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Towards a pluralistic society: Good practices in the integration and social inclusion of Muslims in Italian cities - synthesis

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Summary Report

Towards a pluralistic society: Good practices in the integration and social inclusion of Muslims in Italian cities

Bartolomeo Conti

January 2014

Summary

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INTRODUCTION

Across Europe, the number of Islamic prayer rooms increases with the increase of the number of Muslims residing in the continent, but rather than a normalization and a gradual acceptance of the Islamic presence, we are witnessing a constant rise of conflicts about the presence of Islam in the public space and, in particular, conflicts over Islamic places of worship (Allievi 2009; Bombardieri 2011). The mosque, rather than gradually becoming a "normal" fact, tends to become an "exceptional" fact that provokes disputes, debates and conflicts more than any other building or place of worship. In theory, the question of the mosques should not even exist because Europe claims that every religious minority, including the Muslims, is entitled to have its places of worship, that should be regarded as absolutely legitimate elements of the public space. Instead there is an exceptionalism of the mosque, which points to a more general exceptionalism regarding Islam and Muslims, which in Europe tend to be looked upon more and more as a special case, which requires a specific interpretative framework and ad hoc actions¹. More than any other social actor and / or minority, Islam has also the property of inducing questions about the host society and in particular their relationship to otherness, their degree of openness or the limits of their system of "acceptance" (Dal Lago, 1999). The public debates about Islam and Muslims are in fact revealing the issues across European societies, their identity and their relationship to otherness. In this complex relationship, the issue of mosques becomes central because, more than other issues like the status of women or the relationship between politics and religion, it directly relates to the control and management of a territory increasingly shared or, I should say, *contended*.

In the European panorama, Italy is not an exception, even though the presence of Islam is quite recent. In fact, over the last fifteen years, the issue of mosques concerns many urban centers, small or large, where there is an organized Islamic community, that emerged from the private sphere to assert its presence in the public space. Faced with the fears expressed more or less explicitly by part of the native population, public institutions adopted an uncertain and contradictory policy, which ended up becoming a real *modus operandi*, if not to say a political strategy: that of not deciding, and, consequently, of not taking responsibility. The policy of not deciding first had consequences on the rights of the Muslim minority, but indirectly also negatives consequences on social cohesion, with the exacerbation of conflicting attitudes, stigma and, ultimately, mutual closure to the Other, either native or foreigner. Faced with the fragmentation of the social body and the phenomena of exclusion and precariousness, public institutions are now called upon to review their way of thinking and acting. The need to adapt the institutional response to an increasingly complex society is now advocated by many, but it remains difficult to overcome the inertia and the blockages to identify appropriate methods and practices. Towards Muslims, and more generally towards Islam than other marginalized or excluded minorities, the Italian institutions are faced with the difficulty of

¹ Ideal-typically, the "essentialist regard" first is the author of its object of study. The ultimate goal of the essentialist regard, as shown masterfully by Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978), is the domination of the Other. For an more detailed analysis of the essentialist regard, see my doctoral dissertation on the emergence of Islam in the Italian public sphere.

reconciling respect for the rights guaranteed by the Constitution and the social fear of the Other, or, in other words, the reluctance to include the Other into Us, Us being understood as a social body empowered to make decisions and govern a specific territory.

In recent years, although in a contradictory manner, some attempts have been performed, sometimes crowned with partial success, to reconcile the right to religious freedom with what we might define the "fears" or the "prerogatives" of the native population. It is just from these concrete experiences that we should start to open a new phase in institutional practice toward Islam and Muslims, which would allow at the same time the gradual legitimization of the Islamic presence in the Italian public sphere and the gradual opening of Muslim communities, often still folded on themselves and unable to build forms of dialogue with the rest of the Italian society. This work intends to contribute to the building of the institutional response regarding the inclusion and visibility of Islam and Muslims in the Italian public sphere. In particular, it aims to indicate tools and good practices through which the public debate around the opening of the mosque would abandon the ideological ground to take the path of inclusion and social cohesion. It is in this context that this work assumes that any demand or claim may have a certain measure of legitimacy and therefore should be fully understood so that it can find an appropriate response. This assumption stems from the fact that only by seriously considering social fears, more or less explicitly expressed, can the institutional responses be legitimate and effective.

This study is structured in three parts. The first aims to contextualize the actual social processes, first through a brief description of the emergence of Islam in the Italian public sphere, then by defining the functions and the role of the mosque, the legal framework and content and forms of conflict that result from the opening of mosques in Italian cities. The first part concludes with an analysis of the public debate on Islam and Muslims in Italy and in particular of those actors who have given form and content to the public sphere. The second part describes the two cases examined, those of Bologna and Florence, the cities that were the scene of an important debate on whether to build a mosque, and that resulted practically in opposite outcomes: if in Bologna, the debate has produced a greater conflict, a rise of anti-Islamic discourses and an additional closure of the Islamic community on itself, in Florence, the participatory process has contributed in legitimizing the presence of Islam in the public space and has encouraged the opening of the community towards the city. To understand why the two paths have produced such different results, first we will describe the preconditions to the debate and then we will analyze the institutional instruments that have regulated the public debate. This work will conclude by pointing at methods and tools that can help local institutions to build a local public policy on Islamic places of worship, thus reconciling social inclusion and cohesion.

