatives combine the reception and housing of refugees with restoration and sustainability projects, the revival of local ancient crafts and solidarity tourism. The craft workshops and these projects promote hospitality towards newcomers by expressing a strong message of solidarity and hospitality that refers to Riace's history of migration. A hand-painted welcoming sign, for example, reads '*Riace, paese dell'Accoglienza*' ('Riace, a town of hospitality'). The main town square is decorated with murals showing the migration history of Riace, such as a painting that depicts Italians leaving for New York and Argentina, on the left side, and African women landing at the Riace's coast, on the right sight. When entering the historical center, a colourful gate welcomes people into the 'global village' of Riace and next to it a mural shows the nationalities of all Riace's inhabitants. Other expressions are more subtle, such as the solidarity calendar which has portraits of locals and refugees together. The calendar is produced by the reception project and hangs in most offices and houses throughout town.

In addition to these ongoing activities, the municipality organises cultural events aimed at promoting support for refugees and increasing awareness of the refugee crisis among tourists and visitors as part of the solidarity tourism program. A main example is the '*Riace in festival*', which is a music, film, and theatre festival centred around the topics of migration and local culture. During the one-month summer festival, events and activities are organised almost daily. These festivities once again reaffirm to locals who they are: the town that attracts visitors and inspires people from all over the world for its hospitality.

> This year we have so many important guests visiting Riace in festival, including the progressive Mayors of Barcelona, of the Podemos party, and the progressive mayor of Napels. The event shows that Riace serves as an inspiration for important politicians from all over Europe, important people. People like us, who also want to improve the situation and change the political climate surrounding the arrival of refugees and migrants. (male inhabitant, 37 years)

Local leadership and local hospitality

The mayor, Domenico Lucano was (re-)elected three times (1st tenure: 2004–2009; 2nd tenure: 2009–2014; 3rd tenure: 2014–2018) and plays a crucial role in defining the local identity and involving Riace's inhabitants in the reception program for refugees. According to the social identity perspective, in order to mobilise people to act upon the vision of a community and to create a future in accordance with it, a leader should be an 'entrepreneur of identity' who embodies what the community stands for (Haslam, Reicher, and Platow 2011). Starting with the landing of the (Kurdish) refugees on the coast of Riace in 1998, Lucano is actively involved in providing help and support. He has continued to promote the local identity of hospitality, first in his role as the founder of the association 'Città Futura Puglisi'. This local association organised an integrated reception[4] for refugees that aims to include them and make them belong to the local community. Later and mostly because of the success of Cittá Futura (Barilla 2017; Sasso 2012), Lucano was elected mayor of the town and he continued to craft a sense of local hospitality as defining 'who we are and always have been'. In his everyday interactions and public speeches he explicitly refers to Riace's history and local identity as the central reason for offering help to newcomers and for making an appeal to the inhabitants to join the mission of Città Futura. This appeal is quite successful as an increasing number of locals joined the association and by now Riace knows seven other NGO's in addition to Cittá Futura, all of them founded by locals (Barilla 2017; Rinaldis 2016; Sasso 2012). Inhabitants involved in these initiatives explicitly state how they were inspired by the mayor, as explained in the next excerpt from an interview:

> Without Domenico, this town would not exist as it is. You would for example probably never have known of Riace, and neither all the friends you brought here would have heard of this town, leave alone they would have visited. Because the mayor spread and developed our Riace model of solidarity, of solidarity, people, work camps, tourists from all over the world visit. It has been Domenico, who has always spread the message of hospitality, of anti-mafia. who has really been with the locals. He does not show up in a suit, like many people who get rich or famous do, or even all other mayors that Riace has known before him. He wears normal clothes, and off course it is not just about that. But he also really acts to benefit the town, and really does everything to help our village forward, even when times get

