STRATIFICATIONS OF THE IMMIGRATION LANDSCAPE A CASE STUDY ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF MILAN

ESSAY 92/05

BARANZATE IMMIGRATION LANDSCAPE

Baranzate is an autonomous municipality of about 12.000 inhabitants on the outskirts of Milan. During its history, since the political Unification of Italy, the town has gradually transformed from an agricultural village to an industrial center that, already after the First World War, began to attract flows of immigrants from the southern Italian regions. After the Second World War, its population grew considerably thanks to the increase in Italian immigration and – more recently– from abroad. With over a third of immigrants among its population, today Baranzate is the Italian municipality

-with more than 5,000 inhabitants- with the highest percentage of foreign people. Consequently, the town changed its original housing structure with the establishment of neighborhoods inhabited mainly by foreign citizens.

Is it possible to identify an immigration landscape and its visual characteristics that best describe the settlement dynamics? This paper tries to answer this question by means of images that can show the traces of housing processes and of the difficult paths towards a progressive integration of immigrants into the Italian society.

THE CASE STUDY: STATE OF THE ART AND SCIENTIFIC METHOD

Italy has always been a crossroads of migratory flows, favored by its climate and central position in the Mediterranean area that have facilitated accessibility. After the unification of the national State, and particularly in the last quarter of the 19th century, demographic pressure and scarcity of resources delayed economic development and triggered considerable emigration flows. Millions of Italians left their country from 1875 to the First World War (Commissariato Generale dell'Emigrazione, 1926). Since the first postwar period, the demographic policies of the fascist regime discouraged emigration, while the industrial development of the country generated internal movements, especially from the southern and the northeastern regions, directed towards the capital of the kingdom and the northwestern 'industrial triangle'. The flows started again after the Second World War until the end of the economic boom and then began to slow down. Nevertheless, their traces on the landscape in the destination regions were remarkable, particularly in the urban suburbs, which often developed in a disorderly way in order to provide housing to immigrants.

The literature about this topic is enormous: among the milestones of research on Italian emigration, we recall the numerous papers presented during the XXVI Italian Geographic Congress held in Genoa in 1992 (Cerreti, 1996). As regards Italian internal mobility, among the numerous researches published in the same years with historical retrospective purposes, we mention the one edited by Arru and Ramella (2003). Finally, a good work on contemporary movements is the one edited by Colucci and Gallo (2015). Since the 1980s, following the downsizing of industries in northern Italy, internal mobility drastically declined and a more consistent immigration phenomenon from abroad began, especially from non-EU countries. The expression 'non-EU countries' has been replaced in the last twenty years by 'countries with strong migratory

pressure', also including some countries that have recently joined the European Union, in particular those of Eastern Europe, such as Poland, Hungary, former Czechoslovakia, States of the former Yugoslav Federation, etc. (Blangiardo, 2012, p. 9).

Among the best-known studies in the geographical field, we mention the collection of essays edited by Bellencin Meneghel and Lombardi (2002). For over twenty years, ISMU Foundation carried out systematic and in-depth studies on immigration in Italy and every year publishes, in addition to monographic works, also the Ventiseiesimo Rapporto sulle migrazioni 2020 (Fondazione ISMU, 2021): in 2020, it issued the 26th edition. In Lombardy, immigration from countries with strong migratory pressure was particularly intense: on1January 2021, they amounted to 1.142.606 people, 11.5% of the regional population (ISTAT, 2021). Furthermore, in the region there are some of the Italian municipalities —with a population of over 5.000 inhabitants—with the highest percentage of foreigners: at the top of the national ranking, we find Baranzate, in the province of Milan, where one resident out of three is a foreign citizen. Regarding the case study of Baranzate, ISMU published a monograph (Lucarno, 2011a) while short essays by the same author appeared in 2003 (pp. 264-275) and some updates in subsequent years (2013; 2018; 2019).

