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Spatial, Design, Landscape & Socio-economic Dimensions

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EDITOR:

Prof. Aspa Gospodini,

University of Thessaly

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E-mail: grafima@grafima.com.gr

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The management of migrants' emergency in Sicily (Italy), between suspension of rights and controversies of planning

V. Todaro

Department of Architecture, University of Palermo, Viale delle Scienze, Building n.14, Palermo, Italy

Corresponding author: E-mail: vincenzotodaro@hotmail.it, Tel: +39 091 23865442

Abstract

The attention of the media and international news is addressed to the migration issues, just during the landings of illegal migrants, and especially when these landings are linked to the deaths of migrants. However, for nearly thirty years, Sicily, among the Southern European regions most affected by the phenomenon of migration flows, has assumed the role of “gate” which introduces to Europe from Africa, making a bridge among nearest worlds, but often extremely different. This condition is, in fact, a historical value, given that Sicily has always been the crossroads of migration flows among Mediterranean Europe, Asia and Africa which allowed the exchange among cultures, ethnicities and religions.

When we talk about immigration in Sicily, therefore, we refer nowadays to a structural reality, which the Islanders have generally agreed with the sense of hospitality and openness. Over the last thirty years, however, this phenomenon, to the different ways with which often occurs (the territorial scale of the phenomenon, the considerable increase of flows, the different ethnic groups, emerging conflicts and latent ones, the inadequacy of policies etc.) and in relation to issues of inclusion/exclusion processes, poses many problems affecting even, from a social, spatial and economic point of view, urban and territorial planning (Sandercock, 2000; Lo Piccolo, 2006).

In particular, the controversial experience of the migrants' reception centers, expected by Italian laws for the state of emergency generated by great flows of migrants, produces a state of exception, characterized by the suspension of the rights/norms that is paradoxically legalized (Schmitt, 1922; Agamben, 2005).

State of emergency and state of exception transform these centers in “juridically indistinct places” (Agamben, 2005), where migrants' rights are temporally suspended.

Agamben, in fact, argues that the state of exception, which was meant to be a provisional measure, became in the course of the twentieth century a normal paradigm of government in emergency conditions.

The aim of this paper is to explore the controversial and unclear role that planning, as policies and spatial planning, carries out in the “migrants reception policies” related to realization of the reception centers. In these cases, planning is used as an instrument of oppression and exclusion (Sandercock 1998; Friedmann, 1973; Healey 1997), transforming the places of reception in zones of subjugation and control.

Keywords: International migratory flows; state of emergency; state of exception; Sicily (Italy); planning.