

Italy Report

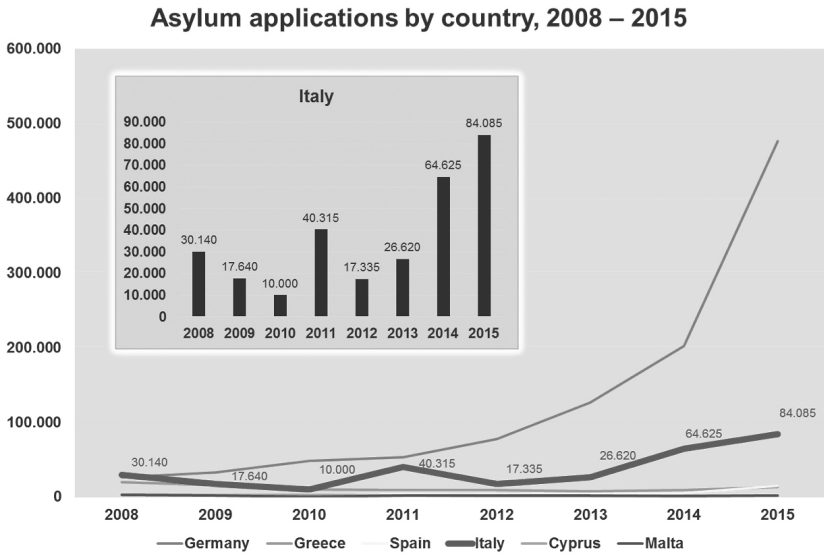
Steffen Letmathe, Timo Kemp, Mats Schulte, Davide Scotti

1. Introduction

With a population of roughly 62,5 million and a size of 301,340 km², Italy is, after Germany, France and the United Kingdom, one of Europe's most densely populated countries – here live 207 people per km² (Statista 2016a; Statista 2016b; World Bank 2016). Being one of the largest national economy in the Euro Zone, Italy's GDP was worth 29, 867 billion US dollars in 2015 (Statista 2016c). Countries unemployment rate amounted to 11,4 % in July 2016 (Statista 2016d). This democratic republic is ruled by the Democratic Party (PD), of which Sergio Mattarella was elected President of Italy in January 2015 (Deloy 2015: 1). Located in the southern part of Europe, Italy borders the EU member states France, Austria and Slovenia, and its only direct land border to a non-EU state is with Switzerland. It is important to note that Italy's land borders cover a length of only about 1,800 km (CIA 2016a), whereas the shoreline bordering the Mediterranean covers a length of about 7,600 km (CIA 2016b). This simple fact explains the large number of people seeking protection who arrive by boat.

The Lampedusa tragedy in October 2013, in which nearly 400 people drowned in the Mediterranean Sea, brought Italy and its asylum policy to the attention of the European public. Since then, more than 6,000 people have lost their lives while trying to reach the shores of Italy via the Central Mediterranean route, which is considered by far the most dangerous path to the EU (IOM 2016).

Figure 1: Asylum applications by country, 2008–15



Source: Adapted from Eurostat (2015b).

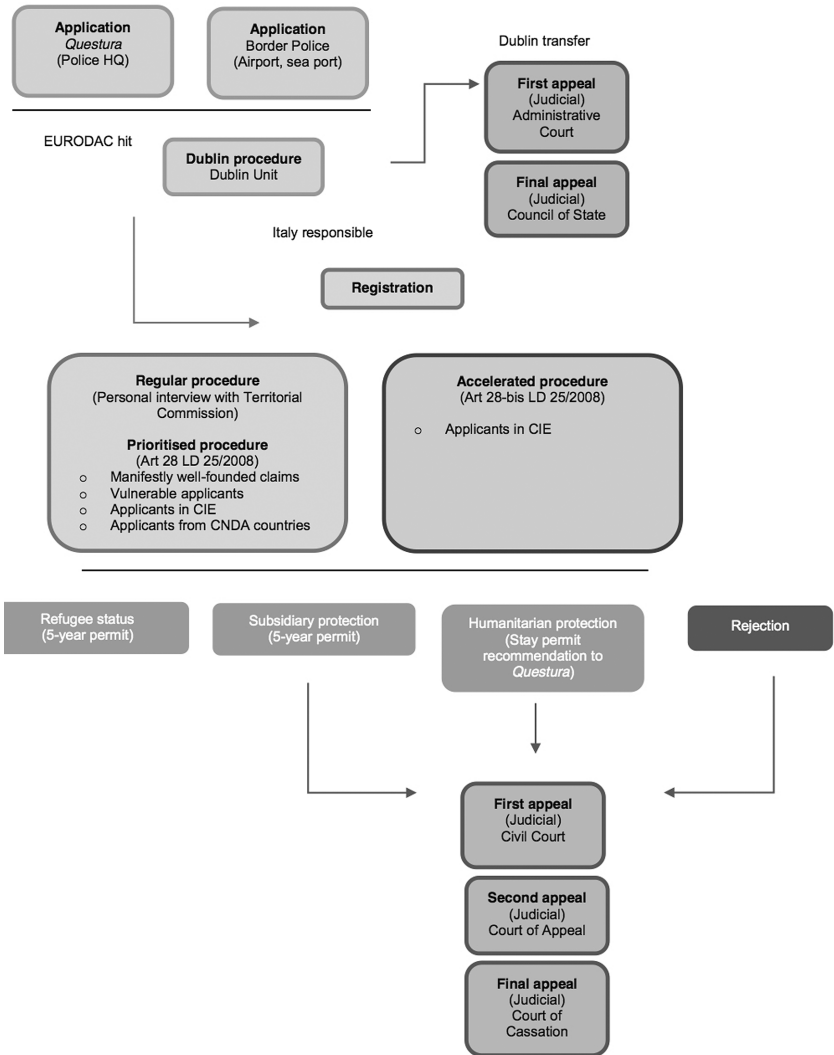
Figure 1 shows that 84,085 people applied for asylum in Italy in 2015 (Eurostat 2015c). In the first half of 2016 there already has been 49,375 first-time asylum applications (Eurostat 2016a). With 813 asylum applications per million inhabitants in the first half of 2016, the rate for Italy is far above the numbers of many other European countries (Eurostat 2016b). Although only 15 % of migrants took the Central Mediterranean route in 2015, 77 % of all recorded migrant fatalities occurred there (IOM 2016). In the aftermath of the Lampedusa tragedy, the Italian government responded by initiating the Search and Rescue (SAR) operation Mare Nostrum. Until it was shut down in October 2014, Mare Nostrum saved the lives of about 150,000 migrants. After more than 1,200 people had drowned in April 2014, Operation Triton, led by Frontex, was established in November 2014. After that, investments in Operation Triton increased in order to improve the rescue mission and to avoid further tragedies (ECRE 2015: 22).

Table 1: Applications and granting of protection status at first instance, January–September 2015

| | Applicants in 2015 | Pending applications in 2015 | Refugee status | Subsidiary protection | Humanitarian protection | Rejection ¹ | Refugee rate | Subs. Prot. rate | Hum. Prot. rate | Rejection rate |
|---|--------------------|------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|--------------|------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Total | 59,165 | 50,460 | 2,480 | 6,975 | 10,330 | 24,240 | 5.6% | 15.8% | 23.4% | 55.2% |
| Breakdown by countries of origin of the total numbers | | | | | | | | | | |
| Nigeria | 12,530 | 10,975 | 225 | 685 | 1,570 | 5,135 | 2.9% | 9% | 20.7% | 67.4% |
| Gambia | 6,365 | 5,365 | 170 | 130 | 1,770 | 3,490 | 3% | 2.3% | 31.8% | 62.9% |
| Pakistan | 5,830 | 5,360 | 270 | 1,090 | 940 | 2,690 | 5.4% | 21.8% | 18.8% | 54% |
| Senegal | 4,870 | 3,930 | 65 | 105 | 915 | 2,130 | 2% | 3.2% | 28.1% | 66.4% |
| Bangladesh | 4,390 | 4,450 | 80 | 70 | 600 | 1,995 | 2.9% | 2.5% | 21.8% | 72.8% |
| Mali | 4,260 | 4,040 | 45 | 445 | 1,400 | 3,940 | 0.8% | 7.6% | 24% | 67.6% |
| Afghanistan | 2,860 | 2,045 | 215 | 2,005 | 95 | 70 | 9% | 84% | 4% | 3% |
| Ghana | 2,455 | 2,260 | 20 | 40 | 425 | 1,030 | 1.3% | 2.0% | 28% | 68.1% |
| Côte d'Ivoire | 2,390 | 1,925 | 40 | 170 | 405 | 695 | 3% | 13% | 30.9% | 53.1% |
| Guinea | 1,185 | 995 | 20 | 50 | 320 | 260 | 3.1% | 7.7% | 49.2% | 40% |
| Syria | 365 | 160 | 175 | 40 | 0 | 30 | 71.4% | 16.3% | 0% | 12.3% |
| Eritrea | 265 | 190 | 210 | 100 | 15 | 60 | 44.2% | 40% | 3.1% | 12.7% |
| Somalia | 550 | 340 | 125 | 595 | 15 | 40 | 16.1% | 76.7% | 1.9% | 5.3% |
| Kosovo | 210 | 190 | 0 | 20 | 5 | 35 | 0% | 33.3% | 8.3% | 58.4% |

Source: ECRE (2015: 6).

