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ANALYSIS OF THE FACTORS THAT CAN ENHANCE THE RESILIENCE OF LOCAL
COMMUNITIES TO THE PRESENCE OF LARGE IN-FLOW OF MIGRANTS FROM A SOCIAL
FABRIC PERSPECTIVE

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Terminology

Throughout the Discussion Paper, the term “migrant” will be used to indicate “Any person who changes her/his country of residence”, in line with the definition of the United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Statistics Division (1998), *Recommendation on statistics of international migration. Rev.1*. Such definition represents the overarching concept that includes any person who no longer lives in the territory of origin for a minimum duration of time, regardless the reason or the purpose underlying the movement and regardless the legal status recognized or not recognized by state authorities in the territory of destination and/or transit. It is worth noting, that, according to the UN Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers and the Members of their Families (ICRMW), people on the move beyond the age of 15, can be considered workers in line with the definition of article 2 of the convention: *The term “migrant worker” refers to a person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a State of which he or she is not a national.*

INTRODUCTION

It is indeed evident that in the last 30 years, migration¹ has become one of the most important human issues affecting and reshaping human relations and behaviours on individual, community, national and interregional level worldwide.

Data shows that from 1985 to 2015 the migrant stock has increased by 57%, from 104 to 243 million worldwide, a sharp increase from 45% recorded in the previous 25 years - from 1960 to 1985 (from 71 to 104 million).

However, besides a steady trend over the years, it is worth underlining that in terms of the share of global population, migration has increased from 2.4% in 1960 to 3.3% in 2015, and that the net migration (the worldwide ratio between emigrants and immigrants) remained the same in the considered timespan.

Notwithstanding these statistics that show a low and steady percentage of the international migrants' stock, the current migration scenario is characterized by recurrent migration shocks with sudden flows of people on the move. Driving factors of these sudden movements are to be identified in the numerous and increasing conflicts and crisis situations that, combined with declining good governance and economic development in many parts of the world, fuel periodic migration humps.

¹ In this paper the word migration is used as an “umbrella” term, including all the typologies of people that, for different reasons and length of time, are moving to another country.

This happens especially in those areas affected by sudden inflows of migrants that are – apparently unexpectedly² - moving in large numbers in different areas of the world, due to armed conflicts and/or natural or man-made disasters.

Indeed, migration is a long-term phenomenon that shapes societies. However, the way those societies are shaped, featuring the coexistence of national citizens and foreigners, depends mostly on the circumstances they come across. The first impact (the imprinting) is crucial: if the migrants are welcomed as resources and not burdens, as active players and not destitute people, the whole society might benefit. If the migrants are seen as potential gate-crashers and a threat to local culture, traditions and values, the integration process will be hampered and slowed down, if not stopped at all.

This paper attempts to unfold the concept of resilience in the field of migration (governance), starting from the moment in which this particular quality of a community is sparked, when an unexpected disturbance affects it. In this context the disturbance is represented by the sudden, large influx of migrants on a specific territory. The more local population will be resilient, the sooner all individuals involved will transform the environment for a better and successful coexistence.

In particular, this paper focuses on the impact of a large influx of mixed flows³ of migrants on local communities⁴ along the Eastern Mediterranean migration route, mainly as a consequence of the Syrian crisis.

Indeed, this inflow of people hit communities already affected by deep social and economic distress, often sparking counter reactions at individual, community and political level. Reactions provoked by the feeling of being under attack, fuelled by political inactivity, interests of some political parties and the media, all contributed to the dissemination of a distorted picture of the size and consequences of this movement, and led to the closing of the route.

In this scenario, local communities in involved areas, suffered from the fragmented and weakly coordinated response in facing the inevitable disturbance brought by the presence of hundreds of thousands of foreigners stuck on their territories, trying to provide as much of a dignified reception as possible to the newcomers while dealing with the reactions of the public opinion.

Some communities managed well and set up reasonably effective responses, others overreacted badly and responded with restrictive and rejecting policies.

This paper aims to explore the main factors that could enhance the resilience of local communities in order to draw some lessons from the migration “crisis” that could be useful in promoting sound and positive strategies for long-term responses to migrants’ integration.

The document starts with a brief analysis of the concept of resilience, from its etymological origin to its conceptual development in ecological sciences, to its current use in social sciences, pointing out the main critical, controversial aspects and limitations of the concept when it faces the complexities of human relationships.

