

ROMA SETTLEMENT IN CAMPOBASSO



The events of the Roma settlement in Campobasso and their integration between the community and the city (Sandro Turcio, CNR-IRPPS)

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The Roma community of Campobasso, the main city of Molise Region, has just over 200 people (232, according to a reliable estimate based on Roma surnames¹ and on municipal register record), two thirds of whom were born in Campobasso. The ancestors arrived in Italy, together with other communities, between the second half of the fifteenth century and the first decades of the following one, by sea and by land (Pontrandolfo, 2013; Spinelli, 1994²), coming from Albania and Greece to escape the advance of the Ottoman Empire. They belong to the group known as Roma Abruzzesi and are part of the largest Roma community residing in southern Italy³.

It is therefore presumable that the Roma of Campobasso, as more generally the southern ones, became Italian citizens when the unitary state was founded in 1860. Indeed, about half (43%) of the 180 thousand Roma present today in Italy, according to the highest estimate (Associazione July 21, 2018⁴), are Italian citizens.

The history of their settlement in Campobasso is more recent, starting in the second half of the 1960s (Mancini, 2002⁵). Until then they had kept the practice of seasonal nomadism by attending horse and livestock fairs between spring and early autumn, which spread from north to south, from Chieti to Foggia areas, and toward west to Benevento and Caserta areas. Instead, they used to spend «... the winter season in homes they own or rented» (ibidem, p. 134), in various Municipalities of the Campobasso area. Otherwise, as stated in a 2005 report, «if finances did not allow ... even the winter was spent not unlike the other seasons, that is outdoors, in tents and caravans» (Menaldi, 2005, p. 16⁶). As centre of the most important fairs and main city of Molise Region, Campobasso has become a coveted city so that «the Roma of the province ... at a certain moment decided to settle there with entire family groups» (Mancini, cit., P. 135).

The following map illustrates the stages of the progressive establishment of the community in the various parts of the city starting from 'Contrada Macchie' where the first Roma family group settled.

¹ Novi Chavarria E., *I cognomi del popolo rom*, manuscript published on www.researchgate.net, 2012. By the same author, see also the volume *Sulle tracce degli zingari*, Naples: Alfredo Guida Editore, 2007. The municipality of Campobasso assisted us in this update on the demographic and social dimensions of the Roma community. Among the documentary sources, it should be noted also a small research carried out by Roma girls and boys of Campobasso during a computer course in 2004.

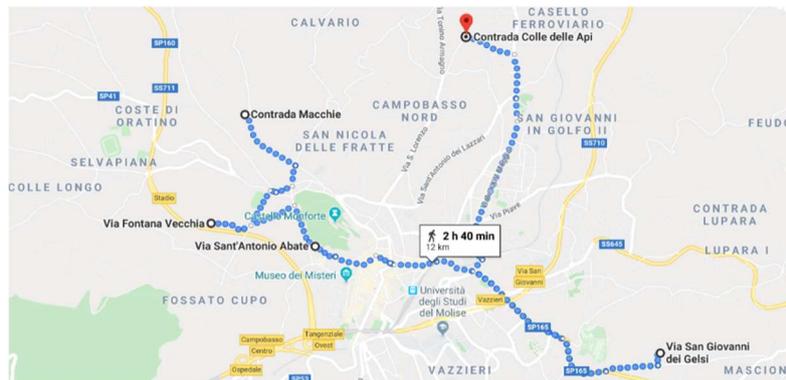
² Pontrandolfo S., *Rom dell'Italia meridionale*, Rome: CISU, 2013; Spinelli S., *Prinčkaranj. Conosciamoci, incontro con la tradizione dei Rom Abruzzesi*, Pescara: Editrice Italica, 1994.