> difficult. People here, the type of tourists, the journalists, the actors, researchers and politicians. . . Those people do not come for our beautiful ocean, they could as well go to another town, but also to learn from the message that we spread as a town. A message that I believe in. Of this I am very proud, and I hope this town will be able to continue to spread this message in the future, (inhabitant, 40 years, shop owner)

This quote illustrates that the mayor is seen as being 'one of us' and as someone who 'makes us matter'. He creates a 'sense of us' by being constantly and visibly involved in daily community life and by informing locals about developments and changes through informal talks, meetings and social media. He regularly proposes new projects to further develop the village, preferably in environmentally sustainable ways, and he asks locals (native Italians as well as refugees) to provide ideas and give their opinion about the new initiatives. By maintaining an open dialogue he tries to ensure that the measures he takes are supported by (a majority of) the local inhabitants. So far, many of his proposals have been realised. For example, Riace owns the first installation in Calabria that uses local natural resources to provide free drinking water to the entire village. Further, Lucano successfully founded a solidarity hotel and was responsible for the creation of public services such as the garbage collection. Those projects, mostly initiated by Lucano[5] and always carried out in close collaboration with locals, foster the idea that Lucano does not work for his own interests but rather prioritises the interests of the town.

A further condition for successful leadership according to the social identity perspective (Haslam, Reicher, and Platow 2011), is that a leader should help to turn local norms, values and ideals into reality. Lucano succeeds in doing this in several ways. For example, he organises programs and guarantees the funds for facilities, such as for the restoration and sustainability projects. He also promotes the 'Riace model' amongst influential public figures who then provided help to maintain the model in difficult times, mainly because of conflicts with the System for the Protection of Asylum Seekers and Refugees (SPRAR)[6] about bureaucratic delays in providing the promised funding for the reception of refugees. Influential Italians have regularly raised public attention to these and other problems, for instance by organising a petition for the government demanding the immediate distribution of the SPRAR funds. Finally, Lucano 'makes Riace matter' by making the 'Riace model' famous:

> Riace has always been a relatively insignificant town, compared to other surrounding villages such as Stylo with its famous Cathedral. Except when they found the "Bronzi" (famous Greek bronzes). Domenico however really wrote history, he put Riace on the map with his "paese dell'accoglienza". We are very happy about this! (male inhabitant, 91 years)

Lucano was in 2016 even selected by Fortune Magazine as one of the 'World's 50 Greatest Leaders'. However, he tries to avoid a 'personality cult' by systematically stressing that he owes this status merely to the town's successful reception program for refugees. Because many locals contributed to and participated in the program and the program is embedded in Riace, the selection of Lucano involves the whole town. Other associations throughout Italy copied Riace's approach, to which (international) media and politicians now refer as the 'Riace model'. Journalists, academics, politicians, artists, tourists and film makers from over the world, ranging from European Parliament Members to academics from Tokyo University, have been visiting Riace to study this model for the accommodation of refugees. This positive public attention clearly distinguishes Riace from other towns in the infamous Calabrian region that is mostly known for its mafia and corruption scandals. So, the local identity of hospitality offers the locals an opportunity to positively distinguish themselves from other towns in the region (Tajfel and Turner 1979).

Challenges to the local identity of hospitality

Even though Riace's locals and the mayor successfully construe and maintain a local identity of hospitality, there are several challenges to this identity and therefore to the continuation of the 'Riace model'. These are mainly to do with the amount of resources available and competition over opportunities.

Resources

The Prefect and the System for the Protection of Asylum Seekers and Refugees (SPRAR),[7] which is responsible for the funds for refugees, form complex bureaucratic systems with complicated procedures. As a result, the available funds often arrive months later than agreed upon. Especially since May 2016, when disagreement arose between Riace's NGO's and the SPRAR, the payment of the funds has been increasingly delayed and sometimes even blocked until the disagreements were solved. These delays resulted in employees investing their own money in the refugee project. This varied from small donations in the form of weekly pocket money to (unaccompanied) minors so that they could buy small groceries, to serious investments (up to 30,000 Euro) to ensure the continuation of the project. For example, the chairman of one of the reception projects for refugees invested this amount of money using his private savings, including his mother's inheritance. Moreover, project employees and shop owners had to accept that salaries sometimes arrived with a delay of a few months. Since the disagreements started in May 2016 some of them even continued to work for a period of more than one year without receiving any salary.