THE CONTEXT

The presence of Islam in Italy is fairly recent and is inscribed in migration processes that have affected the countries of southern Europe since the early '80s². During the first period, religious observance was not central to the definition of immigrants of Muslim origin³, and Islam was exclusively confined to the private sphere and its public presence was practically nonexistent, as a result of the feeling shared by the overwhelming majority of immigrants that their presence in the country was merely temporary. The opening of the first praying halls at the beginning of the nineties represents the first weak testimony of the presence of Islam in the Italian public sphere and signals the beginning of the second phase of the migratory cycle, that of the stabilization of immigrants and of family reunion⁴. Only in the wake of the reconfiguration of the family structure, did it become clearer to immigrants that they were there to stay; this is principally why, as of the 90s, some of the Muslims living in Italy started to assert their religion publicly, either by making official claims to public institutions, or by the simple fact that they constituted the root of reflection, debate and confrontation⁵.

Indeed, if for a long time the idea of a closed and separated Muslim community was pivotal to the definition of public Islam in Italy⁶, during the last decade, while Italy started to experience a growing islamophobia (Allievi, 2005; Massari, 2006), the gradual and effective emerging of a new generation, born and raised in Italy, forced part of the Muslim immigrants to gradually change their self-perception: from migrants in transit to stable citizens, from separate religious community to integrated and active minority, claiming its specific rights and a place within the Italian society.

² According to the Statistical Dossier on Immigration, an annual report published by Caritas and Migrantes and considered the main source on immigration in Italy, at the beginning of 2012 the number of immigrants in Italy reached the figure of 5 million, a million and a half of which are Muslim, or 2.2% of the population, compared with a European average of 3.7% (Allievi, 2010:45). Of these, only a tiny percentage has the Italian nationality, while almost all of those who call themselves Muslim are immigrants or children of immigrants. The most important national community comes from Morocco (506 369), Albania (491 495), Tunisia (122 595), Egypt (117 145), Bangladesh (106 671), Pakistan (90 185) and Senegal (87 311).

³ Under the term "Muslims" I include not only those who are religiously observant, but also all those who find in Islam an identity point of reference consciously accepted or in any case assigned to them. On the use of the term "Muslims" as a neo-ethnic category, see O. Roy (2002) and R. Grillo (2004).

⁴ According to Bastenier and Dassetto (1993), the concept of the migration cycle "aims to identify strategic moments of the conflictual interaction process and the uncertain outcome that engages the public space between "established" and "incoming" in a given society" (1993: 10).

⁵ Since the early 90s, several researches have described the characteristics that distinguish Islam in Italy from that of other European countries. Among the characteristics highlighted, first of all is the large ethno-national differentiation of Muslims, that has prevented the identification with one country or one region; second, the speed with which Islam has organized to claim a place in the public Italian arena, which has facilitated the affirmation of Islamist communitarian leaderships (Guolo, 2004 e 2005); third, the role of converts (Spreafico, 2005). Finally, the Italian Islam remains essentially a first-generation Islam, although more recent studies have highlighted the emergence of a new generation, bearer of a far more individual vision in relation to the religious dimension (Frisina, 2004 et 2007; Césari-Pacini, 2005; Salih, 2004; Maddanu, 2009).

⁶ In this regard, R. Guolo spoke of "*neo-traditionalist hijra*", that is to say "the social construction of a community which, more than the individual integration of its members, aims to negotiate a collective status of exemption of citizenship, status which defines the degree of self-exclusion necessary for the reproduction of its own separation" (Guolo, 2004, 9).

Consequently, in the recent years, in almost every community or mosque of the country, two positions are facing each other: that of those who claim the vital necessity of maintaining a certain degree of separation from “Italians” in order to protect an identity perceived as threatened; and that of those who believe in the necessity of becoming a full part of the society in which they live and in which their children are growing up. If the first tend to reinforce their separation and Manichean vision, the second start to openly assert their presence in the public space and demand not to be excluded or confined to the margins, but, on the contrary, to be recognized as legitimate members of the local community, where they build important forms of cooperation with the institutions and other social actors. Indeed, during the last decade, we have beheld the first signs of the passage from community, separated and relatively closed, to minority, active and claiming a place within the Italian society. This passage can be symbolized by the role assigned to the mosque and, even more, by its location in the *polis*.