Figure 2: The asylum process in Italy



Source: ECRE (2015: 16).

People trying to enter Italy via the regular asylum procedure often face many obstacles, such as originating from what is regarded as a secure country and being considered an economic migrant. In 2015 (January through September), 44,8% of the asylum seekers were given some type

of international protection in Italy – a relatively low proportion compared with the EU-28 average (52%) – and thus 55,2% of the applications were rejected (see Table 1). One of the reasons for this relatively low protection rate is the composition of the asylum seekers and their countries of origin (see Table 1). About 49 % of the asylum seekers who reached Italy in 2015 came from Nigeria, the Gambia, Pakistan and Senegal, and many were labelled economic migrants and thus seen as not being in need of protection by the international community (ECRE 2015: 6; Eurostat 2016c).

In the first half of 2016 total recognition rate of the first-time asylum applications in Italy was about 36 %, subsidiary protection rate amounted to 13 % and refugee rate constituted 5 % (Eurostat 2016d; Eurostat 2016e). In the same period of time 47,505 asylum decisions were made in Italy in total, the majority (30,510) were negative ones (Eurostat 2016d; Eurostat 2016e).

Figure 2 provides a brief overview of the asylum procedure in Italy. The first step after the application for asylum is to determine, based on the Dublin Regulation, which country is responsible for reviewing the application. Applicants who have already applied for asylum in another country will be transferred there. In the case of a first-time application, the registration process will begin. Applicants who possess official documents will undergo the regular registration procedure; all others will need to be identified by one of Italy's Identification and Expulsion Centres (Centri di identificazione ed espulsione, CIE). After the migrant's identity has been confirmed, a decision will be made regarding that person's protection status (ECRE 2015: 16).¹

Three main state institutions are responsible for the Italian reception system. One is Centri di Accoglienza per Richiedenti Asilo (CARA), which runs reception centres where asylum seekers stay for up to one month after their arrival and where their first request for asylum is lodged. The second is the Sistema di Protezione per Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati (SPRAR) – the system of protection for asylum seekers and refugees – which handles second-line reception and has a capacity of 21,500 places in several small reception centres throughout Italy where they provide accommodation and a variety of integration services (e.g. language courses). The third is CIE, which tries to confirm the identity of migrants who lack

1 For more information concerning the Italian asylum system, see: AIDA Country Report: Italy 2015 (ECRE 2015: 16).

documents and detains those who are awaiting expulsion; CIE provides no services for recognised refugees (ECRE 2015: 16).

The main change in the Italian reception system over the past few years has been the establishment of hotspots within the European asylum system – that is, on-shore reception centres that are responsible for initially receiving asylum seekers, providing them with relevant information and determining their identities. After the limitations of the Dublin II Regulation became clear, and as the growing influx of people seeking protection became increasingly challenging in countries at the periphery of the EU, relocation centres were introduced on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea as a way of distributing these migrants throughout Europe. These centres are run by EU agencies such as EASO, Frontex, Europol and Eurojust in cooperation with the national authorities. Of the planned six hotspots in Italy, only four are currently in operation. The centre in Lampedusa began operation on 21 September 2015; the other three are located on the shores of Sicily in the cities of Trapani, Pozzallo and Porto Empedocle. From the outset until 15 December 2015, a total of 144 people have been relocated from Italy to other countries (ECRE 2015: 24–26).

The main focus of the research described in this chapter is on analysing the networks of organisations that deal with asylum- and refugee-related topics and on testing the theoretical elements of neo-institutionalism with our data. The chapter begins with a discussion of the current state of the research and the research questions posed. We then proceed to present the results of our data collection. The chapter closes with a summary of our conclusions.

2. Current State of Research

In preparation for our research, we searched for literature to gain an overview of the configuration of the cooperation networks of Italian organisations in the field of asylum and refuge. Although the evolution, functionality and state of the European asylum regime have been well explored scientifically (Triandafyllidou: 2016; Armstrong: 2016; Kasperek: 2016; Trauner: 2016; Servent/Trauner: 2014; Thielemann: 2012; Klepp: 2010), the role of non-state actors and their relation to governmental and inter-governmental organisations remains somewhat of a ‘black box’. However, several non-scientific publications from governmental and non-govern-

mental actors provided additional information about the Italian organisations' networks and helped us gain some insights into their structure.

The main source on which we relied was the AIDA Country Report: Italy (ECRE 2014, 2015, 2016), written by an expert from the Italian Refugee Council (Consiglio Italiano per i Rifugiati, CIR) and edited by the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE). In this chapter, we provide a detailed overview of the Italian asylum system and stress the important role of NGOs in providing information to asylum seekers (Ibid.: 44 ff.). These organisations also perform many tasks that the state would be unable to properly fulfil in the areas of reception (Ibid.: 60 ff.), medical aid (Ibid.: 82 ff.), integration measures (Ibid.: 80 f.) and rescue at sea (RAS) (Ibid.: 23).

Another important sources for our research were the activity reports of the organisations, which are frequently made available to the public.² In these reports we found information about the specific actions of the individual organisations, their features (e.g. spatial reach, driving norms and values) and their connections with other organisations, as well as the state of the asylum system as a whole. Pro Asyl (2011), for example, reported on their research trip to Rome and Turin and described the situation of asylum seekers, irregular migrants, and the crucial role of NGOs in meeting their basic needs. Amnesty International (2015) and European agencies such as the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) published reports about the situation in the Mediterranean Sea (FRA 2014a, b). In addition, there are a variety of UNHCR reports on the Italian situation in the form of recommendation papers (UNHCR 2013) and general statistical overviews (UNHCR 2016a, b). The UNHCR has also provided detailed information through the Praesidium Project, which they initiated themselves and in which governmental and non-governmental actors cooperated in RAS operations (UNHCR 2009).

Also relevant to our understanding of the current situation in Italy and the degree to which the asylum system has been implemented there were daily news reports and analyses provided by media, such as newspapers, journalists and activists' blogs. Despite the lack of scientific sources, particularly the ones listed above, these outlets represented essential sources

2 Examples include: Activity Report 2016, Sovereign Military Order of Malta; Rapporto annuale SPRAR. Atlante SPRAR 2015" Ministero dell'Interno, Citalia, ANCI 2015; "Accogliere: la vera emergenza" LasciateCIEntrare 2016; "Voci Sospese", SenzaConfine, A Buon Diritto 2013.

of information for our research.³ Of course, in order to remain objective and scientific, one must take into account the possible biases of some media reports and organisations.

Obviously, a final but no less important source of information have been the results of previous rounds of the MAREM project. We have tried to maintain continuity with the work done by all the different research teams (for example using the data on networks collected in 2014 and 2015) and to contribute to the research by attempting to fill, at least in part, the existing research gap.

3. *Research Questions*

A preliminary review of the literature revealed a gap in the research concerning networks of asylum-related organisations in Italy and in Europe. The MAREM project aims to fill this research gap. Our study focused on analysing two organisational networks⁴ related to the Italian asylum system, as well as on the application of several hypotheses to these networks based on the theory of neo-institutionalism and the concept of isomorphism (for a definition of these terms and additional information on them, see the first chapter of this book).