² While many policy makers at national and local level are referring to the movement of migrants towards Europe as “refugee crisis”, few suggest to consider it as a structured phenomenon, “to which communities will have to deal and address it permanently” (Anne Brasseur, Former President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe).

³ The IOM’s Glossary on Migration defines mixed flows as “complex migratory population movements that include refugees, asylum-seekers, economic migrants and other migrants”. See Richard Perruchoud and Jillyanne Redpath-Cross (eds.), Glossary on Migration, 2nd ed., Geneva, IOM, 2011, p. 63.

⁴ The word “community” comes from the Latin *communitas*, “public spirit” (from Latin *communis*, “shared in common”), Oxford Dictionary, 2014. In sociology, A community is a small or large social unit (a group of people) who have something in common, such as norms, religion, values, or identity. In 1887, German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies proposed the first definition of Community (*Gemeinschaft*) as opposed to the one of Society (*Gesellschaft*). The former stresses personal social interactions, and the roles, values, and beliefs based on such interactions. *Gesellschaft* stresses indirect interactions, impersonal roles, formal values, and beliefs based on such interactions

Once theoretically shaped, the paper will investigate how to frame the concept of resilience in the migration field, in order to single out the main factors and conditions affecting social resilience at a certain time and under certain conditions.

In doing so, the analysis of the Turkish and Serbian experiences in dealing with large inflows of migrants will offer a source of reflection for lessons learned thus proposing a possible paradigm of resilience-oriented actions.

Finally, the paper will try to offer an operational way forward, shedding light on the interventions that (positively) influence local resilience, together with concrete proposals for their scaling up.

1. CONCEPTUALISING RESILIENCE: A (BRIEF) OVERVIEW OF THE CONCEPT EVOLUTION

Although this is a discussion paper not meant to be academic, there is the need to frame the concept of resilience, a concept that, after being unconsidered for centuries, since the Seventies has triggered theoretical research and operational modelling, especially in the social-ecological field. In the last decade resilience has been gaining currency also in the social field, including migration, becoming one of the key words in action plans and reports of many humanitarian and development agencies.

Understanding the etymological origin of the term resilience can help in shaping its significance and the way the term frames the reality.

The word resilience stems from the Latin *resilire*, from *re-salire*, or “jump back”. The Latin origin undoubtedly refers to a positive counter-action after an unwelcomed event. The term *resilire* refers to the act of jumping back on a boat after it has flipped over.

This is an important starting point, because it already highlights two elements: first, that the concept refers to something sudden and negative; second, that the counter-action brings the person back on board, to safety, regardless the state of the person or of the boat after such a negative experience.

The term resilience is also found in English literature in 1620 with the meaning of “act of rebounding”, while in 1824 another meaning appeared, the one of “elasticity”. Both meanings inform us that a blow deforms the affected body. Yet, the same blow absorbs the energy, elastically, like a sling, releasing the same energy to return to the original shape.

In the twentieth century, in the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, resilience is defined as:

1. The capability of a strained body to recover its size and shape after deformation caused especially by compressive stress;
2. An ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change.

Here the concept widens, including the stress that is provoked by an unwelcomed emergency (Latin definition) or a blow (1620 definition), emphasising the capacity of a body to recover (its size and shape) and adjust to misfortune. For the first time the term “adjust” appears.

Towards the end of the XX century, many disciplines incorporated this term in their vocabulary.

In physics, resilience is the ability of an elastic material (such as rubber or animal tissue) to absorb and release energy in order to spring back to its original shape.

In psychology, the ability to recover is viewed as analogous to a person's ability to bounce back after a jarring setback or to adjust easily to misfortune or change.

Undoubtedly, the concept of resilience was mostly developed in the ecosystem sciences. Starting from the seventies, many scholars worked on and deepened the concept.

It evolved from the emphasis put on *persistence*, the magnitude of disturbance that a system can tolerate and still persists (CARPENTER et al.). When the ecosystem studies started including social variables, the notion

of adaptability was developed, as the capacity of a system to absorb disturbance and re-organize, while undergoing change so to still retain the same functions, structure and identity (FOLKE 2006). The last step in the development of the concept included the notion of transformability, envisaging the capacity of a system to transform the environment and move to other available “landscape”, modifying the existing internal relations among ecological, economic and social components.

This evolution of the concept of resilience in the social-ecologic field paved the way to the use of resilience in social sciences. When brought into the social field, the deterministic vision of the nature, dominated by cause-effect mechanisms, was further challenged by the intentionality of human actions that are able to rule out the natural events. Furthermore, the human environment is ruled by a number of factors that challenge the cause-effect relation, like power relations among its members, the construction of reality, the ideological production etc.