The town has been the subject of some national press articles: we mention Berberi and Bernasconi (2011) who deal with immigration from the point of view of the implications on the human landscape. A work by Sarcinelli (2011), concerning the Gypsy community settled in the territory, dealt with aspects of a geopolitical nature, while a doctoral dissertation on Human Geography studied the characteristics of Chinese immigrants (Gasperini, 2016). These are two field works of a certain value, as they concern particularly reserved ethnic groups who are not very willing to collaborate in socioanthropological investigations. The local editions of national newspapers have also published many articles that highlight the most striking and original aspects of the integration

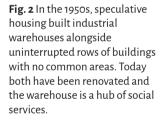
laboratory that the municipality, parishes and educational institutions have set up for the immigrant population. Among the most significant, we mention the articles by Fiori (2017) and Lambruschi (2011), which focus the attention on the most visible aspects of poverty shared by both the Italian and immigrant populations. However, the papers and monographs concerning the stratifications of urban development on the anthropic landscape of Baranzate are much less numerous than the research works concerning migratory dynamics. We mention the work by Montedoro (2012), notable for the urban regeneration projects of the town, and the monograph by Barazzetta (2015) about the Glass Church of Baranzate, one of the most significant ecclesial architectural achievements of the diocese of Milan, built between 1956 and 1957, testimony of the period of the greatest economic development of Baranzate (Figure 1). Finally, regarding the most recent results of the urban transformation place in the town, see the articles of Pignataro (2020) and "Baranzate: ex capannone trasformato in un hub di servizi sociali" (2021) which document the transformation of a former industrial warehouse into a hub for the provision of social services (Figure 2).

Fig. 1 The Glass Church of Baranzate (built in 1957).



The aim of this work is to investigate an original topic of immigration in this Lombard municipality, examining the traces of the various immigration waves on the urban landscape and comparing the current state of the art, which has rapidly evolved over the last five years, with the situation described in previous works. This process is evident in the comparison, also by means of images, of the forms of public and speculative housing built in the 1950s with the modern residential condominiums built to receive the population after the economic boom of the following decades. The geographic location of these different building models also follows a process of development of the urban area that is highlighted through the territorial stratification of the different settlement phases. Today the poorest and most problematic neighborhood is the one currently inhabited almost exclusively by foreign immigrants, the same one that, in the first decades after the end of the Second World War. hosted the immigration waves from southern Italy.

Is it possible to imagine that a similar social and settlement evolution could also affect the foreign population in the next decades? What socio-economic and urban





planning interventions will have to start in order to achieve an effective process of integration and economic progress of immigrants? Finally, we want to identify the conditions that can increase the success of possible virtuous strategies of immigrants' integration and transformation of suburban ghettos into residential neighborhoods where the various ethnic groups live in peaceful and civil coexistence. The statistical data of the population of Baranzate were provided by the *Ufficio Anagrafe* of the municipality, updated as of 30 June 2021, while the information about the most recent municipal projects that have transformed the urban and social structure in the last five years have been obtained from direct interviews with local administrators in July 2021. On-site inspections for the acquisition of the iconographic material followed in the same month.

BARANZATE: HISTORICAL-GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT AND IMMIGRATION PROCESSES AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Baranzate is a town of 12.113 inhabitants in the province of Milan, close to the northwestern outskirts of the regional capital, of which it has now become a contiguous appendix¹. Its position, along the axis of the Varesina state road and near the motorway axes towards Turin and the northwestern lakes, has for a long time favored its accessibility and industrial vocation. In fact, in the second half of the 19th century, pharmaceutical, mechanical and chemical industries arose here and, during the 20th century, attracted strong immigration flows from other Italian regions. This fact caused the assimilation of the indigenous population –in 1936, the inhabitants were still only 851- and its cultural traditions. Migration flows accelerated after Second World War and led to a disorderly expansion of residential constructions, thanks to the lower price of building land compared to those in Milan. Building speculation erased almost all the pre-existing topographical and road references



Fig. 3 The oratory of *San Vincenzo* is the oldest building in the town.



Fig. 4 The Gorizia district, along a narrow street, was a disordered sequence of popular housing for Italian immigrants built after the Second World War.



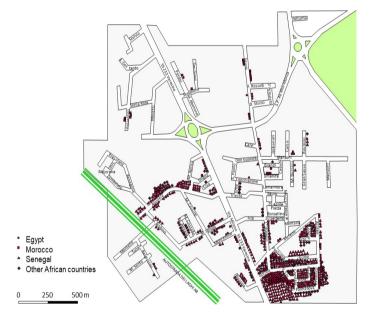
Fig. 5 The Gorizia district, residential houses alternating with big speculative housing buildings.

of the 19th century town, of which only the 17th century church of *San Vincenzo* and some traditional Lombard rural houses survive (Figure 3). The old traces of the urban structure disappeared with the construction of a series of seven-eight-storey buildings in the so-called Gorizia district, around the homonymous street near the border of the municipality of Milan (Figure 4). The buildings were built without a planned urban project, in order to maximize the exploitation of the existing land, minimizing the size of courtyards, common areas and even streets, without parking and green areas. They are alternated with only a few pre-existing smaller residential houses, suffocated in a disordered and repulsive line of structures (Figure 5)².