The first network involved organisations that deal with asylum seekers and refugees (asylum- and refugee-related organisations). Most of these organisations focus on migration-related issues in general, regardless of individual migrants' legal status. The following question provided the framework for the part of the MAREM project that concerns Italy: *What role do the cooperation networks of asylum- and refugee-related organisations play in the national asylum system and the implementation of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) in Italy?*

The second network included organisations involved in rescue operations in the Mediterranean Sea (RAS-related organisations). These groups are committed to safeguarding lives according to the law of the sea regard-

3 Examples include <http://fortresseurope.blogspot.de>, <http://dirittiefrontiere.blogspot.de>, <http://www.meltingpot.org>.

4 Here we refer to the whole network of asylum-related organisations in Italy, although in our study we focused on the egocentric networks of the organisations we interviewed and therefore can show only parts of the whole network (for additional information on egocentric and whole networks see the first chapter of this book).

less of the status of those who are rescued. Concerning this network, the research question was as follows: *What role do the cooperation networks of RAS-related organisations in Italy play in rescue-at-sea operations?*

In addition, we applied the theory of neo-institutionalism to the networks of organisations in the European countries. This theory is used as a guide in the analysis of organisational networks, and the analysis was also intended to test some elements of this theory.

4. Introduction

After reviewing the current situation in Italy based on information obtained from the websites of several asylum- and refugee-related organisations and from the national and international press (e.g. www.internazionale.it, www.lastampa.it, www.ilfattoquotidiano.it, www.bbc.com and www.theguardian.com), we adopted three theses of neo-institutionalism in order to analyse the data we collected. Therefore, we established hypotheses based on each of these theses for each network we studied – that is, the asylum- and refugee-related and RAS-related organisational networks.

Mimetic Isomorphism

The first thesis concerns mimetic isomorphism (for additional information on this term, see the first chapter of this book). We focused on the uncertainty characterizing the work field conditions that can be important for isomorphic processes. Uncertainty is a common feature of both the RAS-related and the asylum- and refugee-related organisations; it is determined by a variety of factors depending on the specific missions of the organisations. With regard to the asylum- and refugee-related organisations, this uncertainty consists in the inability of the state to handle the enormous number of migrants arriving in Italy and the resulting difficulties in applying CEAS provisions;⁵ when one examines RAS-related organisations, uncertainty is an intrinsic feature of their work field because they operate in emergency situations. Therefore, uncertainty in both cases seems to be a

5 See <http://www.internazionale.it/notizie/2015/08/28/diritto-asilo-italia>.

direct consequence of the ways in which the state deals with these issues, namely providing migrants with the necessary support on land and rescuing them at sea. Regardless of the reasons underlying state policies and actions, which are difficult to identify objectively, it is undeniable that the government massively relies, wittingly or not, on these organisations' activities in order to implement the national asylum system and to provide effective rescue operations.⁶ Based on these considerations, we proposed the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a: The inability of the state to provide proper support to asylum seekers and migrants forces asylum- and refugee-related NGOs to fill the gaps in the system, adopting practices already established by other organisations working in the same field.

Hypothesis 2a: The high degree of uncertainty related to rescue operations in the Mediterranean Sea triggered the action of RAS-related organisations in support of the governmental organisations, and the emergency situation could have led the organisations to imitate established practices, which would indicate isomorphism in their modus operandi.

Coercive Isomorphism

The second thesis concerns coercive isomorphism (see the first chapter of this book). We focused on the relationship between the organisations and the state agencies as an indicator of isomorphism between organisations, which can represent an external constraint on activities carried out by the organisations. From the beginning of our research, it was clear that the relationship between the organisations and the state is a fundamental feature of each organisation, because it appears to be extremely relevant in determining their activities and development. This relationship can differ from organisation to organisation depending on their specific mission, especially in terms of the general distinction between asylum- and refugee-related and RAS-related organisations. Application of the theoretical paradigm of coercive isomorphism to the Italian situation is an effective way to understand the roles of the state and of the organisations both in the national asylum system and in rescue operations and how these roles are influenced

6 For a more precise idea about the significance of NGOs' contributions, see the activity reports of the organisations we interviewed, which are available online and some of which are included in the list of references.

by specific aspects of the relationship between each organisation and the state. In consideration of this, we established the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1b: Since most of the asylum- and refugee-related organisations deal mainly with irregular migrants and have to face deficiencies in and breaches of the national asylum system, a major part of their activity does not involve cooperation with state agencies. On the contrary, their activities aim to fill the gaps left by the state. Therefore, one can expect very few or no similarities in their structures and ways of working owing to the lack of transactions with state agencies.

Hypothesis 2b: Because organisations involved in RAS interact closely with state agencies, this transaction leads to isomorphism among them.

Normative Isomorphism

The third thesis concerns normative isomorphism (see the first chapter of this book). We focused on the personnel composition of the organisations which can be relevant for isomorphism, because isomorphism among organisations can be determined by homogeneity in the educational background and professionalisation of the organisations' members. By analysing the composition of the sample of organisations we interviewed in Rome, we could distinguish between those that required professional workers and those that did not. For this differentiation, it did not matter whether or not the personnel were paid. This characteristic depends on the organisation's mission, because professionals are needed in either case to provide certain services such as medical or legal assistance. However, certain tasks (e.g. supporting migrants in their daily life) can be undertaken by non-professionals without a specific educational background. Taking this into account, we proposed the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1c: Because the personnel composition can depend on the specific mission of each asylum- and refugee-related organisation, one can expect to identify isomorphism owing to homogeneity in members' educational background among organisations that share the same mission and whose mission requires professional work to be accomplished.

Hypothesis 2c: Because rescue operations require strict procedures and competences in specific fields, such as navigation and emergency medicine, isomorphism among organisations involved in RAS is expected to be linked to the degree of homogeneity in the members' professionalisation.

5. Data

During our field research in Rome in March 2016, we conducted semi-structured expert interviews with nine organisations in order to gain a deeper insight into the organisational field and the cooperation of asylum- and refugee-related organisations in Italy. Interactions between asylum- and refugee-related organisations and their networks were of central interest because we expect organisations to act and develop their structures and strategies in keeping with their perceived organisational field and the corresponding field expectations.

We categorised the organisations according to five different dimensions based on their websites and self-descriptions in documents and during the interviews. All the organisations were analysed based on the following criteria:

- (1) their *actor type* (official executive actor, civil society non-governmental organisation [NGO], intergovernmental organisation);
- (2) their field of action and legitimation and *spatial reach* (local/regional, national, international/transnational/European/global levels);
- (3) their *driving norms and values* (religious, political, human rights oriented, objectivity);
- (4) the *main issues* they deal with (legal or social assistance, advocacy, etc.);
- (5) their *resources* (private, public or mixed).

Table 2 gives an overview of the interviewed organisations and their main characteristics.

Table 2: Characteristics of the interviewed organisations in Italy

| Name | Type | Spatial Reach | Driving norms | Main issues | Resources |
|---------------------------|-----------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------------------|-----------|
| A Buon Diritto | NGO | National | Human Rights | Legal Aid, Lobbying | Private |
| Mediterranean Hope | NGO | National | Religious | Help Services | Mixed |
| Medicina Solidale | NGO | Local | Human Rights | Medical Aid | Mixed |
| CISOM | Sovereign state | International | Religious | Asylum seekers and refugees | Public |
| CIR | NGO | National | Human Rights | Legal Aid, Lobbying | Public |

| Name | Type | Spatial Reach | Driving norms | Main issues | Resources |
|--------------------------|------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-----------|
| Baobab Experience | NGO | Local | Human Rights | Help Services | Private |
| SenzaConfine | NGO | National | Human Rights | Legal Aid | Private |
| Carta di Roma | NGO | National | Human Rights | Media | Mixed |

Source: Adapted from website and document analyses and expert interviews conducted as part of the MAREM project 2016.

With one exception, all the organisations are located in Rome. Mediterranean Hope was the only organisation not located in Rome, but it operates in Sicily and Lampedusa, so the interview was conducted via Skype. Although the overwhelming majority of the organisations are NGOs, two of them could not be characterised as either an NGO or a governmental or intergovernmental actor. *LasciateCIEntrare* (“Let us in”) does not have legal status as an organisation but could be considered a campaign that is supported by several NGOs. As part of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, *Corpo Italiano di Soccorso dell’Ordine di Malta (CISOM)* is a sovereign subject of international law.