A society can be challenged by three main categories of disturbances: natural hazards and disasters; natural resource management and environmental variability; social change and development issues (KECK, SARDAPOLRAK 2013, 8).

The same authors propose a dynamic reformulation of the concept of social resilience. From the initial understanding of social resilience as the capacity to respond, they suggest the inclusion of learning and adaptation notions, culminating in the acknowledgement of the important role played by governance factors, in terms of power relations in the field of politics (KECK, SARDAPOLRAK 2013, 8). Here the focus is clearly put on the transformations in the social structure that follow an unexpected or unwelcome event.

However, most of the studies on social resilience focus on the capacity of a community to cope with natural disasters and environmental variability such as earthquakes, tsunamis, water scarcity, desertification and so on.

According to these studies, when facing natural disasters and environmental variability, resilience of a social community might undergo the following steps in chronological order: absorb the consequences of the inevitable event, adapt to the consequences, organize the response, and transform the consequences into a new situation, different from the initial one. In particular, setting up a new balance requires, most of the time, the need to reconsider the old governance structure.

Rebuilding a village doesn't imply only the act of re-construction, but also new choices about how, when and what to rebuild. In this process of rethinking the environment – the community space - old social processes and power relations are usually – and easily - questioned and frequently perceived as no longer acceptable by large part of the social fabric. In such scenario, an apparent negative event allows new players to step in, bringing not only new ideas but also creating an opportunity to move from an old socio-economic framework to a new one. This requires a reshuffling of the power relation balance. And this means accepting that unexpected or unwanted event can produce something good in terms of evolution, stability and social equality. Or exactly its opposite.

When life is at stake, as in the case of a cataclysm, power relations and political disputes leave ground to instinctive solidarity and mutual care, in order to oppose the brutal forces of nature that represent an immediate danger to human lives.

But, when the disturbance is provoked by human decisions, such as the relocation of industries, infrastructure constructions (dams for instance) due to economic policy planning, or conflicts, these events involve political representation and participation, testing power relations at different levels, civil society versus institutions, local versus national institutions.

These situations trigger conflicts between the communities affected by the disturbance and the institutions that should find the proper solution to such disturbance.

In transposing all of the above in the social environment, great attention must be paid in framing the concept of resilience. To this end, the following issues must be considered as a compass to orient the identification of key factors that influence trends and evolution of resilience of local communities:

1. **Resilience refers to something sudden, unexpected and challenging.** This means that processes that are slowly changing a society – even deeply - should be excluded. Most of those changes are the result of the “sign of the times” strongly marked by economic, technological and financial transformations. It is difficult to consider them as a sudden challenge that a community has to cope with. Other changes, related to the ecological sphere, such as desertification or floods, resulting from climate change and global warming, should not raise the issue of resilience as well. Also in this case, adaptation to geopolitical, ecological, social and economic transformations is inevitable. Applying the concept of resilience requires a careful consideration whether an event must be attributed to the universe of the unexpected or if it is simply an ineluctable consequence of the time span.

2. **Resilience refers to the efforts that an individual or a community does in order to maintain the internal balance.** This does not mean that the concept of resilience has to be understood in a conservative, normative quality. The concept of resilience itself envisages the transformation of the social components towards a new balance. Under the social perspective, this means that a disturbance can be a powerful lever for social change, and an opportunity for doing new things, for innovation and development (BOHLE et al. 2009).

3. **Resilience has a lifespan.** The reactive, adaptive and transformative capacity of individuals and communities cannot last forever. It is therefore important to identify the edge of social resilience, when a social system loses its balance. This occurs when the structure is no longer able to manage and control the different stakeholders and cannot guarantee a decent life to its members, when the rule of law is substituted with the law of the stronger, when solidarity – either mechanical or organic⁵ - is replaced by unequal and unfair relationships and the redistribution of the income is driven by crude selfishness. In the aftermath of hurricane Katrina that hit New Orleans in 2005, the social fabric nearly collapsed. The federal institutions reacted slowly, the law enforcement almost disappeared and informal networks failed to maintain order. As a consequence the most vulnerable population was heavily affected. If “church leaders, family members, neighbours, non-profit activists, and responsible business owners had not deployed the resources from the civil and commercial society to address the devastation of the storm” (BOETTKE 2007), thus re-founding the social basis for new forms of domestic partnership, the social fabric would have been wiped out.