Until the 1970s, the purchase of a house represented the main objective of the migration project for families coming from the depressed countryside of the southern and northeastern regions of Italy. However, following a settlement pattern, common to many cities affected by strong immigration pressure (Lucarno, 1996), when the economic well-being and the social level increased, the next generation began to move north, in search of better housing solutions. Their next stop was the northern district of Baranzate, where single-family houses or more modern and valuable apartments, with larger common areas and better accessibility, were available. Here, they took over from families who had arrived twenty years earlier and, in turn, having improved their social position, moved even further away from the degraded suburbs of Milan, to neighboring municipalities, in search of even better homes. Therefore, as on a conveyor belt, the path of the immigrants started from the first accommodation point, the Gorizia district, moving northward in stages and the distance was proportional to the social progress achieved (Lucarno, 2011b, p. 25). Since the 1980s, with the same settlement pattern, increasing numbers of foreign immigrants replaced internal migratory flows. However, the population of the municipality, after exceeding 10.000 inhabitants, has somewhat stabilized, as the arrival of foreigners was balanced by Italians who

moved elsewhere. Via Gorizia thus became the axis of a multiethnic neighborhood, a first landing place for immigrants –often irregular— who crowded into homes where no Italians wanted to live anymore. Only after a few years they moved further north, as soon as their economic conditions improved, replaced by other immigrants and replacing Italians who were moving elsewhere. Today there are very few Italians living in the Gorizia district, only the poorest: now they are a small minority in an area that they no longer recognize as their own place of identity (Figure 6).

Fig. 6 Map of the urban area of Baranzate shows the housing location of Africans. Immigrants from other continents roughly follow the same distribution pattern (Lucarno, 2011a).



RECENT EVOLUTION OF AN IMMIGRATION HUB

Until 2004, Baranzate was part of the municipality of Bollate. Only in that year, it became an autonomous municipality with an area of only 2.78 square kilometers, largely urbanized, and a rather high demographic density -4.347 inhabitants per square kilometer. From 2010 to 2021 the total population increased by only 5.6%, becoming 12.086 inhabitants, but while the Italians



Fig. 7 Part of a 19th century Lombard rural courtyard house, renovated for residential purposes and incorporated into the urban structure of the town.



Fig. 8 Example of industrial architecture of the 20th century.



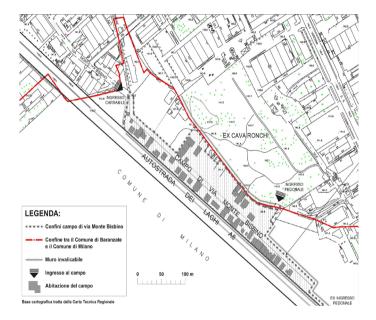
Fig. 9 An abandoned industrial site of the first half of the 20th century.

decreased by 6.0%, the current 4.075 foreigners increased by two-fifths, from 25.5% to 33.7% of the total, without counting unregistered people, whose consistency is not easily assessed. Like many other towns in the area around Milan, the urban structure shows a disorderly development, abandoned industrial areas, degraded housing units and is crossed by axes of great communication. Alongside the main roads, "non-places" have developed (Augé, 1996): they are shopping centers and large-scale distribution warehouses, equipped with large parking areas that have further increased the already high ratio of cemented surface in the territory.

As many towns without their own peculiar identity due to a continuous turnover of the immigrant population, in recent decades Baranzate has acquired the image of a problematic place, where the foreigners are affected by social problems that are difficult to solve: widespread poverty, housing emergencies, education, integration, petty crime, confinement in ghettos. In the last twenty years, the major signs of social marginalization have been the massive use of social assistance, the inability to cope with housing costs, and early school leaving. The municipality is too close to Milan to preserve the characteristics of an agricultural center. The building speculation has in fact almost eliminated any cultivable areas. However, the town is also not well integrated into the organization of the city, of which it only partially shares the public transport services. Without being a rural center anymore, Baranzate is not a real town, but a set of blocks with promiscuous activities, dependent on external managerial functions, without identity and even, sometimes, reciprocal interactions. The most obvious feature of the urban landscape is the progressive deterioration of the buildings. The lack of care by the owners derives also from the uncertainty of their rent when the tenants are insolvent. Nevertheless. the landscape also reveals the historical stratification of the different phases of urban development: the rural one of the 19th century (Figure 7), the industrial one of the 20th century (Figure 8), the building speculation of the second post-war period, the abandonment of industries in the last forty years (Figure 9).