1. The mosque, between right and conflict

According to a survey realized by M. Bombardieri, the Islamic places of worship in Italy amount to 764, compared to about 100 in the early 90s and 350 in 2001. Of these only four are mosques, that is to say built according to the rules of Islamic architecture, ie with dome and minaret, while all the others are mostly industrial buildings, old shops, garages and caves, which have the characteristics of instability and volatility. According to the data provided by Bombardieri, in Italy there is a mosque for every 1702 people of Muslim origin, while in Europe the average is 1528. Considering that only a fraction of the people of Islamic origin go to the mosques⁷, S. Allievi rightly points out that in Italy, and more generally in Europe, "in principle and in general, there is no problem of freedom of religion and worship for Islam in Europe. Especially since many European countries are currently going through a phase of consolidation, stabilization and structural increase in the presence of mosques, investment in their structures and an enlargement of their spaces and their functions "(2010:28). If the numbers tell us that in principle there is no problem of religious freedom not being guaranteed for the Muslims, the conditions of places of worship, their location in the urban geography, the difficulties they have to face and the increasing number of conflicts tells us that a problem exists. Indeed, practically no single public, private or commercial building produces no forms of protest and / or a reflection of identity similar to that which the mosque produces, which then becomes a problem not so much for its function, which is primarily to allow people to pray to their god, but for his real or presumed activities and, more importantly, for its visibility.

In the Islam of the diaspora (Saint-Blancat, 1995), the mosque plays a fundamental role to the point that it ends up encompassing many aspects of the religious life of the believer⁸. A landmark

⁷ According to a study conducted by Dassetto, Ferrari and Maréchal (2007), practicing Muslims would be about a third of the people commonly called "Muslim". On the forms assumed by the practice of Islam in Italian cities, cf. A. Caragiuli (2013).

⁸ I share the definition of the mosque given by Stefano Allievi, which uses extensive criteria and common sense, considering mosques as "all places open to the faithful, in which Muslims gather together to pray on a regular basis, will be considered to be mosques" (2009 :17). This definition manages to combine the main function of

not only for practicing Muslims, but more generally for many immigrants of Muslim origin, the mosque first represents the place from which emanate *other* spatiality and temporality. It is the manifest sign of the fact that Muslims are *here to stay* and that they organize to claim the legitimacy of their presence in the public space (C. Saint-Blancat and O. Schmidt di Friedberg, 2005). The mosque represents the place around which the new actor defines himself, constructs himself and manifests himself, with his different ways of dressing, eating, and using space and time (Bastienier et Dassetto, 1993 ; Göle, 2005). Basic to the construction of a sense of community and the formation of the "good Muslim", the mosque is thus the most important testimony of the emergence of Islam in the Italian public space⁹. By putting in question the very structure of the public space as it had previously been constructed, the mosque becomes inevitably the place around which takes shape the battle for real and symbolic control of the territory, that is a battle to establish who has the power to organize, structure, name or mark the territory. It is in that sense that the location of the mosque within the urban geography can be one of the most important clues to analyze and understand the place of Islam in the public space, and more generally, the forms and levels of integration, inclusion or exclusion of Muslims in Italy. Indeed, in Italian cities, historically based on the central location of spiritual and temporal powers, the physical and symbolical distance from the centre reflects the distance from power or, in other words, that which separates the Other from Us, as demonstrated by the numerous attempts, often successful, to expel Islam from the real and symbolic center, with the closure of mosques present within the city walls and their transfer to the periphery, in the suburbs or in degraded, industrial areas (Allievi, 2010; Bombardieri, 2011). However, the location of the mosque does not depend exclusively on native social actors or the representation given by the media (Conte, 2009), but also on the manner in which Muslims see themselves in Italy, that is on the type of integration or insertion or even communitarization that they desire. Here, obviously, it is the vision of those who manage the mosques, public Islam, that is pivotal (Conti, 2011 and 2012)¹⁰.

the mosque, prayer, and its collective and public character, although several distinctions could be made, particularly between Islamic centers and prayer rooms (*musallā*).

⁹ It is in the passage to the public sphere that the actor takes shape, arms himself with a collective belonging, assumes it and lives it completely. The public space is the space, material or abstract, in which the actor builds himself and asserts himself: it is where everyone asks to be recognized, where all oppose themselves to a stigmatizing look, where the demand for rights is also made for an economic and social repositioning (Goffman, 1963; Lapeyronnie in Wieviorka, 1996). The public space presents itself as a place of conflict *par excellence*, affirmed by N. Gole, (2005: 22-24).

¹⁰ The majority of those who are called "Muslims" live their religion in a private manner, without expressing it openly in public. Next to this silent majority, there is an active minority, described in particular by R. Guolo (2003 e 2005) and which I prefer to call "public Islam", that leads for the affirmation of Islam in the Italian public space and works for the awakening of the Islamic identity of Muslim immigrants. Public Islam consists of a wide variety of groups and mosques, starting with the Union of Islamic Communities and Organizations in Italy (UCOII) and the Great Mosque of Rome.

