

# The Mediterranean model of immigration

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## Abstract

The countries of Southern Europe – Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain – have become in the last decades countries of immigration, while they are still areas of emigration even though with a substantial reduction of the emigration flows.

The patterns of immigration in these countries have several common features. First of all immigration started in all countries in the same period (the 1970ties). Secondly they receive immigrants from many, also very distant, places. Thirdly there is a high presence of female immigrants, that is often above 59% of the total immigrant flow. Fourthly in all these countries – contrary to the intraeuropean migrations of the 'fifties and of the 'sixties - immigrants have found occupation in the service sector, in agriculture and not so often in industry. Female employment in the services is the most important feature of this immigration: female immigrants work mostly as cleaners and in general in domestic work and now, more and more frequently, in the area of care for the elderly. Also the immigration policies in these countries are similar with closed borders and consequent illegal immigration and the practice of amnesty laws.

Because of all these common characteristics the article puts forward the hypothesis of the existence of a mediterranean model of immigration.

## 1. The context

From the seventies onwards the countries of southern Europe, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain, began to develop into countries of immigration while they were still countries of emigration, even though with a substantial reduction in emigration flows and a stabilisation of the emigrant communities abroad. The first issue to be faced is the following: Why did these countries change their role in the international migratory scene during precisely the same years (the 70's) and consequently, what are the elements related to the general context – i.e. the economic and geo-political situation – that determined such a new role?

The second question to be asked is whether these simultaneous changes correspond to common characteristics of the reality in those countries. They in fact presented in the 70's, and still nowadays, some analogies in the economic structure, in the level and rate of development and in the institutional and political system. One only need think that they had all experienced fascism (which meant repression but also a stagnation in economic and social development and the labour relations, with a specific type

of corporatism). And yet, they have all ended up in democratic systems, even if with differences and expressing governments with different orientations and different alternative systems in recent decades. Then there is a very important element, linked to the economical history and especially to the characteristics of the land tenure and land regimes of those countries (or of vast areas of them), that is an agriculture based on the so called “Mediterranean” crops with an irregular labour demand which attracts foreign migrant workers. There is lastly an important issue, typically ‘Mediterranean’, that is the role of the family. And, even more important, the rhetoric of the family and, recently, the crisis of the role of family.

The economic, demographic and social structure – and the related inter-connections – indicate significant analogies and determine particular aspects of the labour demand that explains the composition of the immigrant flows. From this perspective, just consider the phenomenon of the decrease in the birth rate and the dramatic increase in the elderly population that are common firstly to Italy and Spain but, on a different scale, also to the entire area under discussion. One of the most evident inter-connections between such variables can be observed in the welfare system and the functioning of the welfare mix (state, market and family). In all these countries the welfare system developed initially with ‘meritocratic’ or ‘particularistic’ features and experienced a late evolution towards a more ‘universalistic’ model. The Mediterranean – here we refer to the Northern shore - welfare systems have a “worker oriented” characteristic. Therefore in general, the beneficiaries are not the citizens as such but the workers, with differences between strong beneficiaries and weak beneficiaries. Lastly, there is a dominance of the monetary transfers from the state to the families (or to the individuals) rather than the direct provision of services.

All the above mentioned aspects have a noticeable impact on the conditions of immigrants in respect to the welfare system both as beneficiaries (or non-beneficiaries) and as workers in the area of social (and private) services.

A very Italian feature - which tends to concern more and more the other southern European countries (and not only the southern ones) - is the increasing presence of immigrant women who work as employees of Italian families (mainly taking care of the elderly) whose services (or, better, whose labour force) are acquired in the market (or, better, in the international labour market) by the families. And the expenses of the families are partially compensated by the monetary transfers given by the state.

## 2. The Space

On the subject of a Mediterranean migratory model one needs, first of all, a definition of the space one is referring to. In the previous section I used the term Southern Europe (and not Mediterranean Europe) on purpose in order to underline the existence of a

different geographical location of one of the countries: (Portugal on the Atlantic coast). But while studying the Mediterranean model of international migrations one has to take into account the whole of the migration flows that occur in the Mediterranean basin. One should therefore consider the whole area where conflicts, encounters and exchanges have historically taken place: the Mediterranean with its historical, ancient and recent inheritances, including the colonial pasts.