³ According to Spinelli (1994, p. 21), the Abruzzese Roma would have arrived by land as suggested by the use of German and Serbo-Croatian words in their Romanès dialect, unlike the other groups arriving by sea, such as the Calabrian and Apulian Roma, «which do not present in their spoken German terms». The first official document attesting the presence of gypsies in Italy dates back to 1422 (<https://digilander.libero.it/vocidalsilenzio/ilmondodeirom.htm>, 13/09/2019).

⁴ Associazione 21 luglio, *Rapporto annuale 2017*, Rome: Associazione 21 luglio Onlus, 2018.

⁵ Mancini A., *I rom di Campobasso: ciclo di vita e aspetti comunitari*, in Pontrandolfo S. – Piasere L. (edit by), *Italia Romani. Volume terzo*, Rome: CISU, 2002, pp. 133-61.

⁶ Menaldi P., *Conclusioni del lavoro di ricerca svolto presso la comunità rom di Campobasso nell'ambito del progetto Urban – Italia*, manuscript, Campobasso: Opera Nomadi, Sezione provinciale di Campobasso, 2005.



Half a century has passed since the first settlements, and the community has reached its fifth generation. The degree of integration has evolved into a relationship with the city of mutual attribution of alterity (“othering”). Many things have changed: economic activities, endogamy, primary education, relations with civil society and services and even gender and generational relations. Nevertheless, communities and cities continue to live parallel lives, in reality inevitably intersected.

Scrolling through these changes, a privileged witness of civil society we met (a local parish priest) said that few fireflies, or individual cases, do not illuminate. On the other hand, a privileged witness of the community, a small Roma entrepreneur, suggested that we have to find working solutions for the community based on large family groups. From different points of view, these positions reflect the existence of alterity: an integration model that follows the traces of its history (path dependency) made up of mistrust, prejudices, closures.

The European strategy for Roma inclusion, adopted in Italy by UNAR, runs on four axes of intervention or social areas: education, training and work, health and social services, housing. To facilitate access to these rights/services, the creation of a technical cooperative table (Roma Table), is also planned: it can be established even at municipal level with the participation of the main local stakeholders involved in the above four areas and representative bodies of the Roma community.

How does the degree of Roma inclusion in Campobasso look from this perspective? The hypothesis of the training we start is to open a democratic space of mutual learning and cooperation between operators and Roma on the following theme: the degree of integration of the Roma in Campobasso is good, above all thanks to the fact that they are Italian citizens, but it is firm. Why? What are the limits of the city and what are the limits of the community? What else can we do in Campobasso to overcome mutual prejudices and mistrusts, and encourage greater active participation in rights and civil society?



1. Demographic characteristics

Before going into the merits of our questions, it is useful to examine more closely the demographic structure of the Roma community based on a municipal database. Only personal data (age, gender, residence and demographic movement) can be obtained from the register. Information on the degree of social inclusion of the Roma, with particular reference to the four areas of the European Strategy, was collected through interviews with privileged witnesses.

Initially, the database had more than 350 people, a number similar to that provided by a small school research conducted by Roma girls and boys in 2004. Having detected several inconsistencies, the municipality of Campobasso worked for updating the database, reaching the indicated number (231 at 31 December 2018). However, according to the doubts of a privileged witnesses (a Roma woman), it could be underestimated: there are movement inside the community for marriages or new couples between Roma or mixed (usually man gypsy/female non-gypsy) that probably escape registration.

The database in our possession are higher than the statistics contained in Mancini – according to which at the end of 1997, the community was made up of 186 people, for a total of 25 families divided into three settlements – and the Menaldi's most recent study, according to which 213 Roma lived in Campobasso at the beginning of 2006.