2. The legal framework

In Italy there is no law on religious freedom, nor a law to regulate the opening or the building of places of worship, nor an agreement (*Intesa*) with the Muslim minority. Faced with this legal vacuum, however, there is a legal framework based on the right to freedom of religion and freedom of worship, as well as the guarantee of the rights of minorities. In Italy, the relationship between the State and religious denominations is regulated according to three principles (Ronchi, 2010):

i. The protection of individual rights to religious freedom

The right to religious freedom is an individual right guaranteed first by the Italian Constitution. Consequently, the possibility of having a place of worship doesn't depend on the relationship between state and religious confession, but stems from the personal right to religious freedom, which must be guaranteed for all. In its core, therefore, the right to religious freedom includes the right to have places of worship, with the result that the role of the state cannot be passive, but must be designed to remove barriers that prevent the full development of the human person.

ii. The autonomy of religious confessions and the incompetence of the state in religious matters

In addition to individual rights, the Italian Constitution recognizes the rights of those communities through which the full development of the human person can be realized, including religious confessions. Art. 8 states first that "*all religious confessions are equally free before the law*", then, together with Art. 19, establishes the independence of all religious confessions. For religions other than Catholic, which enjoys a special status, there is a model treaty, that means that the relations of religious confessions with the State "are regulated by law on the basis of agreements (*Intesa*) with their respective representatives" (Art.8). Despite several attempts, so far no agreement has been reached with Islam, because, among other reasons, of the lack of a hierarchical structure in the Islamic religion, the absence of representative bodies and because of the internal fragmentation of the Muslim community (Ferrari, 2008).

iii. The collaboration between the State and religious confessions

In order to guarantee religious freedom and the full development of the human person, the state is called upon to take an active role in ensuring effective equality of all citizens, fostering the possibility of each person to exercise his worship according to their own forms and methods. The state's duty is also to ensure the necessary conditions for the citizens to fulfill their religious needs. To this end, according to S. Ferrari (2008), it is up to the state and local administrations to contribute to the construction and maintenance of places of worship.

2.1. The legislation on places of worship

In Italy, the opening of a place of worship is not subject to any special permission, except the need to comply with the rules governing the building of worship. The construction of a place of worship is governed by national, regional and pact-generated norms (Roccella, 2006). In fact,

however, the state has not legislated, leaving a legal vacuum on the norms that should guide regional laws and this is at the origin of a lack of uniformity. Different from regions to region, however, the rules share some bottom lines:

- In the urban planning, municipalities should identify areas to be devoted to religious buildings and equipment for religious services based on the needs of the local population and of religious communities;
- These areas are assigned to communities that have made a request, in proportion to their size;
- To enjoy areas and services, religious confessions must have an organized presence, widespread and stable.

The laws adopted by different regions, however, have included forms of discrimination, in particular by subordinating the giving of areas and funding for the construction of places of worship on the previous stipule of an agreement (*Intesa*). These rules have been condemned several times by the Constitutional Court, which ruled that the legality to build Islamic places of worship and the possibility also to enjoy financial benefits may not be subjected to the signing of an agreement or other limitations, except those relating to the need for religion to be organized and stable. Despite maintaining certain forms of discrimination towards Islam, according to S. Ferrari, in general "regional laws, while leaving a very wide margin of discretion to local authority, had the merit to establish some objective criteria for the identification of religious confessions that can enjoy the provisions to support the building of worship". With regard to already existing mosques, it is the prerogative of the municipal administration to give the permission to change the original use of the building to that of a place of worship. In fact, as M. Bombardieri says, "in recent years, there have been many cases of closure of places of worship for planning problems, despite the fact that the sanitary and safety conditions were met. The problem - continues Bombardieri - is in the discretion of municipal governments in applying these norms" (2011:105).

Despite the lack of an agreement and of a law on religious freedom, the Italian legislation on construction still offers the opportunity for local administrations to "solve the problem" of Islamic places of worship, providing areas for the building of mosques or public buildings to accommodate Islamic associations of social promotion. It is therefore at the local level that the tools appear to be to give an answer to the Muslims, although the discretion of local administrations remains a real problem, which risks perpetuating the state of uncertainty, the volatility of the mosques and the subordination of a right to the changing moods of public opinion¹¹.

¹¹ Faced with the lack of national regulations on places of worship and the lack of a law on religious freedom, in recent years a treaty model has emerged ,not based on any national agreement (*intesa*), as had been foreseen by the drafters of the Constitution, but a "local" treaty model, i.e. between each Muslim community organized in associations and municipalities. This model generally takes the form of the *protocollo d'intesa*, which is a free agreement between the local Muslim community and the Municipality, which generally provides for forms of control by the administration on finance and business activities in the mosque, in exchange for granting permission to build a mosque or the grant of a building for a mosque.

CASES STUDIES

The importance of the local dimension emerges from the comparison between what happened in the cities of Bologna and Florence, both the scene of an important debate on the presence of Islam in the public space and in particular on whether to build a mosque or not. Although at present, in none of the two cities is the construction of any mosque planned, the results of the two paths have been very different, if not opposite. In Bologna, the debate that affected the city in 2007-2008 resulted in a greater context of conflict, a rise of anti-Islamic and Islamophobic discourses and an additional retreat of the Islamic community on itself. Basically, the debate over the mosque has produced results opposite to those desired. In Florence, the participatory process on the possible future mosque in the city, which took place in 2011-2012, has instead helped to legitimize the presence of Islam in the public sphere and has encouraged the opening of the community towards the city. The path in Florence has had the merit of reducing the potentiality for conflict in the debate over the mosque, to strengthen the position of the Islamic community and to lay the foundations for a legitimate presence of Islam in the public sphere of the city.