4. **Resilience is a quality of a community.** A quality that cannot be reasonably detected until a challenging event happens. It is not possible to predict how a community will react to something potentially threatening its stability. It means that the idea that resilience can be built with “toolkits” based on something that happened in the past or even in the present, cannot not be fully used because “past behaviours of the system are no longer a reliable predictor of future behaviours even when the circumstances are similar” (DUIT et al., 2010).

5. **Resilience can be measured only ex-post.** This aspect already questions whether resilience, as a quality, can be promoted or enhanced before, *ex-ante*, the immediate disturbance, like something that remains in the community and can be used in case of future events. Of course, resilience can be enhanced, but only in the aftermath of an event and only if we assume that the internal mechanisms and balance of a society are sufficiently “flexible” to be modified.

6. **To whom the concept of resilience refers.** Should the concept be referred to a society as a whole or to local communities? Usually, when a serious disturbance happens, local communities and institutions are the first port of call in emergency situations because structures at government level are not able to cope immediately in an organized way. They need time to understand and to put the responses in motion, even if already planned. Communities and local governments organize themselves, often in an autonomous and

⁵ In sociology, “mechanical solidarity” and “organic solidarity” refer to the concepts of solidarity as developed by Émile Durkheim. In the former, cohesion and integration comes from the homogeneity of individuals—people feel connected through similar work, educational and religious training, and lifestyle. In the latter, social cohesion depends on people’s reliance on each other to perform their specified tasks.

scarcely supported fashion, while the rest of the social fabric and central institutions receive an often-distorted echo of the magnitude of the disturbance.

7. Factors that could hamper the inner power of resilience. The way a disturbance is perceived strongly influences the way a community reacts. Possible reactions can be placed along a *continuum* between keeping the *status quo* (conservative position) or searching for a new balance (progressive position). In this regard, it is worth noting that what the community perceives as disturbing can be influenced. Something initially perceived as not disturbing can be presented as a major threat. This perception can be influenced by some stakeholders in the attempt to protect their own interests. As a consequence, an event potentially able to modify social participation mechanisms can trigger social tensions for, or against, the possible reshuffling of power relations.

Taking into consideration all of the above, for the purpose of this discussion paper, the concept of resilience can be framed in the following working definition that will represent the compass when adapting such concept to the field of migration:

A community is resilient when it is able to face, cope with and adapt to an event that is suddenly and unpredictably disturbing, representing a challenge to its governing structures and socio-economic relations through a transformative action. Whatever the coping strategies are, they release an inner hidden energy aimed not only to re-establish the *status quo* but also to catalyse a deep change (positive or negative) in the social fabric.

2. SOCIAL RESILIENCE IN THE MIGRATION CONTEXT

Before plunging the concept of social resilience – as framed in the previous paragraphs – there is the need to frame also the migration concept. To this end, the following elements should be considered:

1. Migration is a “total social fact”, a phenomenon that has implications throughout a society, in the economic, legal, political, and religious spheres (MAUSS 1966). Migration is an intrinsic feature of mankind that fosters a re-thinking process of human relations in line with the etymological root of the word that in ancient Greek means “to change”.

2. Although history has shown that migration is a well-appreciated experience for many, in recent times migration has become a very sensitive social and political topic. Economic evidence shows that migration is a key driver of economic development and growth. It is possible to grasp the economic impact of migration considering the global annual trend of migrants’ savings and remittances: USD 440 million. Despite its positive impact, human mobility has been encountering greater resistance up to open opposition. One of the main consequences of increasing barriers to international migration is the growing flow of people travelling through illicit channels with the involvement of illicit intermediaries. The parallel increase in conflicts, political and economic crisis and the decrease in good governance are fuelling humps of irregular migration⁶ that are becoming periodic and progressively more severe. Migration has thus attracted increasingly more political attention and migrants are often used as scapegoats of socio-economic difficulties that have little to do with human mobility. The public perception of an invasion of poor and destitute people, fuelled by certain political messages, bears relevant implications, particularly at the level of social cohesion.⁷

⁶ According to IOM, the movement that takes place outside the regulatory norms of the sending, transit and receiving countries. There is no clear or universally accepted definition of irregular migration. From the perspective of destination countries it is entry, stay or work in a country without the necessary authorization or documents required under immigration regulations. From the perspective of the sending country, the irregularity is for example seen in cases in which a person crosses an international boundary without a valid passport or travel document or does not fulfil the administrative requirements for leaving the country. <https://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms>