Moreover, we asked all interviewed organisations to identify their most important cooperation partners. Combining the analysis of each organisation’s characteristics and the structure of its cooperation network, we searched for cooperation patterns and tendencies toward isomorphism based on the criteria mentioned previously (i.e. actor type, spatial reach, driving norms, main issues and resources). To measure isomorphism, we used the concept of homophily (McPherson et al 2001), which postulates a higher probability of ties between actors who are similar to each other in the relevant dimensions, as well as the network diversity index developed by Baum et al. (2000).⁷

7 The egocentric network diversity index (see Baum et al. 2000: 277) calculates diversity as 1 minus the sum of the squared proportions of the categories in the network divided by the total number of cooperation partners: $ND = (1 - (\text{Proportion of category 1 in network})^2 + (\text{Proportion of the category 2 in the network})^2 + \dots + (\text{Proportion of last represented category in network})^2)$. Network size is the number of the ties of the regarded actor. In our example, it is the number of the main cooperation partners of the interviewed organisation. The values range between 0 and 1, with values closer to 0 showing less network diversity and values closer to 1 showing more network diversity.

6. Results

Network Analysis

In this section we present the results of our network analysis. As a first step, we describe the interviewed organisations to provide an overview of their main characteristics. Subsequently, we will describe the egos' cooperation networks (it means: the cooperation networks of the regarded actors/organisations) with respect to the five analytical dimensions.

For the most part, the spatial reach of the interviewed organisations was national. Six have a national field of action and legitimation, and two (Medicina Solidale and Baobab Experience) act locally; only CISOM operates on the international level. Concerning the driving norms, the category of human rights was dominant for seven of the organisations, whereas two (Mediterranean Hope and CISOM) follow primarily religious values. Regarding the main issues that the organisations deal with, a very broad spectrum of tasks was covered. Baobab Experience and Mediterranean Hope organise multiple assistance services for migrants (i.e. food, clothing and basic information), and Medicina Solidale offers free medical aid to irregular migrants. CISOM is active in SAR at sea operations, while Carta di Roma provides asylum- and refugee-related data and information to journalists in an attempt to raise awareness within the society by means of objective media information. Three organisations (SenzaConfine, A Buon Diritto and CIR) offer legal aid to migrants and asylum seekers. SenzaConfine specialises in this issue, and A Buon Diritto and CIR are also strongly involved in lobbying to improve the asylum system on the national and European levels. As the largest Italian asylum- and refugee-related organisation, CIR is also running several SPRAR accommodation centres throughout Italy. The organisations' funding characteristics are quite heterogeneous. Whereas four of the groups finance their work using private donations alone, CIR and CISOM depend solely on public financial sources, and the resources for three of the organisations (Mediterranean Hope, Medicina Solidale and Carta di Roma) have mixed origins.

During the interviews, we asked the interviewees to name their organisations' cooperation partners and to describe the nature of their cooperation. The following section presents the results of the descriptive analysis

of their egocentric (or ego⁸) networks. Table 3 gives an overview of the size of these networks and indicates their composition and diversity with respect to actor type.

The average number of cooperation partners in a network is about 15, with a minimum of 6 (Mediterranean Hope) and a maximum of 19 (CIR, Carta di Roma and A Buon Diritto). With the exception of Mediterranean Hope, which cooperates mostly with church-related organisations, the majority of the links for all the other organisations are with NGOs. Nevertheless, all the organisations other than SenzaConfine and Mediterranean Hope have some connections to governmental and/or intergovernmental actors, and these connections do not necessarily consist of cooperative relationships. On the other hand, scientific organisations seemed to play a minor role within the analysed egocentric networks - only CIR mentioned four such organisations as cooperation partners.

As can be seen in Table 3, the average value of network diversity was 0.033, which indicates that the principle of homophily does not apply in most of the cases we studied. Since the average diversity in the case of a network with 15 cooperation partners and 3 representatives in each of the categories would be 0.013, the average diversity of networks concerning the actor type in Italy could be interpreted as being high. Instead of homophily, one can see more elements of complementarity within the networks. There were also big differences between the interviewed organisations: whereas SenzaConfine had ties only with other NGOs, the level of network diversity of CISOM (0.066) and of Mediterranean Hope (0.074) was quite high.

8 The regarded actor.

Table 3: Characteristics of the egocentric cooperation networks with regard to actor type

| Ego | Network size | NGO | GO | IGO | SO | Others | Network diversity |
|--------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|----------|-------------|-------------|-------------------|
| A Buon Diritto | 19 | 12 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0.029 |
| Baobab Experience | 19 | 13 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0.024 |
| Carta di Roma | 19 | 14 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0.022 |
| CIR | 19 | 11 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 0.025 |
| CISOM | 9 | 5 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0.066 |
| Mediterranean Hope | 6 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0.074 |
| SenzaConfine | 12 | 12 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Average | 15.43 | 10.57 | 1.43 | 1 | 0.67 | 1.86 | 0.033 |

Source: Adapted from website and document analyses and expert interviews conducted as part of the MAREM project 2016.

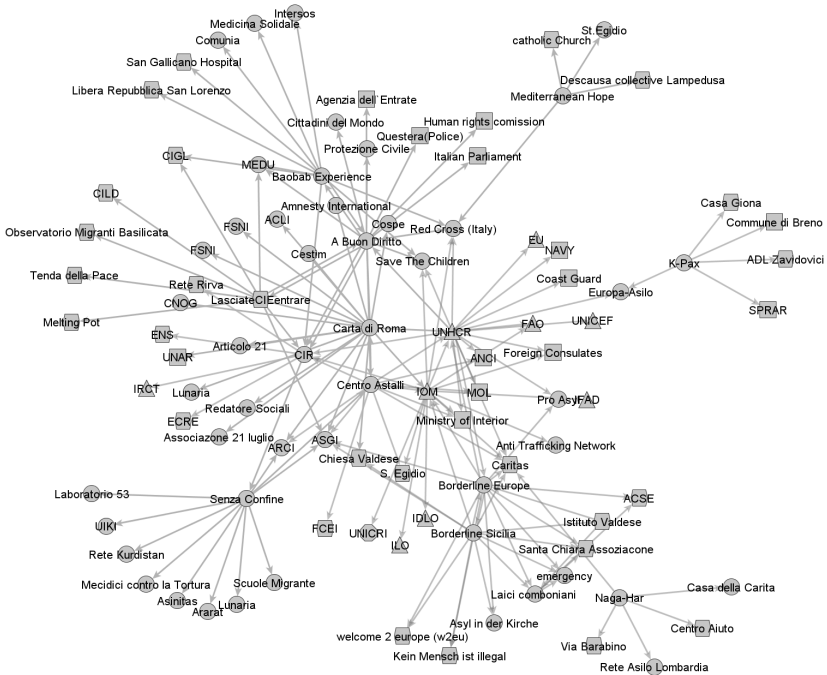
If we analyse the cooperation networks in more detail and combine them with the issues that the organisations deal with, they seem to follow a pattern: organisations that provide services for migrants tend to cooperate with other NGOs, whereas church-related organisations cooperate more with other religious organisations and churches. Instead, organisations that are involved in advocacy and lobbying as well as in RAS operations have a much higher level of network diversity. As one can see in the case of A Buon Diritto, this pattern is also valid for organisations that work on different issues at the same time. When they cooperate with other organisations in lobbying, they work only with governmental or intergovernmental actors, but when they provide services directly to migrants, they cooperate solely with NGOs.

If we extend the analysis to all the data that have been collected since the beginning of the MAREM project (i.e. including data from 2014 and 2015 as well), the results are quite similar to those presented here: NGOs tend to cooperate with other NGOs, but there are a lot of exceptions. The network⁹ consists of 113 actors, 57 of which are NGOs, 15 governmental executive actors, 9 intergovernmental organisations and 5 scientific organisations. Twenty-seven actors could not be classified within the existing

9 The network visualisation connects the different egocentric networks of the organisations we interviewed during the MAREM project from 2014 through 2016. It was not the research aim to reconstruct the whole network, so the illustrations shown here represent only parts of the network.

categories. Figure 3 is a visualisation of the networks focusing on actor type, as generated by means of the software Visone.

Figure 3: Asylum related organisations in Italy, their actor types and cooperation, 2014–16



Source: Adapted from website and document analyses and expert interviews conducted as part of the MAREM project 2016.

The cooperation networks of intergovernmental organisations in particular, such as UNHCR and IOM, are also worth considering. With 21 cooperation partners, UNHCR has the largest egocentric network among the interviewed organisations. The egocentric network of UNHCR consists of 21 organisations, of which 10 are NGOs, 7 are GOs and 3 are IGOs; hence, its network diversity value is above average (0.036). As part of the Territorial Commission and as initiator and coordinator of the Tavolo Asi-

lo¹⁰ (the Italian asylum round table), the UNHCR plays an important role as a mediator between governmental and non-governmental actors in the asylum system in Italy.