One should put forward the analysis beyond the contrast between the Christian northern shore and the Islamic southern shore, bearing in mind also the analogies that exist in the area in its entirety and the unity of the processes that take place there. "Can we still talk of the Mediterranean?" Maurice Aymard questioned in a paradoxical way in a lecture given at the Rossi-Doria Association a few years ago. The question was obviously rhetorical. But the problem of the entity and the processes we are referring to, when we speak of the Mediterranean as a unique entity, is still open. On this issue it is important to remember the Braudelian innovation which consists of, amongst other things, seeing the Mediterranean not just as a simple geographical space but also as an autonomous specific reality: a complex of phenomena and processes, with tensions that, on a special level, continuously move the borders and the central gravity points, also with an impressive continuity that can be explained only through the *long durée* approach. From the point of view of space and borders, as far as migrations are concerned, only 40 years ago, as noted by Aymard, there was an important border (*limes*) within Europe between South and North (not by chance it almost cut Italy in half). It was very difficult to imagine another one at that time. Now the new border is the sea. It is a border that is dangerous to cross as those coming from the southern shore (or from countries even more southern than those) have experienced trying to get into Europe seeking work.

Besides this, there is another significant factor of complexity: the existence of another Mediterranean country that, alongside the southern European countries, has been affected by the great inter-European migrations during the post-war expansion (the years of the so called fordist industrial development), Turkey. The Turks worked alongside the Spaniards, the Italians and the Greeks in Germany for a considerable period. And it is not by chance that they are not present in the migration flows directed towards southern Europe: they probably would say: "we found better alternatives." But this is just one aspect of a far more general question concerning the direction of the flows and the immigration policies (and in general the policies that rule the relationships between states) that interact with them. At the beginning of the new migratory experience (the one that has seen the countries of the northern shore as receiving countries) the main migration flow was the one linking the northern shore to the southern shore. It is a flow that has interested mainly Italy and Spain because Greece attracted immigrants coming through different routes and canals. In any case the international literature on

migration had described the Mediterranean as an important migratory space with a prevailing south-north direction of the flows. Baldwin Edwards, among many others, builds his own understanding of Mediterranean immigration on this, also giving an empirical base using the data available by the end of the 1900s on the importance that immigration from Maghreb had in each southern European state. The study was not incorrect for the period and the data represented, more or less, the situation as it was. What was missing was the fact that, as shown by Mattia Vitiello only five years later using the same sources, it was a situation destined to be immediately overtaken with a reduction in incidence of the Maghreb component. Such a reduction tends to accelerate due to the effect of the new arrivals from the Eastern countries. In sum, what was missing in the Baldwin Edwards analysis (and other similar ones) was the idea that the presence and the intensifying of the inter-Mediterranean flows were the product of a temporary situation. In other words such studies did not consider the continuities and discontinuities that suddenly take place, amplifying and making more complex, the Mediterranean migratory space.

In reality, from the beginning of the 90's onwards new immigrants coming from areas that had not taken part in migratory flows, arrived in western Europe. It is the immigration by the workers coming from the Eastern countries, non Islamic (apart from some areas in the south of the Balkans) and not the Mediterranean, that represents the greater component of the incoming flows towards the southern European countries. Hence the Mediterranean migratory space becomes more complex. And it is such a growing non Mediterranean immigration in the Mediterranean Countries - related to the characteristics of the labour demand in the northern shore - that, at least partially, puts the model into discussion. But the Mediterranean sea continues to be the central transit area and the Mediterranean shores carry on being areas of provenience even if less exclusively than before. It is mainly in the Mediterranean spirit of history and of cultural institutions of the countries of destination. And some fundamental aspects of the incorporation process of immigrants in countries of the northern shore can be traced back to the 'Mediterranean' character of the history, of the culture and of the institutions of these countries.