3. Despite its evolutionary nature, the public discourse on migration has turned from the field of social sciences to the field of law. A “natural” phenomenon like migration becomes “illegal” – bearing “pathological” consequences - when the law forbids it. The rigid control of human mobility contradicts globalisation that promotes the liberalisation of the economic and financial markets, as well as the diffusion of a globalized modern lifestyle, the erosion of the concept of centre and periphery; all elements that are to be considered in a context of spectacular evolution of means of transportation and communication. As a consequence of this approach, the term “migrant” is progressively more associated with the term “alien.” This word is a synonym for stranger, meaning a person who is “extraneous”, a word derived from the Latin “*extra*” that, in a true physical sense, refers to what is “out” compared with what is “in” (VOLPICELLI, 2015).

According to the above, migration can be defined as follow:

Migration is a “natural” experience in the life of many. As economic evidence confirms, migrants are relevant drivers of behavioural, political, economic and social change in the countries of origin, transit and destination.

When combining the two concepts of resilience and migration, three main situations can be identified where the capacity of local communities is challenged by sudden migration-related events.

1. The resilience of a community facing natural or man-made disasters is enhanced by the remittances provided by individuals that left the same community.
2. The resilience of individuals (or groups) that decided to migrate and had to cope with disturbances met along the journey.
3. The resilience of communities that host migrants in their socio-economic fabrics, both in urban and rural areas, who reached (or transited) those areas in an unregulated, disordered way, as a consequence of a sudden event.

The available literature focuses mostly on the first and second typology. The first branch of studies is carried out by ecologists, sociologists, anthropologists and economists. It focuses mainly on how both remittances and know-how from migrants abroad can help communities in origin countries in reacting to natural hazards and disasters, natural resource management - resource scarcity and environmental variability. This field of work is very similar to the studies brought forward by eco-system scientists. In this case, the analysis focuses primarily on the relations between two different groups, those that remained in the community at origin and the compatriots who migrated abroad.

The second branch of studies mainly refers to psychology. It focuses primarily on the coping, adaptation and transformation strategies of people who, voluntarily or forcibly, decide to move to another geographical area. Most of the studies focus on trauma related to the harsh circumstances experienced during the trip and the clash with foreign societies.

When the focus moves to the third area of study, there are fewer available papers.

Some studies investigated the impact of migration on societies at destination, while none addressed the resilience of societies faced by sudden inflows of hundreds of thousands (or millions) of foreigners on their territories.

Experience has shown that when a large number of people fled to different countries it was because something serious had happened in their own countries.

Just to mention some of the most recent migration humps: in Africa, two million of Tutsi were displaced from Rwanda to Uganda in 1994; in Latin America, in Colombia, massive displacement of Colombians to Ecuador, Venezuela, Costa Rica and Panama (hundreds of thousands of the 6.3 millions) occurred due to the internal conflicts; in Europe, the ex-Yugoslavia crisis produced hundreds of thousands of migrants; in the

Middle East, the civil war in Syria forced 4.8 millions of Syrians out of the country, mainly to Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan. Along with these examples we could also mention the situations of Afghanistan, Iraq and the Horn of Africa.

For the purpose of this Discussion Paper, the examples of Turkey and Serbia that will be discussed in the following paragraphs have been shortly analysed with the aim to identify and frame some key factors that influence resilience of hosting communities to the presence of migrants.

2.1 SOCIAL RESILIENCE TOWARDS LARGE MOVEMENTS OF MIGRANTS: TURKEY AND SERBIA CASES

Turkey and Serbia can represent useful sources of reflection to discuss the operational aspects of the concept of resilience in communities hosting large numbers of migrants.

TURKEY

The Government of Turkey, with the help of UN Agencies, has launched a “Regional Refugee and Resilience plan”⁸ for the years 2016/18. It envisages a number of interventions, aimed at improving the situation of both local and foreign population. The plan addresses particularly the labour market, infrastructures of local municipalities, health and social services as well as legal protection for the migrants.