> …even though the new funds are not arriving, I continue to work out of solidarity. However, I don't receive any salary since December 2016. It is not easy. (Woman, works in one of the handicrafts workshops)

From a social identity perspective, one might argue that this is an exemplary case of identity enactment. People's support for refugees seems to be driven by their commitment to the local identity of hospitality even when it affects their personal financial situation negatively. However, it is clear that financial difficulties can undermine the success of the 'Riace model'. Moreover, material interests and financial motives to invest private savings in the refugee reception programs can lead to instrumental reasons becoming dominant for supporting the reception of refugees. Not investing could mean, for example, that local administrators have to close down their reception projects with the loss of jobs as a result. The so-called SPRAR-jobs form a substantive part of the local employment and economy: *'the whole local economy would collapse without the projects'* (male, ex-social worker). Furthermore, several locals benefit financially from Riace's fame because the town attracts many tourists, youth camps, journalist, artists, documentary makers and various others. Those visitors spend their money in local shops, bars, restaurants, and B&B's, and many locals sublet their family houses to tourists. To be part of the village of hospitality brings inhabitants a type of 'free publicity' that they can use for personal purposes rather than for the good of the local community.

Opportunities

Some locals feel that the project that was once created by passionate volunteers wanting to help refugees, nowadays tend to resemble a business undertaking that revolves around governmental funds. This is expressed, for example, by a former employee of one of the NGO's who lost his faith in the project and now travels for his work between Riace and Northern Italy.

> I'm now working in the North. But I always have my roots here. Here is my hearth. I want to do something, not only for me, but for the community. However, the main function of the associations now is only business. I don't like this mentality, even though my own nephew works here (with one of the refugee projects).

Other locals criticise the project and accuse Italian project employees of having secured their position through nepotism or corruption. They sometimes also suggest that project employees use government funds for their private purposes and expenses. In response to these accusations, the mayor strives to be as transparent as possible and to include the locals in all decision-making processes. Still, these sentiments have not disappeared, as one of the inhabitants, a refugee who has been living in Riace for a few years, explains:

> The mayor doesn't steal money from the project for personal purposes, but still his mentality is quite "mafioso". Jobs are given to his personal friends. When you are applying for a new job opening – within one of the refugee projects-, this "incrowd" challenges you with nasty gossips, so that you get frustrated and, out of frustration, start gossiping about them as well. When the gossip (that you spread) reaches them, they go to the mayor to complain about you, so that your application gets rejected and you are excluded from the job opportunity. This happened to me as well

These inhabitants seem to lose their trust in, and sometimes even turn against, the refugee projects and other local inhabitants. They regularly express this through gossip. One further reason for this is the way in which the government funds (from SPRAR and the Prefect) have an impact on the local economy. In order to obtain these funds, the municipality has to submit applications to the Ministry of Internal Affairs in which they have to demonstrate that they can offer refugees an integrated reception program aimed at (long term) socio-economic inclusion, in strong collaboration with local NGO's. This has created an unforeseen side effect of increased competition between locals that can undermine a shared sense of community and local identity. Some locals have the idea that they can secure long-term jobs within the refugee reception system by creating their own association or NGO and applying for (SPRAR) funds. Hence, creating a NGO to apply for funds can increasingly become an end in itself rather than a means to help refugees to find their way in Italian society. In Riace, this has resulted in the foundation of already seven different associations (or NGO's) that aim to accommodate and integrate refugees. As the SPRAR and the Prefect only provide a limited amount of funding per town, the local competition for the funds fuels distrust among the inhabitants. This distrust is reinforced by a long history of 'Ndrangetha mafia, corruption scandals, and extreme poverty in Calabria that provides fertile ground for suspicions. The result is that some locals are slowly losing their enthusiasm and support for reception projects run by local inhabitants. As a consequence, the local identity of hospitality might lose part of its appeal for an increasing number of locals.