### **3. The model and its dimensions**

In this section I will describe the international migratory Mediterranean model, I shall only point out a few general coordinates and conditions peculiar to a phenomenon or of a process that allows one, in actuality, to talk of a model.

The first of these conditions is the presence of a number of features and connotations of the phenomenon itself that we encounter in all the involved social contexts. Secondly, such connotations are specific and, therefore, distinguish the phenomena as it shows itself in the involved social contexts from the way it shows itself in other contexts.

Thirdly, such conditions have to be constant. This means the essential characteristics of the model do not change with time.

Talking of a Mediterranean model, for a phenomena such as immigration, implies to single out aspects and characteristics of immigration that can be found in all the Mediterranean countries of immigration, namely in southern Europe. They should be specific to those countries without meaningful changes over time. In practical terms, one just has to individuate how the present migration that concerns the southern European countries as destination countries differs from migration that concerned such countries in other times or from migration concerning other countries nowadays.

On the basis of such a definition, a temporal aspect is introduced. We are talking about countries of “new immigration” in the sense that the immigration phenomena on a vast scale began roughly in the last thirty years. And, as already mentioned, we are talking about countries that, up until very recent times, were emigration countries. Such migrations happened in the post-fordist phase of economic development, characterised by significant processes of ‘tertiarisation’ of the economy, amongst others. But the other countries, those with an historic immigration tradition, are interested in the same processes. Also here the new immigrants (and a large part of the old ones) have changed occupational location and place themselves in the tertiary sector. But in Mediterranean Europe we have only the new post-industrial immigration whereas, in the other countries, we also have what is left of the great experience of inter European migrations led by the industrial development.

The other characteristics of the model mainly concern other aspects of employment and, in particular, the employment in agriculture which was rather exceptional in the old intra-european migration of the fordist age. We still have to remember other variables amongst which the demographic composition, with a noticeable female presence, which in the Mediterranean model, even during this phase, is higher than in other countries.

Finally, there is again another characteristic that concerns the time. Mediterranean immigration comes about in an age in which borders are closed and legal immigration on a vast scale is limited. This has significant implications both on the situation of the immigrants (very often illegal) and the way in which the migration policies are produced and applied. The presence of a high quota of clandestine (and, in general, non regular immigrants) and the practice of amnesty laws for the illegal immigrants is a common characteristic of all the Mediterranean immigration countries.

Not all the variables that are taken into consideration in order to define the model must be exclusive. Neither should they all be present in the same way in all the countries. The importance is that they are predominantly present and that they tend to characterise the model in a more stable way.

Let us now consider the characteristics of the Mediterranean immigration in more detail. It must be reaffirmed that, firstly, we are talking about countries where immigration, starting from the 70's, has progressively substituted emigration without, however, ceasing to be countries also of emigration. This is both because of a presence of large communities of citizens resident abroad and due to the constancy of outgoing flows which, even though equal in number to incoming ones, still show a strong population turnover. If one takes the case of Italian emigration to Germany, one can estimate to at least, a couple of million, the total number of the departing and incoming people (officially re-entered people) starting from 1973. That was a time of the Anwerbenstop which usually indicates the end of the stage of the great inter European mass migration. And this shows how much a Mediterranean country like Italy continues to be a crossway of great movements with arrivals and departures.

Secondly, in all the Mediterranean countries, especially in the initial phases of the immigration experience, an important employment opportunity for the immigrants is represented by seasonal agricultural labour. Agriculture had not been effected, or only marginally, by immigration during the great inter European migrations of the proceeding decades. The seasonal agricultural immigration, that ends up being not infrequently a definitive immigration, has analogies with other experiences such as, for example, the Mexican immigration into California. The opportunities offered by seasonal work initially, with frequent returns to their homelands, was favoured by a lax control of the borders and, in general, by more permissive admission policies. That is particularly significant in those regions not unlike southern Italy where agricultural work, especially during the harvest season, involves a large part of male immigration. The same thing holds also true for the building trade which is a typical occupational landing ground for the latter arrivals but where immigrants find more and more their definitive location. In the agricultural and building industries, the so informal work largely dominates (we better use the expression "black work") for all the countries). Contrary to what happened the post war decades of economic expansion, the labour demand in the industrial sector is not as strong. At that time, the international migrations themselves were pulled by the industrial development. Such a development was also characterised by stable employment and long term employment contracts (often in big enterprises). These are characteristics that are seldom encountered in the Mediterranean immigration model.