This Plan was launched after many “negative coping mechanisms affecting the migrants, also lamenting lack of information, inconsistent implementation of regulations and policies, restrictions to movement, access to services as well as non existence of durable solutions. Negative coping mechanisms such as child labour and child marriage - exploitations carried out by the host community members - were also identified” (3rpsyriacrisis.org, pag.15). The Multi-agency plan envisaging “efforts undertaken through prioritized capacity-building of government institutions will also contribute to the resilience of impacted communities, while simultaneously increasing social cohesion between migrants and local residents”, seems to consider resilience as an engineering solution to the problems arising in the aftermath of people movements that involved both host and hosted population. The foreseen interventions seem to be a mechanical response to those problems. Yet, the identified problems already reveal a lack of resilience in the host population. In this regard, the actors involved in providing responses may possibly approach resilience with more careful considerations in order to enhance effectiveness of the proposed interventions.

In view of identifying some possible levers to enhance resilience, it may be useful to review the main steps of the Syrian crisis and the impact on the Turkish community⁹:

1. The migrants fled to Turkey following a civil war that turned into an international crisis.
2. The responses from both government and intergovernmental agencies were somehow slow: the crisis started in 2011 while the 3RP plan was launched in 2016. Since the beginning of the Syrian crisis, Turkey spent 10 billion dollars¹⁰ to support Syrian migrants, while the reaction of the international community was still fragmented.
3. Turkey accommodated the migrants either in tents or containers in 26 centres located in 10 cities. The migrants had an impact on communities already affected by economic and infrastructural problems.
4. Along the years, the majority of migrants left the centres/camps and moved particularly to urban areas in Turkey. They entered the labour market, got employed in construction, textile manufacturing, heavy industry and the agricultural sectors.

⁸ <http://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/3RP-Regional-Strategic-Overview-2017-18.pdf>

⁹ The information about the Syrian crisis and the impact on the Turkish community come from the Turkish Policy Quarterly, December 20, 2016, available online at turkishpolicy.com

¹⁰ <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/en/originals/2016/09/turkey-syria-refugees-mind-blogging-increase-expenses.html>

5. The increasing competition for low-skilled jobs between Syrian and Turkish labour force has fuelled resentment against the migrant workers. This issue has been only partially addressed through the issuance of work permits for Syrian workers.
6. Along the years, the crisis is turning into a chronic situation, which is putting the resilience of the social fabric of Turkish communities under severe pressure.

SERBIA

Serbia is the country that was severely hit by migrant inflow along the so-called Western Balkan Route (from now on WBR), being one of the seven entry points to the European Union (EU) for irregular migrants (among them also asylum seekers, not yet granted the refugee status).

The WBR is a well-established route to Europe. In the years 2009 and 2010 this route was used more frequently than the other major entry point to the EU, the Central Mediterranean Route (Migration Policy Institute, 2011 p.9). The WBR route became a popular passageway into the EU in 2012 when Schengen visa restrictions were reduced for the five Balkan countries – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia¹¹ (fYRoM).

In 2015, approximately 700.000 persons attempted to walk this way, transiting through Greece, fYRoM, Serbia, Hungary (or Croatia and Slovenia) and Austria (or Slovenia and Italy). Together with Syrians, also other migrants joined the flow in particular Afghanis, Iraqis and Pakistanis.

Before 2015, migrants who walked this route met almost no obstacles on their way to Europe. But the sharp increase in inflows of migrants provoked a domino effect, and one after the other the transit countries started closing their borders, limiting entries to few hundreds persons per day. Such decisions were brought in an uncoordinated way by the Governments of these countries “in the absence of a clear and coherent European response” (COUNCIL OF EUROPE 2017). For these reasons, a large number of migrants were trapped in Serbia, on the borders with fYRoM, Hungary and Croatia.

As a response to the crisis, camps were established and run by central Governmental agencies in cooperation with local NGOs and international agencies.

Today, two years after the original outbreak, logistically speaking, the situation has not changed much, with some ten thousands migrants on the Serbian territory, waiting to find a way to cross the borders separating them from their European targets.

The UNDP is currently addressing the situation through different interventions aimed at enhancing resilience of local communities¹². According to the agency’s website, “UNDP will support the affected municipalities to cope with the crisis by improving the waste management, water supply, wastewater treatment, social and health services”¹³.

In view of identifying some possible levers to enhance resilience, it may be useful to use the main steps of the Serbian crisis, as follows:

1. In 2015 there was a sharp increase in the people’s movements along the Balkan route, a well-established path towards Western Europe.
2. After an initial positive reaction, in terms of support and assistance, given the increase in the number of migrants crossing the WBR, neighbouring countries progressively intensified border controls and banned entries.