According to our database, the Roma community of Campobasso consists of 352 individuals. M4R and the Municipality of Campobasso updated it in the following table:

- Resident in Campobasso	232
- Transferred to another municipality	77
- Deceased	27
- Unknown at the registry office	16
Totale	352

A first interesting fact is the relative young age of the community residing in the city. The average age is 35.9 years, much lower than that of the Campobasso population as a whole: 46.1 years. This means, on the one hand, that Roma families continue to be on average more numerous than non-Roma ones; on the other hand, that the weight of adolescents reduces that of older Roma, attributable to the second generation (over 60, equal to 14.6% of the sample). The first generation that of the progenitors has disappeared, while the third and fourth generation make up the large segment of the adult and active population, of varying degrees of kinship. The last generation, the fifth, the one belonging to the so-called *millennials*, accounts for about 30%. There are 50 children and pre-adolescents (up to 13 years of age), over a fifth of the resident community, but they are also - in constant of low fertility - a resource to be exploited, promoting, for example, greater education.

Popolazione Rom e città di Campobasso (01.01.2019)

Classi età	Numero	%	Numero	%	Diff. %
1-10 yrs	39	16,8	3.990	8,1	8,7
11-20 yrs	29	12,5	4.417	9,0	3,5
21-30 yrs	31	13,4	5.444	11,1	2,3
31-40 yrs	38	16,4	5.842	11,9	4,5



41-50 yrs	43	18,5	7.093	14,5	4,1
51-60 yrs	18	7,8	7.534	15,4	-7,6
61-70 yrs	13	5,6	6.421	13,1	-7,5
71-80 yrs	13	5,6	4.788	9,8	-4,2
81 e+	8	3,4	3.520	7,2	-3,7
Totale	232	100,0	49.049	100,0	

Source: Municipality of Campobasso

A second noteworthy aspect is the eccentricity of the composition by gender. Unlike what is usually observed in demographic statistics, where women prevail over males and even Campobasso is not an exception to the rule from this point of view, in the community males (124) outnumber females (108).

Unfortunately, from the database it is not easy to reconstruct with certainty the number of families in the Roma community. The holders of the personal data sheet are 77, which if compared to the number of Roma residents returns an average family composition of three people, an absolutely incomparable figure to what is inferred from Mancini's study, for which the average composition rises to over seven people (7.4). Relating this average to the Campobasso Roma population, the number of households should be around 31-32 units. From this point of view, further work could be carried out by listening to the community and the choices relating to the formation of the couple and the family arrangement.

2. Housing

In Campobasso there are no nomad camps: all Roma live in decent civilian homes and in non-degraded neighbourhoods. Residential ownership is widespread in the first two settlement areas; in the San Giovanni area, social housing. In Via Sant'Antonio Abate, especially in the final part of the road, at the foot of Monforte and the historical city centre, the settlement arose through a process of ecological succession, which occurs when a total population change happens in a given urban space (a neighbourhood or other specific area). According to Mancini (cit., p. 135), the succession began when the first Roma families settled «in dilapidated houses but today almost all have been renovated». From that moment, Menaldi continues (cit., P. 46) «began the depopulation of Sant'Antonio Abate by the *gagé* [non-Roma], many of whom feared the arrival of Roma as neighbours and preferred to sell own houses and moving to other areas of the city».

The settlement in the area of S. Giovanni dei Gelsi, on the other hand, arose as a result of political-territorial choices in the field of social housing starting from the 1980s. Here the families live in condominiums alongside other low-income families living in social housing. Roma families are also present in social houses of the CEP district and in the buildings built near via Sant'Antonio Abate. An official from the local IACP office, interviewed as a privileged witness, reports that relations between Roma and *gagé* are good neighbourly, that their homes are clean and that there are no critical backlog situations. People sometimes complain because they make noise and because they use the common parts of the building for housework (for example for tomato sauce), but there are no cases of social intolerance.



The Roma homes are located above all in the peripheral area of the city, assuming as the city centre Piazza Vittorio Emanuele around which an ideal circumference has been designed with a radius of one kilometre, within which also Via Sant'Antonio Abate falls. All the documentary sources on the Abruzzese Roma community of Campobasso describe the settlement of Via Sant'Antonio Abate, which has gone down in Campobasso history as the *neighbourhood of the gypsies*, as the pulsating centre of the community, where the Roma spend much of their daily time.