Discussion

Research in Europe has shown that many citizens and locals have negative attitudes towards refugees, especially those who strongly identify with their nation and local community (Schildkraut 2014; Wagner, Christ, and Heitmeyer 2010). A strong local or national identity is considered to go together with clear group boundaries ('us and them') with the related exclusion of newcomers (Wimmer 2008). In contrast and in line with the social identity perspective (Turner and Reynolds 2011), the current analysis demonstrates that a strong local identity can go together with a welcoming

attitude towards refugees (see also Reicher et al. 2006; Smeekes, Verkuyten, and Poppe 2012). Riace defines itself in terms of hospitality and support for refugees and the locals who tend to be very proud on their village are therefore inclined to act in a prosocial way. This means that it is important to understand how people construe and define a pro-social local identity, how they are encouraged to believe and act upon it, and the role that local leadership plays in this process.

Historical narratives form the core of the pro-social Riace identity. People explain their hospitality as a continuation of the town's traditional welcoming attitude and its emigration history, which would make them understand what it feels like to migrate and to receive newcomers within their community. Local inhabitants and organisations use this narrative as a rhetorical resource to further stimulate the enactment of the local identity of hospitality, for example through family tales, artwork, activities, festivities, and rituals. Moreover, it is the arrival of newcomers that offers the locals ample opportunities to strengthen their local identity, as it gives them a chance to practice and reaffirm the typical Riace hospitality. Further, the local leadership has played a decisive role in promoting and upholding the local identity of hospitality. The mayor successfully embodies and appeals to the local identity of hospitality and stimulates locals to participate in and contribute to the refugee integration programs, which in turn promote the idea amongst inhabitants that the projects reflect local prosocial norms (Haslam, Reicher, and Platow 2011). Furthermore, the 'Riace model' has gained (inter)national fame, and politicians, academics, policymakers, artists, and tourists from over the world visit Riace to learn from this exemplary case of successful community inclusion of refugees. This public attention gives locals a chance to positively distinguish themselves from other villages and towns. However, a small number of locals is critical about the refugee projects and accuses Italian employees of having secured their position through corruption. They feel that a project once created by passionate volunteers helping refugees out of humanitarian concern nowadays resembles a business revolving around governmental funds. Given the local tradition of suspicion and mistrust, fed by the long history of 'Ndrangetha mafia, corruption and poverty, these sentiments pose a challenge to the continuing support for the reception project.

In conclusion and in agreement with the social identity perspective, this research demonstrates that a strong local identity does not have to go together with the exclusion of newcomers. Theoretically, social identities are often conceptualised in terms of group boundaries and processes of boundary drawing with the related social exclusion (e.g. Wimmer 2008, 2009). However, social identities define specific norms, values and beliefs of 'who we are as a community' and this provides community members with

a direction for how to think, feel and behave (Reicher et al. 2010; Turner and Reynolds 2001). Social identities do not only differ in the boundaries that they draw and the intensity of the reactions that they arouse but also in the nature of those reactions. The content of the local identity can be prosocial and when a community defines itself in terms of hospitality, community members are inclined to act in that way.