¹¹ Reference available at <http://frontex.europa.eu/trends-and-routes/western-balkan-route/>

¹² Projects “Strengthening Local Resilience in Serbia: Mitigating the Impact of Migration Crisis” and “Enhancing Local Resilience to the Migration Crisis”, both launched in 2016.

¹³ <http://www.rs.undp.org/content/serbia/en/home/ourwork/povertyreduction/resilient-development/enhancing-local-resilience-to-the-migration-crisis-.html>

3. The response to the crisis suffered from fragmentation and weak transnational coordination as well as international support.
4. Migrants were accommodated in camps, impacting communities already affected by economic and infrastructural problems.
5. In 2015 local communities, encouraged by the central government, reacted in a very supportive and dignified way, helping the foreigners with the provision of food, clothing and showing empathy towards the newcomers (UNDP 2016).
6. In spite of the governmental efforts, responses aimed to improve the living conditions of both host and hosted population are still insufficient. In 2016, local and international players started deploying more structured interventions, especially in the field of health and infrastructures.
7. Two years later, the feeling that the situation is not going to change has been fuelling increasing negative attitudes towards the migrants in the local communities¹⁴.

2.3 LESSONS LEARNED

The two examples show similar patterns that can be synthesized as follows:

- A response to the crisis that was slow and fragmented for a fairly long period of time, spread in the local communities a feeling of being left alone to address the emergency ➤ **DISTURBANCE**,
- Initial solidarity was displayed by the local population, already in distress ➤ **ACTIVE RESILIENCE**,
- Exacerbation of the relationships between the two groups, is due to the persistent weak support from agents external to the local communities ➤ **RESILIENCE DECLINE**,
- Attempt to reduce the further deterioration of a chronically difficult situation ➤ **RESISTANCE**.

Through the two case studies, now it is easier to identify gaps and misunderstandings in the current discourse of resilience of communities when targeted by large influx of people on the move.

Of course, attempts to uphold and, if possible, enhance resilience in a community envisage the provision of services and the improvement of infrastructure (shelters, health facilities and paraphernalia, waste management, labour market etc.). Yet these interventions must be planned and carried out in a consistent and coherent framework that is challenged both by time and meaning.

Immediate Disturbance

Actions should be timely, in the aftermath of a disturbance. In our case a prompt intervention would help affected communities in better coping with the unforeseen event, building consensus about the rightfulness of their response.

Active Resilience

It is the moment when a community shows its resilience, providing shelter, food, clothing, and hygienic tools, directly and informally offered in a sort of championship of solidarity.

Resilience Decline

After a while, weeks and months later, expressions of solidarity start fading, giving way to resentment towards the central Government and the International community that did not fulfil their role according to expectations, slowly pushing the community against the newcomers.

Uphold Resistance

When the community is not adequately and timely supported, the disturbance tends to get chronic. The feelings of the host population deteriorate towards delusion and despair, turning resilience into resistance. At this point, support interventions become more “mechanical”, aimed at smoothing out the hostility and

¹⁴ http://www.divac.com/upload/document/kljucni_nalazi_istrzivanja.pdf

maintaining the status-quo. The third step of resilience - the transformation of the host population through the consolidation of the feeling of being a new and strong community, the improvement of the infrastructures for all and the sense of full membership - would be difficult to achieve.

3. TOWARDS A NEW PARADIGM OF RESILIENCE-ORIENTED ACTIONS

All the above considered, whenever resilience-oriented interventions are planned and designed, several issues should be carefully considered:

- a. Enhancing resilience should not be limited to helping the community affected by a disturbance in its coping strategy. As reported in the first paragraph, the concept of resilience implies the capacity to develop a new energy that, after the first moment of legitimate stiffness, could adapt and lead to the change of community's structure (and infrastructures). Resilience should not be (mis)understood as "the ability of a community to absorb shocks and stresses to its infrastructure, and its social, cultural and economic fabric" (UNDP 2016). Addressing resilience needs a more long-term vision.
- b. Resilience-oriented actions should include the society at large, not only the community affected. The social fabric is composed by many in/formally structured stakeholders, spontaneous groups, civil society organizations, trade unions, political parties, government institutions at local and national level. Yet, although a disturbance affecting a local community does not hit the overall society in the same manner, nevertheless it can reverberate on, and produce a change in the social fabric as a whole. In the deployment of coping strategies, while the privileged recipient remains the community directly affected by the disturbance, it is necessary to envisage interventions involving the overall society.
- c. A community can cope alone with a disturbance for a limited time-span. Especially if the disturbance is related to the distress of other individuals, the migrants in this case. Generally, large inflows of people on the move take place in areas that are already struggling to maintain a decent level of life. When a community that is already in distress, is faced with other people carrying their problems, the tensions arise fast. That is the reason why the "honeymoon", the immediate solidarity shown as a reaction to the disturbance, lasts only few weeks or months. Newcomers should be relocated so that the responsibility for their safety would be shared, thus enhancing the feeling of membership and reinforcing the community values.
- d. The disturbance should be framed in a positive light in the public narration. Migration is becoming a forefront issue in political debate, and in the last twenty years it has been narrated in a very partial, confused and contradictory way. The problems stem from a distorted storytelling based on stereotypes, portraying people on the move mostly as illegal immigrants, clandestine, criminals, boat people, "gate-crashers", "invaders", people who exploit host countries' generosity. As the word suggests, storytelling relies on a story that someone is telling to someone else. Storytelling is fictitious by definition. To get out from this vicious circle that finds consensus especially in areas where the local community feels overwhelmed by foreigners, it would be important to replace the word "narrative" with the word "discourse". The latter implying "the process of understanding, reasoning, thinking".

4. OPERATIONAL WAY FORWARD

Given the above, some operational suggestions can be advanced to guide and inspire resilience-oriented interventions at community level.

- A crisis should not be left uncontrolled or unmanaged for long periods of time. Supportive measures should be planned immediately, during the development of a crisis, trying to understand the bottlenecks, foreseeing where the flow of migrants could be stuck. This is possible through a sound and careful consideration of the migration laws and border management of the countries on the route.
- A country should not be left alone to face migrants' flows. The international community, in facing mass migration flows, should help involving governments as early as possible. When interventions

- are planned and designed late, they become only patches and stitches on a wound that needs surgical attention.
- Responsibility-sharing between central governments and local institutions. Representative/s of the central government should be deployed to the affected community, coordinating interventions and keeping a constant communication with the central institutions, setting up feedback mechanisms with service providers for constant operational follow-up.
 - Initial solidarity displayed by the local population already in distress should be supported. Some steps to be taken could include the following:
 - Understanding the quality of resilience of the community affected. Carrying out a thorough and careful analysis of the community perception towards migrants, patterns stemming from past experience of similar problems – a memory of past experiences of migration or asylum seeking, core of values of the community, ethical and religious closeness with the host population.
 - Assessing the logistic and infrastructural needs of the community, deploying immediately the needed paraphernalia¹⁵ to support the community.
 - Improving the quality of the infrastructures and transforming it (increasing the capacity might not be enough). The current waste management including recycling, improving the capacity and skills of the local health centres (not only increasing the number of health practitioners in existent and often dilapidated infrastructures), planning the creation of new economic districts, evenly subsidised, where host population and migrants can develop their capacities (not just providing the newcomers with the right to work).
 - Reporting about the situation to the public audience as it is, avoiding narrations about the risks related to the foreign presence or of their suffering.
 - Relocating the migrants in other areas of the countries, avoiding camps and containers, especially in areas where the community is not facing disturbance of any kind.
 - Involving neighbouring countries and intergovernmental entities in the solution of the problem.
 - In order to avoid usual fragmentation and overlapping of interventions, a mapping of all activities implemented by international organisation and NGOs in collaboration with local CSOs should be mandatorily put in place and constantly monitored and updated.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Far from being a new buzzword in the field of human sciences, the concept of resilience represents a challenge in current panorama of the humanitarian crisis interventions. The challenge relates to the potential revolution in planning, designing and implementing of humanitarian interventions.

Resilience-oriented interventions are evolutionary because they imply a social change, its dynamics, and may envisage the subversion of the logic and power relations leading to disturbance.

By mismatching resilience with support interventions only, there is the risk that these measures unwittingly reinforce the normativity of a social fabric, its consolidated *status quo* thus preventing its evolution.

Migration always represented a powerful engine of change due to its capacity to create new connections, to move around ideas, goods and services, to create cultural, social and economic relations, and to promote open societies (STOCCHIERO 2007).

In this sense, a resilience-driven strategy could therefore promote the development of a fair, inclusive and integrated social fabric where the relations are not based on the distinction between “us” and “them”; where the “other” is valued as an opportunity, not as a threat to individuals’ identity.

Are we ready to accept this challenge?

¹⁵ Paraphernalia are the ensemble of all material and immaterial provisions displayed in a humanitarian intervention.

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