To understand why the two paths have produced such different results, we must first analyze the preconditions to the debate on the presence of Islam in the public space and then the forms the paths themselves took.

3. The preliminary conditions

The debates that took place in Bologna and Florence are the result of a long journey that began in the late 80s, when in both cities the first prayer halls were opened. In the initial phase, the stories of the two communities have many similarities, to the point that we could say that, at least initially, Islam began to appear in the public space of the two cities in the same way. But the two paths also have a series of differences, the comparison of which can help to understand why the recent public debates on the possible construction of a mosque have taken place in very diverse contexts and have had such divergent results.

3.1. Similarities

The first two prayer halls of Bologna and Florence were opened at the end of the 80s by university students, mostly of Middle Eastern origin, who had the possibility of benefiting of halls given by Catholic associations. Those halls, in both cases located in the centre of the two cities, were quickly replaced by larger halls, able to accommodate a rapidly growing number of believers, and that bore witness to the links established between the first groups of practicing Muslims of the two cities and the Catholics involved in the social and in the inter-religious dialogue.

In addition to the positive relationship with basic Catholicism and the central location, another common feature shared by the first prayer halls is the profile of those who opened and continued to manage them over the years. It was in fact young Muslims who came to Italy to study, coming mainly

from the Middle East and often linked to Islamist movements in their countries of origin. The two Presidents, and (almost) unquestioned leaders of the two Islamic centers in Bologna and Florence, the Syrian Radwan Altounji and the Palestinian Elzir Izzeddin, had a key role in the most important Islamic organization in Italy, the Union of Islamic Communities and Organizations in Italy (UCOII), organization to which the two mosques¹² adhere.

Another similarity, even if indirect, worthy to be mentioned is that of the political context in which the debate on the possible construction of a mosque developed. Bologna and Florence, and, more generally, Emilia Romagna and Tuscany, are cities and regions historically governed by the Left, who, in principle, is more attentive to the rights and integration of immigrants and, in theory at least, less accustomed to anti-Islamic and Islamophobic discourses.

Finally, although historically governed by the Left, Bologna and Florence are also two cities where the role of the Catholic Church is very important. This is especially valid in the city of Bologna, defined as " the second city of the Catholic Church in Italy ", where the Curia has played a central role in the construction of an urban debate on the role and place of Muslims in the city, particularly legitimizing, if not even creating, the conditions for the development of an Islamophobic and anti-Islamic discourse¹³. In Florence, the attitude of the Catholic world was much more varied. If, in fact, the Catholic Church has made its voice heard by stating its preference for small prayer rooms, meaning for a less symbolic presence of Islam, other members of Catholicism of Florence were openly campaigning for the building of a place of worship for Muslims, who in turn responded to the need to see their presence legitimized from a symbolic point of view, as well as social and legal one.

3.2. Divergences

In the face of the similarities mentioned above, the differences between the cases of Florence and Bologna seem much more important. In particular, albeit starting from similar situations, the evolution of the two Muslim communities and their relationship with the city have taken opposite directions, which allows us to understand why the outcomes of the two public debates on the possible construction of a mosque have been so different.

¹² The Union of Islamic Communities and Organizations in Italy (UCOII) is the most important Islamic organization by the number of mosques who have joined it, the number of Muslims who attend its mosques and the influence it exerts in the definition of Islam in Italy. Founded in 1990, the UCOII refers to the variegated Islamist galaxy (for a critical approach to Islamism, see O. Roy, 2002 N. Göle, 2006 F. Burgat, 2007), as results from its adhesion to the Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe, expression in the old continent of Islamist movements and, in particular, of the Muslim Brotherhood. Although the mosques that adhere to the UCOII generally have in common a certain vision of international relations and the aspiration to the communitarization of Muslims living in Italy, it is necessary to get out of a reductive vision of the UCOII. In fact it is a complex organization, which gathers sometimes differing approaches, particularly in regard to what the future of Islam in Italy should be.

¹³ Cardinal Giacomo Biffi has certainly been one of the leading ideologues of the impossibility of integration of the Muslims in Italy and of the clash of civilizations. His thinking is contained in the pastoral "The city of San Petronio in the Third Millennium" (2000), in which he states that "Europe will or will become again Christian or will become Muslim".

- **The mosque in the urban geography**

The first prayer halls of Bologna and Florence were both opened in the centre of the two cities, but they then followed two opposite paths. The Islamic cultural center of Bologna has been gradually and inexorably moved from the centre to the periphery, while the mosque of Florence has always remained at the center of the city.