Thirdly, in all the Mediterranean European countries such irregular working conditions, at least in the initial phase, are strictly linked to the forced condition of illegal immigrant. The question of the high incidence of illegal workers within Mediterranean immigration must be linked to the initial absence of rules regulating immigration and the more recent enactment of rather restrictive laws concerning immigration and admission policies. There is a particular similarity in the migratory policy experience of

the Mediterranean countries: they have all experienced the shifting from a policy (or rather, a non policy) of borders mainly open to a policy of alignment to the European Union orientation of closed borders of which we will talk later. This explains the condition of prevalent illegality which is typical of the model.

Fourthly, still from a labour market perspective, the characterising element of Mediterranean immigration is the concentration of immigrants in the tertiary sector. As previously stated, although it can be found in all the countries including those of long time immigration, this location (particularly domestic work but also and mainly elderly care and home services of various kinds) represents a particular connotation in the Mediterranean. This means that the immigrant workforce in the Mediterranean countries also fills the deficiencies in those countries' welfare systems. In fact their activities (as private jobs) satisfy needs and a demand for services that otherwise would be satisfied by the welfare state, in particular in the realm of childcare and, more and more, in elderly care. Finally, one must not forget that the presence of immigrants is noticed in regions characterised by a low rate of unemployment and strong labour demand and in regions (such as the Italian south) that have a high unemployment rate related to a weak local economic structure. This feature leads to a complex interpretation of the role of immigrants in the labour market, so much so as to overtake the traditional dichotomy between the immigration led by the labour demand or by the labour supply. In other words, one must bear in mind the processes of segmentation in the labour market and the internal differences within the Mediterranean European countries. The segmentation of the labour market allows us to understand the paradox of the co-existence of immigration and unemployment, particularly evident in agricultural regions where the immigrant workforce plays an increasingly significant role.

Fifthly, we must underline the peculiarity of the composition on the basis of gender and the significant presence, sometimes overriding, of women in some of the main immigrant groups (those placed in the sphere of the domestic work or linked to similar activities). Such a phenomenon began with the arrival of immigrant women to work as cleaners and domestic helper. Now, instead, their presence has become far more evident and on a mass level in the realm of elderly care. We can say that it is one of the principle novelties of Italian immigration starting from the second half of the last decade. It is a novelty that reflects relevant social and demographic transformations within Italian society. (as far as Italy is concerned), but this is also true for other countries. Initially the renewed diffusion of full time domestic workers (living in the houses of their masters 24 hours a day) in the 70's and 80's in middle class homes, seemed to be due to traditional social relations. But things seem to have changed with time. Female immigration, especially that coming from the Eastern Countries, is destined to work in the field elderly care.

As previously mentioned, the presence and the development of such immigration must be understood within the framework of the transformations and the crisis of the Mediterranean family. But the crisis of the traditional family, hence the difficulty/impossibility of taking care of the elderly within the family itself, does not mean the overcoming of traditional Mediterranean familism. The contradiction is that the elderly in need keep relying on the family in any case, in absence of other supports. But the family is no more able to take care of their elderly members directly. Hence the need for commodified domestic help paid by family but indirectly by the state (mainly or in part) through pensions and subsidies. And this is a very interesting aspect of the Mediterranean welfare mix.

A last characteristic of immigration in the Mediterranean countries, though tied to the above mentioned ones, concerns the still scarce access to social benefits by immigrants, not only due to the inadequate policies and their actual implementation but also because of the more complex character and the instability of immigration nowadays. The *implementation deficits*, very evident in Italy, represent the main problem of the immigrant policy, that is of the social policies for immigrants. But these implementation deficits also concern the border control policies, with the result of mass entrances by clandestine immigrants and the consequent need for amnesty laws and mass regularisation.