With regard to the driving norms, human rights is dominant not only for most of the cooperation partners of the interviewed organisations, regardless of whether or not they are promoting human rights themselves, but also for the actors that foremost follow religious values. However, the network diversity of Mediterranean Hope and CISOM is above average, which indicates a certain degree of isomorphism. Table 4 gives an overview of egocentric networks in relation to their driving norms.

Table 4: Characteristics of the cooperation networks with regard to their driving norms

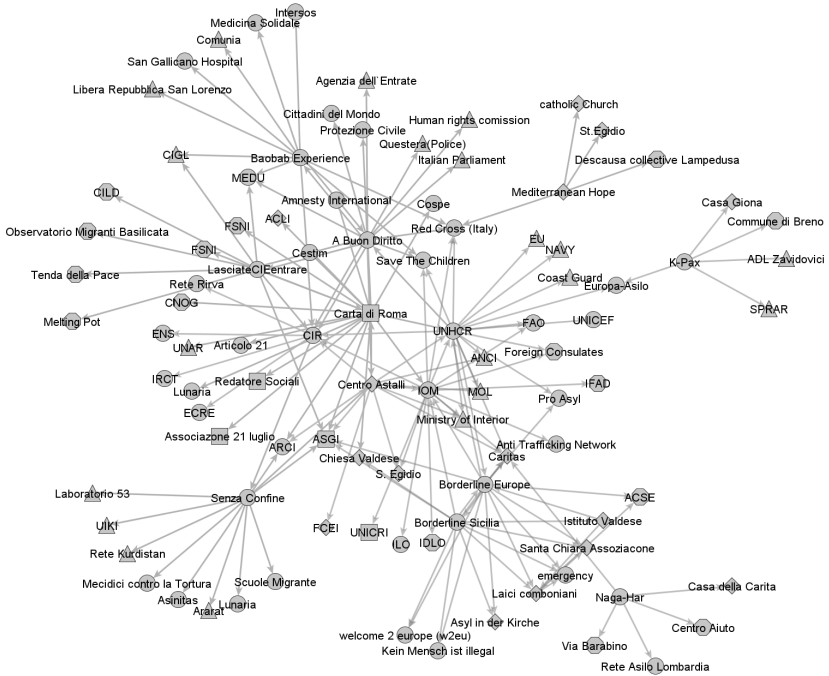
| Ego | Network size | Human rights | Political | Religious | Objectivity | Others | Network diversity |
|--------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------|
| A Buon Diritto | 19 | 13 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0.025 |
| Baobab Experience | 18 | 10 | 7 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0.03 |
| Carta di Roma | 19 | 11 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 0.032 |
| CIR | 24 | 13 | 2 | 5 | 4 | 0 | 0.026 |
| CISOM | 9 | 5 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0.066 |
| Mediterranean Hope | 7 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 0.102 |
| SenzaConfine | 12 | 6 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0.052 |
| Average | 15.43 | 8.57 | 2.86 | 2.43 | 1 | 0.75 | 0.041 |

Source: Adapted from website and document analyses and expert interviews conducted as part of the MAREM project 2016.

On average, the majority of the cooperation partners (8.57) promote human rights, whereas only 2.86 and 2.43 follow political and religious values, respectively. Objectivity is the dominant value for only one organisation, and only 0.75 have other driving norms. Thus, the average network diversity is 0.041. The organisations cooperation partners, values and norms, are visualised in Figure 4.

10 Tavolo Asilo is an Italian network of asylum- and refugee-related organisations and is devoted to lobbying.

Figure 4: Networks of interviewed organisations in terms of driving norms, 2014–16



Source: Adapted from website and document analyses and expert interviews conducted as part of the MAREM project 2016.

The high correlation between an organisation's actor type and its leading norms can be considered remarkable: All governmental executive actors followed political values, whereas objectivity was the dominating norm for each of the scientific organisations. The majority of NGOs promote human rights, but a part of them also follows religious values. These organisations are mostly church-related, examples being international organisations such as Caritas, but also national ones such as Centro Astalli or St. Egidio, which have large and highly diversified networks, dispose of sufficient resources and therefore have an important position within the whole asylum system in Italy.

If we look at the field of legitimation in which our egos act, there is a tendency toward homophily. More than half the cooperation partners (7.86) are acting on the national level, whereas only 5 are international

and 3 are active only on the local level. Overall network diversity has a value of 0.04, on the same level as for the driving norms. As the only local organisations that we interviewed, the Baobab Experience (0.037) and Mediterranean Hope (0.082) have much higher network diversity, although Baobab Experience is the only organisation with the majority of cooperation partners on the local level. Also, CISOM, as the only organisation that is active on an international level, has an above-average network diversity value (0.049).

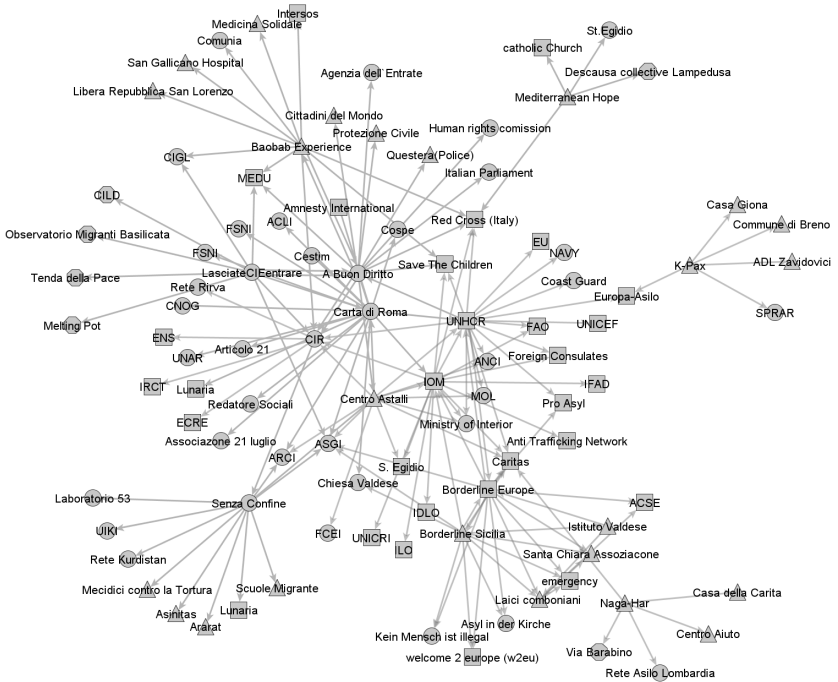
Within the reconstructed part of the whole network, the distribution is equal in terms of its spatial reach. Among 41 organisations in the network visualisation, the national level is overrepresented, but 39 organisations are active internationally and 33 locally. Since the national and international organisations have, on average, bigger networks and more ties to other organisations, the local organisations appear at the outer edges of Figure 5. Nonetheless, they play an important role in the asylum system, because they are in direct contact with the migrants and facilitate integration and social welfare.

Table 5: Characteristics of the cooperation networks in terms of spatial reach

| Ego | Network size | Local | National | International | Network diversity |
|--------------------|--------------|-------|----------|---------------|-------------------|
| A Buon Diritto | 19 | 4 | 10 | 5 | 0.032 |
| Baobab Experience | 18 | 7 | 5 | 6 | 0.037 |
| Carta di Roma | 19 | 0 | 16 | 3 | 0.014 |
| CIR | 24 | 4 | 12 | 8 | 0.026 |
| CISOM | 9 | 0 | 3 | 6 | 0.049 |
| Mediterranean Hope | 7 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 0.082 |
| SenzaConfine | 12 | 4 | 7 | 1 | 0.045 |
| Average | 15.43 | 2.86 | 7.86 | 4.71 | 0.04 |

Source: Adapted from website and document analyses and expert interviews conducted as part of the MAREM project 2016.

Figure 5: Networks of interviewed organisations in terms of spatial reach, 2014–16



Source: Adapted from website and document analyses and expert interviews conducted as part of the MAREM project 2016.