3. Health

Being Italian citizens, all Roma in Campobasso registered with the National Health Service and accessing health services like all other citizens. In general, they therefore enjoy good health due to the quality of the health services offered by the regional health system and the effectiveness of the services it provides: directly, through their own facilities, and indirectly, through those with agreements.

Our database does not allow us to establish how many Roma families are exempt for low income from the payment of tickets on pharmaceutical and outpatient services. The threshold, set by regional legislation, is 8,263.31 Euros, increased up to 11,362.05 in the presence of the spouse and an additional € 516.46 for each dependent child. This type of survey is not part of the research tasks of the project, but it would be interesting to know the data as an indicator of the economic conditions of the Roma.

On the side of participation in health rights, an excerpt from Mancini's study (cit., P. 152) should be noted where he states, regarding the rites of young women (*runmniá*) between pregnancy and baptism, that they «generally give birth in hospital ... [and] undergo regular medical examinations and this justifies the fact that almost no reference to magical-religious practices of childbirth emerged from the interviews»⁷.

4. Education

The relationship community/ school / education is a critical aspect in the light of the European and national strategy for the inclusion of Roma, Sinti and Caminanti (RSC). On the one hand, there is the best practices of primary school inclusion, stubbornly achieved over the years thanks to projects and other initiatives by the Municipality, the schools and NGOs; on the other hand, the low participation in higher education.

The role of the community in determining the current criticality was fundamental. In the Roma culture of Campobasso there is the prejudice, fuelled in its effects by the more general crisis of attraction of the educational system, that the school is an expression of "othering" from oneself. The important thing is to be able to read and write: the rest of education is something that teenagers

⁷ Mancini refers to the practices of popular medicine made up of rites, ancient knowledge, formulas and faith that have had ample space in the past especially in the peasant world, described by Carlo Levi in the autobiographical novel *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* (1945).



can do without. A patriarchal cultural which, moreover, has a different impact on individual preferences: «while for men – observes Menaldi (op. Cit., P. 42) – the systematic drop out of school after primary school is a choice, for women is a prohibition that cannot be violated».

If it is not just culture that keeps Roma adolescents' participation in higher education levels low, the most sensitive part of the community complains about the high and often prohibitive costs of supporting children and grandchildren in the education system beyond compulsory school.

In this regard, during a recent national seminar held in Bologna⁸, Fabiana Forni of the Municipality of Bologna and contact person of the “National project for the inclusion and integration of Roma, Sinti and Caminanti children”, reiterated the importance of not stopping at the successes achieved in the large metropolitan cities in terms of primary school inclusion of Italian and non-Italian Roma, inviting the representatives of the municipal administrations attended at the conference to do more and better through consultation with families and educational institutions.

According to a privileged witness we interviewed, a manager of a primary education school (from 5 up to 13 years), the participation of Roma children and pre-adolescents and their families in school events does not differ much from that maintained by other families and pupils. The Roma who participated in the Need Assessment (focus groups) said they were satisfied with the degree of interrelation between school, pupils and families and that they were not subject, except in one particular case, to exclusions and discrimination. Linguistic difficulties due to bilingualism persist (Italian and Romanès), even if they are diminishing because of the increasing enrollment of Roma children in kindergarten.

Quickly overcoming the language gap is important to reduce the risks, which emerged during the focus groups, of seeing the gap transform into discontinuity in attendance, greater disaffection and perception of scholastic failure and - to quote Galimberti - of "no future", announcing the early exit of Roma boys and girls from the education system with a high probability of returning illiteracy.