The question of migration policies is not of scarce relevance for the definition of the model. There is something in common in the policies of the southern European countries that differentiates them from the experiences of countries with a tradition of immigration. As is well known, on a European level, the main immigration countries (France, Germany and England), historically have had models of immigration policy that differ: different levels of border openings and different criteria for settlement of immigrants. There was the German model of rotation, the 'Gastarbeiter model' on the one hand the assimilation and highly inclusive model (within the limits of acceptance of the "republican principles") in France and the English multi-cultural, and with different levels of citizenship, model. At the level of principles, the migration policies in Mediterranean Europe were produced, in substance, with the presumption of being able to overcome the limits and the shortcomings of the proceeding historical experiences. The assimilation- 'republican' model was questionable because it did not take into account the need for cultural autonomy and because it was considered disrespectful of differences (strongly pushed in the rhetoric in the migration policies in countries like Italy). The British model, more multi-cultural, was criticised for its ethnic/cultural segregation. The Gastarbeiter model was badly treated by the press within the international migratory literature and had to be left behind too. In the meantime, maybe in an exaggerated manner, authors like Soysal pointed out, that in all the countries of traditional immigration, the social rights of citizenship were progressively

extended to immigrants. And such an extension became stronger and more concrete when referred to workers coming from southern Europe, that means from countries now part of the European community. But this does not hold true in the same way for immigrant from Third World countries, arriving now in Mediterranean Europe.

Strictly tied to such a fact, there is another aspect that characterises immigration in the above mentioned countries: it is happening in a time of the closed borders (closed, in fact, for the non-Eu citizens). It is known that with a minor or major strength in different countries, immigration comes to pass in any case. The illegal entrances live a more or less long phase of illegality anyway, to which follows a regularisation legal initiative in all countries which, temporarily, mends the situation. It is not by chance that in Italy we use the term “sanatoria” which implies healing. In sum, we have a closed border policy on paper with permeable borders and social policies that are rather advanced but largely not applied. All of these characterise the Mediterranean model for what happens on a political and institutional level.

There is an element of complication risks threatening the model, that is the existence of a new migratory component which is legal because it is made by EU citizens and that doesn't seem to, be able to enjoy the privileges that it deserves. It is the case of the Romanians.

To finish with the Mediterranean model's characteristics we must underline that the factors of attraction are determined by the demand for labour that reflects not only the characteristics of the economy but also the characteristics of the local society. The occupation of immigrants in the agricultural or building industry is the expression of the first feature whereas work in the area of services to people (in particular elderly assistance) is the expression of the second.

As far as the push factors are concerned, they are the same ones that dominate the migration processes worldwide. Although there is a significant fact concerning the trajectories and directions of fluxes: immigration in Mediterranean countries has mainly been an emigration from other Mediterranean countries. There is still a strong tie between southern and northern shores that was at the origin of these flows, and in respect to each, we must consider the important role of the geographical proximity. Such a strong tie is also potentiated when the push factors of an economical type are added to the social political type. In particular, the effects of war and persecutions in the countries of origin such as the ex Yugoslavian migration case. But from the 90's onwards the south north fluxes have been progressively taken over by east west with a growing role of incoming fluxes from eastern Mediterranean countries such as Albania or some ex Yugoslavian republics. It is a phenomenon that concerns Italy but also mainly Greece. In very recent years, the flux coming from eastern Europe has

become more vast, including not only the Balkan countries but also other nations like those that belonged to the former soviet union, in particular the Ukraine.