The practical implication is that policies aimed at developing a strong local identity can go together with the inclusion, rather than exclusion, of refugees. Many local and national governments face the challenge of accommodating refugees while preventing an increase in anti-refugees attitudes and behaviours. Governments increasingly seem to opt for stricter immigration policies but IOM statistics (2018) show that the number of migrants moving to Europe does not decrease, and these policies can also stimulate illegal migration. Our analysis indicates that it is important to develop a pro-social community identity in which the reception of refugees is not perceived as an identity threat but rather as a reflection and continuation of 'who we are'. Compared to small local settings or towns, construing such a pro-social identity in larger and more diverse cities or nation-states will be more challenging. However, the successful appeals to a national identity of solidarity and tolerance in Bulgaria (Reicher et al. 2006), Portugal (Vala 2008), the Netherlands (Smeekes et al. 2012), New Zealand (Sibley and Liu 2007), and Canada (Citrin, Johnston, and Wright 2012) indicate that this strategy can also work in larger settings. This is especially likely when political leaders (e.g. prime minister Trudeau of Canada) consistently emphasise and enact the cultural diverse nature of the nation. Research has shown that political leadership can persuade people to either higher or lower acceptance of immigrants and cultural diversity (e.g. Verkuyten and Maliepaard 2013).

Future research could examine further the theoretical and practical implications of the current findings. We conducted our study in a particular place and the analysis does not address the broader political, economic and cultural context in the southern region of Calabria and Italy. A sense of identity is never finished and the local identity of hospitality can be challenged or supported by regional, national and also European developments. For example, changing financial and political circumstances and agreements about the reception of refugees at the European level might have an impact on local communities. Our interest was in examining the local identity of hospitality and future research could examine whether similar or different processes of identity construction occur in other places that also try to construe and enact a local identity of tolerance and hospitality, as for example in Palermo and Sutera in Italy and in Salatiga in Indonesia.

Notes

1. In Badolato, where the first Kurds arrived in 1997, the reception program never became as successful as Riace. According to Perda, a sociologist and economist at the Universities of Messina and Reggio Calabria, and founder of a regional centre for interventions and cooperation (CRIR), 'the village lacked a local group who knew how to valorise the opportunities brought by refugees in order to revive the village. Contributors were mainly young individuals looking for a permanent job in a reception structure'. (in Sasso 2012, 26).
2. In the restoration and sustainability projects, refugees and Italians collaborate to improve the local infrastructure and architecture and to create well-functioning public services such as the garbage collection, all in environmental friendly ways. In the 'Laboratorio' or shops, traditional Calabrian handicrafts are produced by refugees and local Italians together. There are for example shops for dressmaking, joinery, pottery and glass-blowing. Finally, the solidarity tourism combines volunteering and tourism in order to stimulate the development of the local community.
3. Riace is located in the southern Italian region of Calabria (Province of Reggio di Calabria), an area that for decades has been characterised by waves of emigration and depopulation. Between the 'Risorgimento', the Italian Unification in 1861, and the Great Depression around 1930, many Calabrians, mainly from rural areas, left for the United States. They were driven by poverty after Italian's unification, which marked the end of the feudal system. As no substantial land management practices were created, local farmers were left behind with poor farmland in an era of high taxes and low incomes. Sizable numbers of people continued to leave Calabria during the periods between World Wars I and II, and again after World War II, to destinations such as Argentina, Western Europe and Australia (Borzomati 1982). The emigration reached another peak in the 1960s and 70s when many people moved to the industrial North of Italy.
4. The 'integrated reception' programs aim to help refugees to (re)gain their personal independence. Programs include activities aimed at socio-economic inclusion, such as internships, language courses, collaborative working projects between locals and newcomers and sociocultural activities (Driel 2016).
5. During the first years of the reception program, Lucano's ex-wife played an important role as well, as she initiated the 'laboratorio' and the 'Taverna Donna Rosa', the local solidarity restaurant as part of the solidarity tourism. After their divorce, she moved out of Riace.
6. In Italy, second-line reception for refugees is mainly provided under the System for the Protection of Asylum Seekers and Refugees (SPRAR) and applies to asylum applicants who are identified and have started their asylum procedure. In 2001, the Department of Civil Liberties and Immigration of the Ministry of Home Affairs signed an agreement with the National association of Italian municipalities (ANCI) and with the UNHCR for implementing a 'National Project on Asylum'. This agreement was later institutionalised by the Law no.189/2002 (SPRAR 2014).
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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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