The Islamic cultural center of Bologna, although it took its first steps in an apartment located in the heart of the city, after a series of moves, finally ended in an industrial hangar, not just outside of the walls of the city, but outside of the urban community, that is outside the extreme limits of the city, where no one can see or hear it. Thus we witnessed a movement from the center (physical and symbolic) to the periphery, but also from small to large and hidden to visible, even if in a marginal manner. This movement, the scope of which is largely symbolic, was often the result of the convergence of two complementary and converging thrusts: a growing Islamophobia, the desire to expel a more and more visible Islam and the willingness and/or need of public Muslims to create a “community”, that is to say, to isolate themselves beyond the boundaries of the *polis* in order to differentiate themselves and assert themselves as a specific community. The consequence of the movement and thus of the location of the mosque in the urban geography is that the Islamic community in Bologna ended up being isolated and, at the same time, isolate itself, becoming in some way self-referential. In moving towards the borders of the *polis*, the Islamic cultural center of Bologna did in fact gradually break the bonds that were created during the first decade of existence of the mosque, to the point that, when the talk of the possibility of building a mosque began, Islam and Muslims were (almost inevitably) perceived as external to the city, strangers and, at worst, as invaders. A further consequence of this geographical, social and symbolic marginalization has been the further push towards the fragmentation of the Islamic community, with the opening of other prayer halls.

On the contrary, in Florence, the mosque has always remained at the center of the city, and this has allowed the construction and development of ties between the Muslims and the rest of the city's population. The construction of spaces of communication and exchange, such as schools, workplaces, public markets, etc. has allowed the city to overcome some of the prejudices and fears of otherness. The constant centrality of the prayer hall of Florence means that when the talks began of the possibility of building a mosque *ad hoc* in Florence, there existed already the conditions for the rest of the population not to perceive it as an external threat or stranger, but only as the evolution of something that already existed and with which they had had the opportunity to interact over the years. In addition, the centrality of the prayer hall has finally favoured the construction of a Muslim community in the plural sense, but at the same time essentially united and able to speak with one voice.

- **Network and social capital**

Initially met in locals given by Catholic associations, the first groups of practicing Muslims of the two cities established from the beginning links with those who better than others could

understand their need to come together for praying, ie Catholics involved in social issues, in the welcoming of immigrants and in interreligious dialogue.

In Florence, over the years, interreligious dialogue, not only with Catholics, but also with other religious confessions, such as the Jewish one, has been continuously reinforced and subsequently has found an institutional legitimacy in the Consulta for dialogue with the religious Confessions established by the Municipality of Florence. This dialogue, which began in the early 90s, was developed in the course of the following two decades along with a number of other initiatives aimed at mutual understanding and support the social groups that were most in need (paths of mutual understanding, camps for kids of different faiths, school visits, courses of Arabic for Italian and Italian language for foreigners, etc.). This set of initiatives, developed not without some difficulty and contradictions, has enabled the development of an important social capital, which has facilitated the rooting in the city of part of the members of the Islamic community, and more generally of the Muslims of the city. This social capital was crucial at the time of the introduction of the topic of the future mosque in Florence, which could be developed relying on the individual and collective relationships developed over the years. The participatory process, and more generally the debate on the presence of Islam in the public sphere in Florence, was undoubtedly aided by the fact that different social actors in the city, as well as individuals, had had the opportunity to meet and collaborate with Muslims of the prayer hall of the Borgo Allegri.

In Bologna, the various forms of collaboration with institutional and social actors developed by the center of Islamic culture, as well as interreligious and intercultural dialogue, practically ceased in the early 2000s, when the Islamic Center was relocated outside the boundaries of the city of Bologna and the Curia made anti-Islamic speech its lifework. At the same time, a Manichean and essentialist approach pervaded both the Italian society and a part of the leadership of the Islamic center of Bologna, so that when the possibility of building a mosque was introduced in the public space of Bologna, the Muslims of the Centre were isolated from the rest of city, without the support of those mediators that generally have the function of breaking the Manichean approach and of delegitimizing dichotomous discourses.

- **Leadership**

Beyond the common affiliation to the UCOII, there are differences on the relationship that the Islamic centers of the two cities have had (and continue to have) with that organization. For a long time, the Islamic center of Bologna has been one of the most important UCOII's centers, to the point of having a prominent role at the national level. The same leaders of UCOII had the dream of making the future mosque in Bologna not only a religious center but also an economic one in the Italian Islam. The leadership of the Islamic center is openly linked to Islamist movements, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood movement, and is ideologically and politically quite compact. It is dominated by the first generation of Muslim immigrants, whose discourse often refers to the socio-political dynamics of countries of origin and fits into the framework of the struggle against colonialism and / or western neo-colonialism. Their vision often refers to the transnational public

sphere, more ideological and conflictual¹⁴, also because the public space of the city of Bologna has gradually built up anti-Islamic and Islamophobic discourses, which prompted the Muslims to take refuge within the borders of their community. In addition, as pointed out by P.P. Amodeo (2012-2013), the leaders of the Islamic cultural centre showed their inadequacy or immaturity when, rather than addressing the city of Bologna via the media, they adopted the idea of being able to simply negotiate with the authorities, outside of the public space and then outside of a comparison with the city's population.