As in a geological series, the various strata emerge in areas where the different stages of development have prevailed. These are often non-communicating neighborhoods or production areas, sometimes physically separated by missing or over-saturated infrastructural axes. The most striking example of the lack of integration between housing sites and different ethnic groups is the presence of the Kanjaria. They are a semi-nomadic group of varying consistency over the year, from about 100 to 300 units, settled since 1988 on the southwestern margins of the municipal territory, on an area of

Fig. 10 Map of the nomad camp before the partial demolition because of the construction of a motorway junction. It is located in the municipality of Milan, but the only access is from Baranzate.



about 2.5 hectares. They own the ground —an area once used as an industrial landfill— which they bought to allocate their caravans or to build makeshift homes there, after the Milan City Administration had introduced restrictions on the parking of nomadic caravans on the municipal territory. Over time, more and more buildings arose and, although they are all illegal, the authorities cannot demolish them without raising problems of relocation of the community, which also has many minors (Lucarno, 2003, 2018; Sarcinelli, 2011).



Fig. 11 Two-storey house in the nomad camp of Via Monte Bisbino.



Fig. 12 Wooden house in the nomad camp of Via Monte Bisbino.



Fig. 13 Eclectic-style house in the nomad camp of Via Monte Bisbino.

It is therefore a 'nomad camp' different from the common meaning as it is not authorized or assisted by public bodies, but a private property for all practical purposes (Figure 10). The ground is actually located within the municipality of Milan. from which it is however separated by architectural barriers – fences, motorway junctions. The only access is located on Via Monte Bisbino, in the municipality of Baranzate, so the territory can be considered as a municipal pene-exclave, accessible only after crossing the territory of a neighboring municipality (Robinson, 1959, p. 283). The inhabitants are often irregular immigrants, sometimes engaged in activities on the margins of the law, with conflicts with the population of Baranzate due to their difficulty in establishing cultural relationships and in adapting their life to the basic rules of civil coexistence. The precariousness of housing structures, without connections to urban services and regular energy supplies, is the consequence of their high temporary mobility to other locations –especially in France and the Balkan countries. The buildings, all singlestorey or exceptionally two-storey houses (Figure 11), are often made up of messy shacks built in light materials, in some cases in masonry (Figure 12), with rather kitsch eclectic styles, also in the interior furnishings.

These 'villas' concretize, in the owners' imagination, the aspiration to an idealized status symbol, often conforming to styles conveyed by Hollywood images or by representations of fantastic places (Figure 13). They probably represent the synthesis of veiled aspirations to be rooted in the territory without giving up the traditional freedom of the nomadic culture and its transgressive side. The building of the neighboring *Expo 2015* site represented an important turning point in the life of part of this community. The construction of a motorway junction involved the expropriation of about half of their land and the demolition of part of the houses: the owners, with the compensation received, bought housing units in the Gorizia district, where they moved not without generate problems of coexistence and cultural incompatibility with immigrant communities already integrated into city life.

What remains of the nomadic district of Via Monte Bisbino today appears even more degraded, limited among abandoned industrial areas, motorway ramps that rise above the height of the roofs, illegal landfills and previous agricultural canals that, in case of floods, overflow the road access (Figure 14).

CURRENT URBAN MANAGEMENT POLICIES AND LANDSCAPE CONSEQUENCES

For over thirty years, Baranzate has represented a frontier of immigration in Italy, both for the percentage of foreigners and for the obstacles that arise along their way to integration. To solve these problems, the school, the municipality and the catholic church operated getting different results. For several years, educational institutions registered an increasing number of enrollments of foreign students: in 2017 the local Istituto Comprensivo "Gianni Rodari" recorded only 26% of Italian students –or of Italian origin – out of a total of about 800 students enrolled. The number of enrollments varies considerably during the school year due to frequent family transfers and the school management has not provided more recent data. The school is engaged in a difficult skill of teaching the basic Italian language, citizenship education and integration of various cultures. The municipality and the social services face a permanent emergency on the fronts of education, housing, linguistic and work integration, the fight against petty crime caused by poverty and unemployment. Religious institutions, in particular Sant'Arialdo parish, which has jurisdiction over the Gorizia district, materially assist the poor, regardless of their religion. In recent years, thanks to the contribution of the Bracco Foundation, it has also activated cooperatives and small startup enterprises to initiate immigrants, after a first period of assistance, to empower themselves and autonomously run businesses in order to become employers. Other parish initiatives are the establishment of counseling centers and the promotion