The Role of Organisations in RAS Operations

Concerning the role of different organisations in RAS operations, only three non-governmental organisations could be identified that are actively and practically involved in the work of preventing shipwrecks in the Mediterranean Sea: CISOM, MSF and MOAS.¹¹ Several governmental organisations, such as the Guardia Costiera (the Italian Coast Guard), the Guardia di Finanza (the Italian finance police) and the Italian Navy, also

¹¹ CiSOM was the only organisation interviewed in MAREM 2016 that was involved in SAR Operation, so these results can be supported only by their testimony.

operate in this field (CISOM 2016) and play the leading role in coordinating these operations because the state provides an essential portion of the resources. According to the AIDA Country Report, Triton, for example, operates on a monthly budget of €2.9 million and coordinates the deployment of three open-sea patrol vessels, two coastal patrol boats, two coastal patrol vessels, two aircraft and one helicopter in the Central Mediterranean (ECRE 2015: 22).

In this work field, the hierarchical structures of state organisations are fundamental. The NGOs must therefore work within the structure of the GOs and, if necessary, adapt to them, as mentioned by CISOM in the March 2016 interview: *“We have to adjust to the hierarchical structure of the Navy, because we join them in the missions using their structures and means.”* In RAS operations, the NGOs support the GOs, sending their staff, such as physicians, nurses and rescuers, to the operational field, while the GOs support the operations in terms of logistics and provide the boats and helicopters. For example, in 2015, CISOM deployed 102 doctors, 66 nurses, 73 volunteers and 12 logisticians who worked with the authorities in charge of rescue operations for migrants in the Strait of Sicily, namely the Coast Guard and the Navy. The search and rescue (SAR) operations comprised the following (CISOM 2015: 1): 491 SAR operations, 53,712 migrants rescued, 800 therapies administered, 72 urgent transfers, and 25 helicopter transfers.

Furthermore, according to CISOM, cooperation among the organisations in RAS is defined by formal agreements: *“We have agreements with the state administration (protocolli d’intesa) and agreements with Guardia Costiera and Guardia di Finanza (protocolli operativi) [...] With regard to organisations other than state ones, we have partnership agreements (protocolli d’intesa) to define our cooperation”* (CISOM 2015).

CISOM also emphasised that many cooperation partnerships, especially on shore, are informal and are determined by practical issues related mostly to emergency situations: *“We cooperate [in] the field with anybody who is involved in the specific emergency situation we face, such as MSF, IOM, UNHCR, [so there is] no need for a[n official] partnership. At the POS [punti di sbarco, or disembarkation points], we work with Caritas, Croce Rossa and Misericordia”* (CISOM 2015).

*Neo-institutionalism**Mimetic Isomorphism*

Regarding the first two hypotheses concerning the mimetic isomorphism theoretical paradigm (see Hypotheses 1a and 2a), the expert interviews were analysed to identify a connection between the uncertainty that characterises the field of action of each organisation and the development of the organisations either through imitating other organisations' effective practises or as models for other organisations. Depending on the network under study and the specific task of the organisations involved, the way each organisation worked was expected to be conditioned by other organisations' ways of working through different processes.

During the expert interviews, the representatives of almost all the organisations – Baobab Experience, CISOM, SenzaConfine, A Buon Diritto, Medicina Solidale, LasciateCIEntrare and Mediterranean Hope (2016) – pointed out a lack of governmental involvement, which leaves organisations to find their own way in dealing with migrants' issues in general and those related to asylum seekers and refugees in particular. As will be demonstrated in this section, the main function of asylum- and refugee-related organisations is to fill the gaps in the asylum system left by the state. The organisations' work is necessary for meeting the migrants' needs, especially in Rome; however, sometimes their work is not sufficient. Their activities mainly involve services they believe migrants should have access to, either because of their asylum status or because it is their right as human beings. Legal assistance, medical aid, accommodation and support in daily life and in the integration process are services covered mainly by the NGOs, which cooperate with one another in order to improve their activities. Therefore, personal relationships among the members of the organisations are extremely relevant in determining organisational practises through direct cooperation in the field and, subsequently, for competence exchanges.

The following quotations taken from the interviews support this interpretation. With regard to the lack of involvement by the state, the representative from SenzaConfine states: *“The problem is that after the initial reception, the subsequent steps are not implemented, so even if a family finds a place to stay for the first year, they cannot remain there, yet at the same time they are not fully integrated and not able to provide for themselves”* (SenzaConfine 2016). Consequently, voluntary work provided by

the NGOs is necessary: *“Basically, the government exploits the volunteers’ work and sometimes finances religious organisations”* (SenzaConfini 2016). Other comments by the representative from Baobab Experience strongly underline this fact: *“The volunteers somehow have to fill the gap left by the institutions, even if it should be the latter’s responsibility”* (Baobab Experience 2016), and again *“Because the institutions are not able to guarantee the migrants’ rights and support them, we have to do that”* (Baobab Experience 2016). The representative from Mediterranean Hope shares this view and connects it to the Italian situation in general: *“Italy doesn’t have a good welfare state both for Italian people and for migrants; the Italian authorities do not provide any kind of benefit. [...] If you are granted asylum in Italy, you won’t have any economic or other benefit, so you are left completely alone in the labour market”* (Mediterranean Hope 2016). When talking about the SPRAR project, which is referred to as a good example of state intervention, he adds: *“Actually just a small portion of the migrants present in Italy are included in this project. Many of them are instead in other centres that do not have any kind of services, such as language school and professional courses”* (Mediterranean Hope 2016).

The interviewed representative from Mediterranean Hope explains the process that determines the chosen practises: *“How do we learn from different experiences? Probably thanks to all the meetings that we have. Since we meet many people who work in different organisations, we see different examples. As I told you, I spend the weekend with two people who work for Amnesty International. Informally, we got some interesting information about their work and how they organise it, so we are trying to learn new things”* (Mediterranean Hope 2016). The experiences of other organisations are often shared through personal relationships among the volunteers. The following quotations support this view: *“Everybody works for their own association, but when possible, we cooperate of course; we have lots of reunions. We have groups in which we discuss the law and the procedures”* (A Buon Diritto 2016).

“Every time we hear something about a practice that can help us in our daily work or in reaching one of our goals or in implementing one of our activities, we try to get in touch with the organisation to understand how to make it work in our case” (Carta di Roma 2016).

“We also of course rely on others’ competences if we have no experience with something. For example, the guys who are creating the alphabeti-

sation school turn to an organisation that has already dealt with education services for migrants” (SenzaConfine 2016).

Thus, Hypothesis 1a appears to be proven, because it seems to adequately interpret the way organisations, especially NGOs, operate in the field and develop their practices. In fact, personal relationships and cooperation in the field appear to be crucial in shaping the practices adopted by the organisations.

Regarding RAS-related organisations, the cooperation network seems to have developed from an initial state of uncertainty, as revealed by the high proportion of migrants’ deaths at sea, which were allegedly due to deficiencies in state intervention. To understand the development of this network, the MAREM project must rely on data collected during interviews with the representative expert of CISOM, the only RAS-related organisation directly included in the MAREM research, so the perspective is limited. According to what the interviewee reported, CISOM was the first organisation not connected to the Italian state (although, as part of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, it is technically a governmental organisation) to lead rescue operations in the Sicilian Channel starting in 2007. Its decision to intervene was triggered by an emergency situation, caused by the lack of intervention by the Italian state organisations: *“Migrants shipwrecked in the Mediterranean Sea [were not being rescued], so I [the national director of CISOM] called Guardia Costiera to find a way to rescue them and provide them with first aid on the sea”* (CISOM 2016). Since then, a few other NGOs, such as MOAS and MSF, joined the rescue operations throughout the following years, using the practices shaped by CISOM and the relationship they had established with the governmental organisations involved as a model: *“[The other organisations] used our experience as a model, and they started in 2013, and then MSF began as well, at first on MOAS ships and later with their own ships”* (CISOM 2016). In this case, one can see the initially uncertain conditions in the work field have determined isomorphism among organisations involved in rescue operations. The best practises of the leading organisation acting as a role model are imitated and adopted by other organisations. This supports Hypothesis 2a.

Coercive Isomorphism

The way in which legal and political constraints influence the shaping of these organisations' activities is fundamental to comprehending the situation in Italy. Throughout the interviews, it clearly emerged that the state is ambivalent with respect to migration issues: whereas, on the one hand, the state must defend the rights of asylum seekers and fulfils this to a certain extent, on the other hand, it posits the very conditions for these rights to be violated. Regulations and policies are often considered the cause of many of the critical issues related to migration of which the NGOs have subsequently taken charge. A comment by the representative from Mediterranean Hope on the human trafficking situation stresses this point: *"I think that the state activities influence the trafficking a lot. For example, now the European member states have signed this agreement with Turkey,¹² so we are expecting that many of the migrants who were crossing Greece to reach Germany and other countries will divert their journey – they will try to pass by Italy to reach Germany. So, that is an indirect influence, because we change our policy and then the smugglers change their activities"* (Mediterranean Hope 2016).