Roma Community by level of education (2005)

- Illiterate	39	18,3
- Preschool age	15	7,0
- First level primary school	37	17,4
- Second level primary school	112	36,2
- Secondary school diploma	9	4,2
- Graduate	1	0,5
TOTALE	213	100,0

Source: Menaldi (op. cit. 37)

5. Work and training

⁸ “Be inclusive. Esperienze e buone pratiche per l’inclusione dei bambini Rom, Sinti e Caminanti”, Bologna 9 and 10 September 2019. The seminar was part of the actions envisaged by the PON project “National Project for the inclusion and integration of Roma, Sinti and Caminanti children” (ESF 2014-2020), and by the European project "RISE - Rome Inclusive School Experiences" promoted and coordinated respectively by the Municipality of Bologna and the Department of Education of the University of Bologna.



The last piece of the national RSC inclusion strategy concerns the second most critical aspect of the relationships between communities and cities: access to work and training. Prejudices are reversed: how much does the city weigh on the high unemployment of Roma adults in the community? All the young Roma who participated in the focus groups declared themselves unemployed and the community's request for work was reiterated on every occasion of the project meetings.

When the community settled in Campobasso, the main economic activity was the horse and livestock market. Today, and for several years already, this is no longer the case. With this change, the economic activities of women outside the home also disappeared almost completely: *mangel* (begging), palmistry, petty theft. With a burst of pride and personal dignity, the Roma girls of the last generations have waged a personal battle for emancipation from the traditional patriarchal culture, so much that the *mangel* turns out to be a residual practice occasionally exercised by the older women of the community.

However, for a “gypsy” to find work is not easy. Economic activities have diversified: the horse market has been replaced by that of cars; there are a couple of small entrepreneurships that carry out unskilled activities in the service sector and that support the income of more than one household; unskilled seasonal workers (especially bricklayers and carpenters); some temporary jobs in unskilled services following work grants and internships provided by the Municipality. For the rest, the greatest risks of social deviance (dealing, usury, frauds) are often around the corner.

The recommendation of a “gage”, a non-Rom, who acts as guarantor of the Roma person, seems to be indispensable to work. Without it, things get complicated. In an informal interview, a local small entrepreneur said he would not hire a young Roma because he would not feel safe. Even in this case a firefly does not light up the universe, in the sense that it cannot be generalized. However, one fact leaps to the eye again: that after more than half a century of settlement and integration history of the Roma community in Campobasso there is no Roma municipal employee and the same applies, with rare exceptions, to other territorial offices of the public administration.

As aforementioned, an important channel of possible job placements passes through professional training, provided by the Municipality and by the Region that unfortunately guarantee few employment opportunities. Over the past two years (2017-18), 25 young Roma have benefited from these training activities. An ATS official told me the story of a girl who received a job offer out of town following a job grant. The father did not want to, but following the insistence of the official on the girl and of the latter on the father, “who remained outside the door the day she went to sign the agreement”, after a few days the Roma girl started taking the bus to work.

Vocational training opportunities, even if still not very effective, work like schools as a containment of the otherness between city and community, between low schooling of the Roma and distrusts of civil society. They keep the community / city relationship alive, especially with reference to the younger Roma who have always expressed their appreciation for these occasions.



First remarks

According to the objectives of the National RSC Strategy, the Campobasso reality appears to be very advanced if compared to situations where Roma often experience stories of violation of fundamental human rights or have recently started an inclusive path.

Several Roma families have received the REI (Inclusion Income) and have applied for the new Citizenship Income, of which the data on the beneficiaries does not yet know.

All Roma have a roof over their heads and take care of themselves. Much has been done to reduce illiteracy and guarantee the right to education of children and pre-adolescents for the benefit of the greater well-being of the Roma community and the city: no one has been left behind. Work and income composition follow many different paths and the Municipality is committed with its resources and interventions to support the inclusion of young Roma and other disadvantaged groups.

Can anything else be done? The formative hypothesis of Municipality4Roma does not reach conclusions on what to do to improve the relationship between community and city to overcome closures and mistrust. It is not his job to do so, at least at this stage of the project. However, in the light of the results of this context analysis, the question arises with the aim of shaking up the status quo and raising, through the democratic method of listening and sustainable proposal, the integration model towards new inclusive goals.