of collaborations among immigrant families to achieve emancipation, partially replacing social services (Lucarno, 2018, 2019).

However, a few years ago a breakthrough started in the management of social policies following the disposal and redevelopment of the *Expo 2015* area, located in the municipality of Rho but almost next to the town of Baranzate. At the conclusion of the international event, the problem arose about the reconversion of a 110 hectares area that could no longer return to its original agricultural vocation, nor be entirely destined for new exhibition purposes. The endowment of infrastructures and buildings and the high accessibility had already suggested possible projects – university campuses, research centers, academies, project centers in the fashion business— (Lodigiani, 2014; Russo, 2016) and a reception center for refugees, a hypothetical possibility that would have transformed the site into a new ghetto (Dazzi, 2016).

After years of political debate and the search for funds, some projects are starting, with the participation of local authorities and private partners, including international ones. The MIND -Milano Innovation District- project includes development plans for research and production innovation of the University of Milan -Center for medical studies- the Galeazzi Hospital -Human Technopole- and the Fondazione Triulza -Lab-Hub for Social Innovation and Sustainable Development. The sites under construction will attract several thousand researchers and students. Other companies, such as the multinational AstraZeneca, are acquiring areas to implement their activities in Italy. The municipality of Baranzate proposed itself as a stakeholder, too. In fact, new perspectives are opening up for the urban center, which could offer proximity residential homes: the site is located about a kilometer away and can be reached with 'gentle mobility' and the creation of a cycle path. However, in order to become a quality and high-value residential center, it is necessary to redevelop the neighborhoods, eradicating

the widespread perception of a 'ghetto-town' that is a consequence of a century of immigration. The municipality has faced this difficult task with several urban redevelopment projects aimed at integrating the foreign population.

Among the implemented or in progress urban planning projects we mention the creation of a public park -the socalled linear park— on the roof structure of the Rho-Monza motorway, the completion of a cycle path that crosses the town, reaching the former Expo 2015 area with an overpass on the Varesina state road, the current separation barrier of the urban center, the restructuring of the school complexes and the environmental requalification of quarries and abandoned industrial areas. Social projects foresee the opening of a childcare center, with educational services for families with both working parents, and scholarships for foreign students who show interest in university or professional studies. The municipality is aiming also to the renovation of apartments for elderly people and students, including foreigners, who will attend the university centers in the former Expo 2015. Another project is the renovation of meeting spaces – the goal

Fig. 15 The building in Via Aquileia, 12, now inhabited only by immigrants.



is internationalization beyond the themes of integration of immigrants. With the words of the mayor of Baranzate, "our vision is to create a city of ideation and knowledge, where universities and businesses, research centers and residents can meet in public places, libraries and common co-working spaces to innovate together"3. Furthermore, the organization of the urban area has already registered the displacement of the local police headquarters to the Gorizia district, in order to guarantee the presence of the institutions in the most problematic area of the town. The recent inauguration of a new ecological platform limits the abandonment of bulky waste and the opening of new sports facilities, a kindergarten and a library has increased in the promotion of cultural events. The activation of public and private resources is going to redevelop the large condominium in Via Aquileia, 12, an immigration ghetto that has originated petty crime for years (Figure 15).

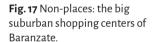
Finally, the municipality is finalizing a twinning agreement with the Chinese city of Xinmi, where, in the local area called New Milan, a textile district is active with



Fig. 16 The recently built residential condominium in the northern discrit of Baranzate are inhabited mainly by Italian people.

economic and cultural relations with the Chinese community of Milan; Baranzate thus intends to propose itself as one of the reference points for Chinese investments in Italy. With these interventions, the municipality is trying to radically change the urban landscape and get out of the stereotypes of a degraded ghetto. The current direct relationship between the quality of urban spaces and services and the quality of life of the inhabitants is evident: the worst quality spaces are mostly inhabited by foreigners, especially those of more recent immigration, and by a few Italians living under the level of poverty (Figure 16).