The interviewed representative from SenzaConfine seems to endorse an even more radical point of view: *"We sent a letter to protest against the new agreement between the EU and Turkey, because it does not defend the dignity of the people who will be expelled from Greece to Turkey, which is not a safe country and where they cannot make any request for asylum"* (SenzaConfine 2016). And again: *"Italian law is the reason why human trafficking exists, because there is no legal way to enter Italy for those people"* (SenzaConfine 2016). The position taken by the representative from CISOM is milder but still consistent with this perspective concerning the ambivalent role of the state: *"In my opinion, an organic and complete perspective on the integration problem is lacking even if much is done. The government also has a problem in managing the money destined for the migrants. They ought to manage it in a more effective way, providing more services and avoiding corruption and scandals"* (CISOM 2016).

When we look at asylum- and refugee-related organisations it is interesting to see how the coercive isomorphism thesis can be applied to the Itali-

12 The Mediterranean Hope representative refers to the agreement between Turkey and the EU of 18 March 2016.

an situation if its logical counterpart is considered (see Hypothesis 1b). In fact, most of the NGOs work outside the boundaries of law prescriptions, because they have to deal with policies and normative deficiencies. This is especially clear for organisations involved in advocacy, such as SenzaConfini, whose representative states: *“Most of the time governmental organisations are our counterparts. Through Tavolo Asilo we entertain a dialogue with the Minister of the Interior”* (SenzaConfini 2016). In particular, a major part of this organisation’s work is devoted to providing assistance to those migrants whose juridical status prevents them from benefiting from state assistance. These are mostly people seeking protection who want to cross Italy in order to apply for asylum in another European country, without being stuck in Italy because of the Dublin Regulation. Moreover, many other migrants come to Italy from countries that are not classified as countries at war; thus, these people are considered irregular migrants and cannot benefit from international protection, despite the fact that their lives could be in danger upon returning to their country of origin. Discussing the beneficiaries of their work, the spokesman for Baobab Experience says: *“Most of them are economic migrants and asylum seekers who do not want to stay in Italy, and they usually do not have documents and have not had their fingerprints taken”* (Baobab Experience 2016). Since these organisations have to deal with these people’s needs outside the legally recognised procedures, no isomorphic processes regarding cooperation with the state can be observed among them.

As far as RAS-related organisations are concerned, the situation is the opposite. This is because these organisations must work within the structure of the governmental organisations that are in charge of safety at sea, such as the Navy, the Guardia Costiera and the Guardia di Finanza. Despite the fact that these organisations deploy their own means and logistical apparatus, they participate in operations coordinated by governmental organisations and therefore have to adjust their structure and modus operandi. The cooperation between them is strictly defined by protocols, and there is almost no room for criticism unless the cooperation is interrupted. This happened when MSF recalled its ships from the Aegean Sea as a critical response to the EU–Turkey agreement of 18 March 2016.¹³ The following statement from the national director of CISOM shows how

13 EU–Turkey statement, 18 March 2016, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18-eu-turkey-statement>.

cooperation in this field is impossible unless organisations endorse policies established by the governmental actors involved: *“The real problem, rather than expectations, [is] the huge amount of rules and regulations that underlie policies to which organisations react. For example, MSF and UNHCR left the Aegean Sea in response to the new agreement between Greece and Turkey. However, because we work with state organisations, we do not expose ourselves politically and we are automatically aligned with government decisions”* (CISOM 2016). Therefore, this close transaction between GOs and NGOs concerning rescue operation planning apparently can lead to isomorphism among the organisations involved.

Normative Isomorphism

With regard to the two hypotheses on the theoretical paradigm of normative isomorphism (see Hypotheses 1c and 2c), the analysis focused on the connection between the educational background of the organisations’ workers and a possible isomorphism between the organisations related to the workers’ professionalisation. Professionalisation of the personnel was expected to be crucial for determining the way of working of the organisations.

Although a homogeneity in the staff’s educational background related to the organisations’ mission seemed to be present when we looked at the asylum- and refugee-related organisations, as a result there were also similarities in the structure or in the way of working. Organisations involved in lobbying and legal assistance, such as A Buon Diritto or SenzaConfine, mainly employ people with an educational background in social science or law: *“[President] Simonetta is a lawyer; then we have a teacher for migrants with a degree in literature, a couple of people with a degree in political science, a nurse with a degree in social sciences. The formal president was a researcher with a degree in anthropology”* (SenzaConfine 2016). *“I am a sociologist and so are some of my colleagues, but we also have economists and, as already mentioned, a lot of lawyers working for us on a voluntary basis”* (A Buon Diritto 2016). Medicina Solidale, which provides medical aid, employs people with an educational background in the medical field: *“They all have an academic background in medicine. Voluntary doctors mostly”* (Medicina Solidale 2016). LasciateCIEntrare and Carta di Roma, which are both involved in monitoring, employ mainly journalists: *“We have journalists, lawyers, activists. People concerned*

with civil action and those kinds of things” (LasciateCIEntrare 2016). “Most of us are actually journalists” (Carta di Roma 2016). Conversely, Baobab Experience, whose mission requires human and relational skills rather than professional ones, employs a variety of people: “There were students, children, old rich ladies, retired people, unemployed people, also some university researchers and so on. We do not require professional preparation” (Baobab Experience 2016).

Despite this connection between the organisations’ missions and their staffs’ educational background, no interviewee was aware of any isomorphic processes that could have been determined by this homogeneity. Similarities seemed to be determined by other factors instead, such as cooperation in the field or, in some cases, the background values and methods adopted by the organisation. The representative of A Buon Diritto underlines this while talking about cooperation with organisations involved in lobbying: “We cooperate when we are in the field but not when we speak with institutions or members of the Parliament, for example, because in those situations we have a lot of problems, because our method is different and we don’t feel comfortable cooperating in such situations” (A Buon Diritto 2016). Thus, Hypothesis 1c cannot be fully verified by the results of the data analysis.

With regard to the RAS-related organisation, however, Hypothesis 2c can be supported. According to the activity reports or the websites¹⁴ of the organisations involved in RAS operations, the staff composition is similar and reflects the structure and hierarchy to which these organisations must adapt. Professionals in the health field, especially those in emergency medicine and nursing, and personnel trained in navigation are needed to carry out the rescue operations. The structure and the way of working make it necessary to adapt to determine homogeneity in the workers’ professionalisation. Nevertheless, the clear connection between these elements seems to account for isomorphism among organisations involved in RAS operations that is related to their members’ professionalisation.

14 For example, the website for CISOM is <http://www.cisom.org/attivita/attivita-umanitaria/sar-mediterraneo.html> and that for MSF is <http://www.doctorswithoutborder.org/emergency-mediterranean>.

CEAS

Since 1999 the EU has been working to create a Common European Asylum System (CEAS) and to improve the current legislative framework, which is intended to ensure that the rights of refugees under international law are protected in its member states. The system sets minimum standards and procedures for processing and assessing asylum applications and for the treatment of both asylum seekers and those granted refugee status (European Commission 2015).¹⁵

The MAREM research is aimed at finding out how far CEAS has been implemented in Italy and whether it affects the work of the asylum-related NGOs. One of the ideas of CEAS is to create the EU as an area of protection and to ensure that there are humane reception conditions (such as housing) for asylum seekers and refugees in Europe¹⁶; in Italy (Rome), however, this right does not seem to be entirely granted at present. It is reported that the asylum seekers and refugees live under bad conditions in the detention centres. This fact seems to be confirmed by the representative from *LasciateCIEntrare*. She claimed that *“because the parliament also does not know these centres in Rome [...], and we know that the system does not guarantee human dignity inside the centres, they asked us to start monitoring the situation”* (*LasciateCIEntrare* 2016). Furthermore, people in need of international protection often do not have the chance to apply for protection because the legal services do not work properly for them. As stated by the representative from *SenzaConfine*, the Dublin Regulation III apparently does not fulfil its goals: *“Dublin Regulation III is supposed to allow the migrants to ask for the country they want to go, but they never applied it. Most of the good things within the regulation are never applied”* (*SenzaConfine* 2016). Furthermore, she pointed out, CEAS also defines who is a refugee or economic migrant and thus sets that person’s legal status, but this does not affect the work of NGOs. *“We do not make any distinction. We consider them all political migrants. We work with everybody for everybody”* (*SenzaConfine* 2016). On the basis of the interviews, CEAS has apparently not been successfully implemented by the Italian state until now.