On the contrary, the mosque in Florence, although its president in 2010 was appointed national secretary of UCOII, and the mosque is an integral part of that organization, brings together different approaches, not only for ethno-national origin, but also ideological and generational. Beyond this internal diversity, it is the approach towards the city which distinguishes the leadership of Florence from that of Bologna. In Florence, the leaders of the Islamic community, starting with its imam and president Elzir Izzeddin, are particularly integrated into the fabric of the city, both geographically and socially. They participate actively in the life of the city and have woven interpersonal and collective relationships, structured and stable. In other words, the context in which the direction of the mosque operates is the town, that is a local public space, characterized by a slow and long-term temporality and a spatiality marked by proximity, factors that promote integration, participation and mutual understanding¹⁵.

- **Intra-Muslims Dynamic: offering on the religious market**

To distinguish the cases of Bologna and Florence, there are also the social characteristics of the immigrant population, and in particular their ethno-national origin, with consequent repercussions on the Islamic religious offer in the two cities.

In Bologna, those that for a long time have been organizing and presenting public Islam in the city are almost exclusively students or former students coming from the Middle East, while the role of immigrants from the Maghreb is very limited because of the minor importance granted to the organization of religion, and having the latter established in the hilly areas or the Po Valley, namely in areas quite outside the city. The arrival of Asian immigrants in the course of the 90s, and particularly after 2000, caused a major change in the composition of the population of Muslim origin in Bologna, with the consequent opening of different ethnic, national or linguistic *musalla*. Over the last decade, the offering on the Islamic religious market has thus been highly diversified, to the detriment of the

¹⁴ It is in the transnational public space that the level of alterization, stigmatization and conflictual context is the highest. Briefly, the transnational is the sphere of the imaginary, of opposing memories, unresolved conflicts, ideology, so that we can say that imagined communities (Anderson, 1991) are those who structure visions, and ultimately, identities.

¹⁵ It is in the local public space that a certain acceptance of the mixture and an effective relativity of values seem to characterize the vision of most of the Muslims. The local is in fact the space of proximity, the manifestation of difference, but also of its acceptance thanks to the factors time (slow, repetitive and long duration) and space (proximity and physicality). It is particularly at the local level that many new strategies of insertion have been put in place and that a "social capital" has been acquired (Saint-Blancat and Perocco in Césari-McLoughlin, 2005).

representative capacity of the Islamic cultural centre of Bologna, which has become one of the eight Islamic centers in the city, though still the most important. Not only that, but the leadership of the centre, already during the debate over the mosque, did not seem to be able to represent the instances of the Muslims who lived in and around Bologna, for reasons of geographical, ideological and even generational origin.

In Florence, the mosque of Borgo Allegri, though flanked by two other prayer halls, brings together almost all of the Muslims of the city. This ability of aggregation, namely one that goes beyond the ethno-national origins of the believers and their ideological-religious affiliation, stems from several factors, starting with the spatial location of the mosque, which is in the center of the city, where an important part of the immigrants works. A second factor is that the different ethno-national groups that compose the Muslim population of the city are represented on the board of the mosque, which is thus not controlled by a single ideological or geographical group, but gathers people with different backgrounds and views.

- **Context: 2007 vs 2011**

Although between the two events only 4/5 years passed, the context in which occurred the debates on the possible construction of a mosque was very different. In 2007, the year in which in Bologna appeared on the news with the intention to build a new mosque, the city, like the whole of Italy, was still plagued by the fear that stemmed from the images of the twin towers, Madrid and London. Bologna engaged the issue of the mosque and, more generally, of the presence of Islam in the public sphere, when the level of Islamophobia was at its peak, at the point that the whole debate was structured around the issues of security, who quickly overwhelmed everything else, starting from the right to a place of worship established by the Italian legislation. The same protocol of agreement that was supposed to be signed by the parties was a clear demonstration of how much weight had the fears linked to Islamic terrorism and security.

Although Islamophobia is still very present in Italian society and the security problem remains strongly felt and relevant, the discussion in Florence was able to take place in a very different atmosphere and the few attempts to deviate the debate on the issue of security found no space nor legitimacy in the urban debate. More than safety, it was the couple of right / openness to diversity that was the corollary to the whole debate on the mosque, which rapidly became a theme of the whole city and not just of the Muslims.

4. The forms of the path

The public debate on the possible construction of a mosque requires spaces in which to be developed, actors who animate it and contents. Spaces, actors and contents are generally, but not necessarily, defined and / or selected through the creation of (more or less) institutionalized paths, which are supposed to have the ability to structure the debate itself (Florida, 2013). The two cities in question chose different paths that, consequently, had a different ability to structure the public debate, that is to define spaces, actors and contents.

- **The space of the debate**

In Bologna, in the face of the explicit request made by the Islamic cultural center, the city administration decided to create a space for direct negotiations between the heads of the administration itself and the leaders of the centre of Islamic culture. In other words, it was a space of discussion restricted to a few people, basically two decision makers and two representatives of the Islamic Centre, from which the population as well as the rest of the Islamic community were excluded. Only in the face of very strong reactions coming from citizens' committees, political parties and different social actors, was it decided to give life to open public meetings and then, because of the strong context of conflict that emerged, to a "participatory path at invitations", i.e. aimed at people or groups selected by the municipality itself. The population was thus involved only when most of the decisions, starting with the location of the mosque, had already been taken by a small group of people, especially in an attempt to give legitimacy to decisions made at the top and that "fell down from the top". At the same time, no actions were studied nor put in place to involve Muslims, beyond those who were nominated and / or identified as "representatives of the Islamic community".