The previously mentioned interventions and the urban redevelopment projects that the municipality is carrying out are mainly aimed at rebalancing the accessibility to services and the quality of the urban landscape by reducing the differences between the neighborhoods. A more standardized urban landscape, even if characterized by evident architectural differences, and less dominated by the presence of immigration ghettos, can help to develop a unitary vision of a town that has until now been markedly divided into two parts: the first still predominantly Italian, the second poor and multicultural. The slow and gradual redistribution of the





richest foreign inhabitants in all the city districts contributes not only to accelerate their slow integration into the Italian national context, but also to amalgamate their culture with the native one. The ultimate goal is to ensure that the external aspects of multiculturalism, destined to survive for a long time, such as ethnic shops and restaurants, can emerge from entrepreneurial precariousness, improve their quality and represent in the future only a reason for commercial attraction. In this way, they will lose the repulsiveness they currently arouse towards the Italian population and will broaden their business prospects. Consequently, the Gorizia district, currently perceived only as a repulsive ghetto, could become a place where multi-ethnicity offers itself as an added value for commercial activities alongside those already existing at Baranzate, today heavily dominated by the presence of non-places consisting of large suburban shopping centers (Figure 17).

In order to transform Baranzate into a quality multiethnic place, linked to the future economic development of the metropolitan city of Milan, the municipality plans to promote a virtuous process of urban redevelopment by connecting the residential spaces of the town to future reuse of the former Expo 2015 area and offering them to a new, more qualified migration. This is probably causing a change in the perception that inhabitants have about their place of residence. The turnover of both Italian and immigrant populations has slowed down, after the pandemic crisis that decreased the mobility. The Egyptians residents, taking advantage of the particularly low price of the apartments put up for auction due to the insolvency of the owners, are buying real estate units in the Gorizia district to rent them to families of neo-immigrant compatriots. This made Egyptians the largest foreign community in the municipality, with 622 people as of 1 January 2021. Evidence of the tendency towards stabilization of residence is also the growing number of naturalized Italians, not included among the evaluation of foreign residents. They immigrated several

years ago and have generally completed a significant path of integration into Italian society. There are two to four naturalizations every week, about 140-150 per year. Besides, the decor and street furniture are also improving thanks to greater attention to the environment and the intervention of private citizens: abandoned waste is decreasing, respect for common goods is improving and some more buildings appear renovated. Much remains to be done for the recovery of disused industrial areas, which will be a resource when they become shared public spaces. Baranzate is slowly transforming. It is no longer an immigration frontier, but a place where a progressive stabilization of the demographic structure is taking place, even if the problems of coexistence between Italians and foreigners will be resolved in a longer time. Poverty is fought by civil and religious institutions, but also by widespread voluntary work that gradually involves even foreigners willing to carry out their migratory project in this municipality.

CONCLUSIONS

When, at the beginning of this century, the first immigration investigations started in Baranzate, it was thought that the town would become a case study that would anticipate by twenty years what would happen in the Italian suburbs under strong immigration pressure. Researchers and administrators looked with concern at the model of the Lombard town, hit by flows of foreigners that seemed unstoppable, generating enormous social problems and an exodus of the Italian population. Today the efforts of public and religious institutions and of volunteering get the first results of a long process of integration that has just begun. The proximity of the former *Expo* 2015 area has offered development opportunities capable of revitalizing the economy, offering jobs and encouraging the transformation of a landscape that has evolved without rules for too many

years. The next stage of the stratification process of the architectural, cultural, productive and immigrant elements will probably be the synthesis of all the previous. A suburb of Milan with a strong intercultural imprint will arise, equipped with services for the enjoyment of free time, such as ethnic restaurants and places of worship and meeting for non-EU groups from the metropolitan area. Once again this cultural laboratory could anticipate a possible social evolution of urban areas with strong immigration pressure and propose itself as a virtuous model of the progressive integration of ghettoized ethnic groups, till now relegated out of a nation that they never felt as their own.

NOTES

- 1 For more details on the morphological characteristics of the area and the historical origins of Baranzate, see Lucarno, 2011b, pp. 19-23.
- **2** Site inspection and interview at the Technical Office of the municipality of Baranzate.
- **3** The quoted text is from a direct interview with the mayor of Baranzate (May 2021).

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