#### **4. Conclusions: stability of immigration or instability of the model?**

One of the characteristics of Mediterranean immigration that was noted by researchers from the beginning of the phenomenon, was the highly precarious employment situation and an highly job-sex segregation so that some occupations were almost entirely only for males and other almost exclusively for females. In fact, there was a segregation on the basis of gender which reflected also an ethnical and/or national occupational segregation. This appeared to be one of the peculiarities of the model: not only hence a high female presence but also its interconnection with nationality and work (and also religion). As a matter of fact, the domestic workers mainly came from catholic countries or belonged to catholic minorities in countries where other religions prevailed. Men, whatever their occupation, mainly came from Islamic countries of the southern Mediterranean shore. From a demographical point of view, at the beginning, it was an immigration of young individuals for whom family reunions rarely occurred and were rarely possible in any case. It is not by chance that the presence of children for long periods was a rarity. One has to just think that in Italy, for at least a couple of decades - when the only information on the dimensions and the composition of the phenomenon was given by the ministry for the interior and police officers - children (actually minors in general) were not even accounted for. They could not be because they were not even entitled to a permit to stay (calculation unit base) but instead were registered on their parent's permits.

The occupational segregation on the basis of gender (and religion and nationality), a high female presence with an autonomous migratory experience, post industrial and postfordist occupational collocation with a presence in the informal economy in an environment of high instability – of which these real connotations were an expression of – characterise the Mediterranean immigration model. New tendencies diffused from within on a worldwide scale (tertiary employment, precariousness, instability) and melded with traditional characteristics such as the deficiencies of the welfare state, a labour market with traditional labour relations in some areas (in particular in agriculture). Within this framework an immigration essentially made up of individuals belonging to central age group (or rather, young adults) seemed more a structural and long lasting characteristic rather than the expression of a phase.

Actually, with the passing of time, the initial demographic characteristics significantly changed, mainly beginning with the arrival of the Albanians in the early nineties. They were the first immigrant group, present on a mass level, with a mixed composition from a gender and age point of view. The first children also started to arrive with their parents, men and women, from Albania. Furthermore, when the focal point

of the origin of immigration moved towards the East, the Romanian immigration with similar characteristics became the most sizeable one. As a whole, minors now represent roughly one fourth of the Italian immigrants (and the other Mediterranean countries tendencies don't seem to be different). In other words, we are witnesses to a process of stabilisation and, therefore, also moving out of a precarious situation of a part of such an immigration. And that is also thanks to integration policies that, with several difficulties, were eventually applied also in the Mediterranean countries, with the more advanced position in Italy and Spain but with a general tendency to a normalisation, so to speak, of the phenomenon.

The intense legislative activity has introduced a series of norms tending towards stabilisation. From this point of view it must be noted that one of the model's characteristics –legalisation processes put into place in order to legalise irregular immigrants or over stayers in all the countries – resulted in having counter tendency effects in respect to the model. It determined the stabilisation of the immigrants, not necessarily through a successful process of integration, but certainly with a minor level of precariousness and uncertainty as to length of stay. In particular, the policies concerning family reunions – put in place by the destination countries, even with a series of limitations – have strongly operated in such a direction. The presence of immigrant families is no more an exception as it once was in the past.

Ultimately, we can note how some initial peculiarities of the phenomenon disappear or persist only in some specific areas and others instead persist everywhere. Particularly complex is the question of the gender composition on the immigrants. The numeric relevance of the female component does not change or perhaps increases. This is due to two phenomena of opposite meaning (as far as stabilisation is concerned). On one hand the female component in some nationalities has increased due to family reunions and hence following a trend that we can call of "normalisation." On the other hand, a new predominantly female flow occurred: a flow of immigrant workers from an eastern country (the Ukraine) made mainly up of single women occupied in the care of the elderly. In any case, whether it comes from the east or from Asian catholic countries (The Philippines) or Latin America, as it was at the beginning, or from the Easter European countries (as it is now) such an immigration component is typically "Mediterranean" And that is because it fulfils a labour demand which is typical of such regions and reflects its social and cultural reality, in particular the role of the family and its crisis.

The model implied precariousness. And the condition of precariousness lies first of all in the labour demand. Spontaneous movements and some policy initiatives have counteracted some features of the model favouring stabilisation. But other general trends and specific aspects of Southern European societies (including familism, and related labour market implications) act in favour of its persistence.

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