15 Common European Asylum System; http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/asylum/index_en.htm.

16 Gaining Asylum in the Union; <http://www.unhcr-centraleurope.org/en/what-we-do/ensuring-legal-protection/eu-asylum-policy.html>.

EASO: Hotspots

After the series of tragedies in the Mediterranean Sea in April 2015,¹⁷ the European Commission proposed to deploy coordinated operational support to frontline member states using the hotspot approach. Operational support provided through the hotspot approach concentrates on registration, identification, fingerprinting and debriefing of asylum seekers, as well as return operations. Italy is the first EU member state where this Hotspot approach, run by EASO and Frontex agents, is currently being implemented.¹⁸ The MAREM research project wanted to find out if this approach has been implemented successfully and how NGOs are connected to it. Based on the interviews, one can conclude that the hotspots currently do not seem to work properly, because human rights violations are being reported: *“The hotspots are not really working. At least this is what the lawyers and activists who are following the situation in the hotspot centres are saying. There are a lot of violations”* (Carta di Roma 2016).

Furthermore, information provided to asylum seekers and refugees seems to be lacking. As the representative from A Buon Diritto stated, *“I saw them [the asylum seekers and refugees] at the hotspots. They don’t tell them anything about the procedure, they don’t explain that it is important to take the fingerprints, they don’t make an individual plan – nothing”* (A Buon Diritto 2016). In general, receiving objective information about the hotspots and the work inside with the asylum seekers and refugees was very difficult. The NGOs Mediterranean Hope, A Buon Diritto and LasciateCIEntrare reported that they tried to get access to the hotspots, but their requests were denied. *“We don’t have a direct EASO contact. We want to go inside the hotspots but we have no authorisation yet”* (LasciateCIEntrare 2016). The hotspots therefore will be an interesting topic for future research.

17 <http://missingmigrants.iom.int/mediterranean>.

18 The hotspot approach to managing exceptional migratory flows; http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/2_hotspots_en.pdf.

Criticism and Suggestions

The interviewed NGOs were asked to describe their most important criticisms of the asylum procedure in Italy. The answers were divided into two different core categories: one regarding the role of the state and the other regarding a more cultural and political perspective.

The first category relates to the role of the state in the Italian asylum system. NGOs talk about a gap in the system and note that the state's support is weak. The work of the organisations is both needed and exploited at the same time. The representative from SenzaConfine claimed that *“basically, the government exploits the volunteers' work and sometimes finance[s] religious organisations such as Caritas and Gesuiti”* (SenzaConfine 2016). Another problem is that most of the state facilities concentrate on asylum seekers, but most people seeking protection try to cross Italy without getting registered and become trapped in human trafficking – a growing problem. The representative from Baobab Experience added this comment: *“Moreover, from a legal point of view, the figure of the migrant in transition does not exist, they don't have a juridical state, they are not asylum seekers and they are not irregular migrants either until they get caught. All the state facilities and accommodations are meant only for asylum seekers and not for the unregistered people without legal status. This gap in the system feeds the human traffic, because they need to act covertly, hidden from the institutions”* (Baobab Experience 2016). Furthermore, the Italian state supports the hotspot approach, which is criticised by the NGOs because of human-rights violations. *“On the shore, EASO selects migrants according to their country of origin, Eritrean and Syrian, for instance are accepted, while others are rejected, who, according to them, cannot obtain asylum. This is obviously illegal, against the Geneva Convention”* (SenzaConfine 2016).

The other category of criticism is related more to the cultural and political perspective. The NGOs criticise the view of the Italian society concerning the refugee crisis. On the one hand, the situation is dealt with as if it was an emergency, while it is actually a constant phenomenon. *“They always speak about emergencies, but they do not understand that it is not an emergency but something that was already happening, and it is going to happen again and again”* (Carta di Roma 2016). On the other hand, refugees are seen as a humanitarian issue or as a problem rather than as an economic opportunity: *“The problem with the Italian government is that migrants are seen as a problem and not as an investment, and this is a po-*

litical problem, also connected with the populist use of the phenomenon by some political actors” (CISOM 2016).

Expert Proposals

During the interviews, the organisations were asked for their proposals on how to improve the European asylum system. Three modification proposals were shared by all the interviewed NGOs, as follows:

1. They agreed that the Dublin Regulation should be changed. *“The first problem is that the responsibilities have to be distributed throughout all the European countries. That means that [the] Dublin Regulation must be changed because it doesn't work. Second, the welcoming system has to be standardised all over Europe so that not all migrants will want to go to the same place. Everybody should agree to a minimal level of welcoming”* (CISOM 2016).
2. There should be diplomatic relations with countries of origin that are at war, and a plan of economic development should be established for the countries of origin of the economic migrants. *“We need to invest in cooperation for the development of the countries of origin of the economic migrants. We need to create economic opportunities there, through dialogue and a diplomatic relationship with the governments of these countries”* (CISOM 2016).
3. There should be a legal and safe way to enter the European borders (e.g. a humanitarian corridor and a special visa). *“Our idea is to create a legal way to arrive in Europe and then to provide human and fair treatment to those people”* (Mediterranean Hope 2016).

Conclusion

With regard to the asylum- and refugee-related organisations, it can be stated that Italian NGOs play a fundamental role in defending the migrants', asylum seekers' and refugees' rights in Rome. The main purpose of these organisations is to provide practical support in the daily life of people in need, beginning with fundamental requirements such as food and accommodations, as well as services such as legal assistance and medical aid. Because the state is not able to fulfil its duties in implementing CEAS, the NGOs must undertake the major responsibility for doing so.

As far as the interviewed asylum- and refugee-related organisations in Rome are concerned, it can be stated that they are well connected to one another and the networks are very heterogeneous with respect to the different tasks and ways of working of the organisations. The only pattern of cooperation that could be identified has to do with the organisations' missions. In fact, organisations involved in providing services to migrants seem to cooperate with other organisations of the same type, namely NGOs. However, NGOs involved in advocating for migrants cooperate mainly with governmental organisations. Furthermore, the conditions are uncertain because the state fails to support the migrants' needs, resulting in a tendency towards isomorphism among the organisations. This can be linked to the direct interaction between their members in the work field. Cooperation among organisations is the only occasion for mutual adaptation to the most effective practices. They are shared through personal relationships between the members of different organisations. This fits the theoretical paradigms of mimetic and coercive isomorphism. Therefore, of the three hypotheses concerning the asylum- and refugee-related organisations network in Rome, two of them, Hypotheses 1a and 1b, can be verified as a result of the MAREM project analysis.

The cooperation network of the organisations involved in the RAS operations is strictly defined by formal agreements among the few organisations directly involved in the rescue missions. In this work field, GOs play a fundamental leading role, whereas NGOs must work within the GOs' hierarchy and adapt to their structures. Isomorphism among these organisations was easily observable, since transactions with the state agencies, which are necessary to pursue the rescue missions, force all the organisations to follow the same procedures and adapt to the protocol's prescriptions. Furthermore, because of the uncertainty that characterises emergency situations, these organisations endorse and adopt the best practices from the organisations that are already involved, leading to isomorphism between them. On the basis of these considerations, all three of the hypotheses concerning the RAS-related organisations' network in Rome – i.e. Hypotheses 2a, 2b and 2c – are supported by the results of the MAREM data analysis.

Despite the NGOs' contribution to the creation of a sufficient asylum system in Italy, many improvements still need to be made in order to fully implement CEAS. The actors involved in the organisations' networks believe that political intervention by the state is the most critical need, with the aim of improving legislation concerning asylum- and refugee-related

issues. The same applies to the RAS-related issues: regardless of the importance of non-governmental actors in the rescue operations, political intervention to improve and implement the European asylum system is necessary as a way of preventing both shipwrecks and the subsequent expenses related to the RAS operation.

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A Buon Diritto

Associazione Carta di Roma

Baobab Experience

CIR

CISOM

Lasciateci Entrare

Medicina Solidale

Mediterranea Hope

Senza Confine