In Florence, the debate on the construction of a new mosque was housed in an institutional arena, the participatory process, which had been proposed by the Islamic community thanks to the Regional Law 69/2007, which provides the funding for participatory process in order to involve citizens in public decisions. This arena, managed by a third actor¹⁶, permitted that from the beginning the debate was expanded as much as possible to include the whole population, including those who were opposed to the building of the mosque, and the whole Islamic community of Florence. It was in this perspective that every recommendation for future decisions, starting from the possible future location of the mosque, was delegated to the participatory process. Its main function therefore was to legitimize the eventual building of the mosque through consent and participation, that thus preceded the decision-making phase.

From the two cases, emerge two spaces for discussion and, consequently, two very different approaches: one shared and inclusive, the other top-down and exclusive. The space in Florence was designed to pass first by a popular legitimacy, in order to create the conditions for overcoming fears and reluctances, especially related to the NIMBY effect (Florida, 2013). In Bologna, the space of the debate was limited to a few people and then their decisions, in particular on the location, were taken before seeking the legitimacy of the population. The following attempt to expand participation was therefore done in an environment already dominated by ideological opposition, fear and consequences of the NIMBY effect. The first model, built on the legitimacy and dialogue, was able to lead to the idea of the mosque of the city, while the second, imposed and not shared, merely led to the rejection of the mosque.

¹⁶ Sociolab (www.sociolab.it) is an expert consultant in methods of participation and mediation, which has produced an abundant material on the participatory process, which can be seen on a specific website www.unamoscheaperfirenze.it.

- **Space and legal framework**

The two cases show a different relationship with the legal framework, and in particular with the principle of religious freedom, which entails the right to a place of worship. In Bologna, an approach was adopted that could be called "positivist", according to which, once stated, the law must be guaranteed regardless of any consideration of the social impact. The right to a place of worship quickly became a tool to justify the decisions taken or to be taken and their implementation. By doing so, contrary to the hopes of the municipality, the law itself ended up being implicitly "the object of contention", losing its intrinsic ability to regulate the conflict coming from the universality of rights.

In Florence, on the contrary, an approach was adopted that could be called "consensual," according to which first a consensus was created around shared principles, beginning with the right to a place of worship as an universal right and not as a right of a specific group and so valid mainly and/or only to the specific case of mosque. The constitutional rights have thus come to represent the framework within which to build the public debate and, consequently, the starting point of the legitimacy of the request of the Muslims to have an adequate and symbolically significant place of worship.

- **Local vs transnational**

The topics discussed in Florence and Bologna differed, just like the languages used. There are numerous reasons for these differences, which can be summarized in the different interactions between the local level of the public space and the national and transnational levels. In Bologna, the debate developed primarily in a national or transnational way, with little regulatory capacity of the local level, despite the attempt to involve the opinion leaders of the neighborhood where the mosque was supposed to be built. The theme of the precariousness of places of worship in Bologna, as well as the forms of integration of Muslims in the city, couldn't find a place in the debate, which was instead structured around themes such as the *Islamization of Europe*, *the status of women in Islam*, *Islamic terrorism*, *the reliability of UCOII*, etc. In Bologna, the public space was then built around dichotomous grids, that put in direct opposition Italians and Muslims, Us and Them.

In Florence, on the contrary – despite the fact that general issues such as the relationship between Islam and the West, or the status of women in Islam, or the democratic reliability of UCOII were not omitted, the debate has remained largely within a local context, that is a space marked by proximity, everyday life and relationships. The debate has thus been structured starting from the local reality, the need to give answers to both the Muslims of the city and to those non-Muslims citizens who asked to see situations of social disintegration resolved or who demand a response to their fears. Practically, any attempt to leave the local dimension found a strong opposition both from Muslims and from other participants, including local institutions. This approach was clearly favored by the methods used by those who managed the participatory process. The difference between the location of the two debates becomes evident in relation to the affiliation of the two mosques to the UCOII, that has been absolutely marginal in Florence, while it has been crucial to the debate in Bologna.

5. The actors

The nature of the actors who participated in the debate is a direct result of the space created and the instruments used. It follows that in Florence and Bologna the actors that took part in the debate were not the same, with obvious repercussions on how the issue of the mosque was discussed and on the outcome of the debate itself.

- **Citizens**

The Florentine participatory process was designed to include the greatest number of citizens, who were called to attend a series of meetings open to all, the purpose of which was to provide recommendations to the public authorities on how and where to open an eventual mosque in Florence. Although it was quite limited, the participation had the function to provide recommendations to institutions that were the result of an open and rational debate and therefore shared by the greatest number of people as much as possible. The calm and rational character of the meetings, a consequence of the method adopted by Sociolab, made it so that, in Florence, a kind of population that can be defined as intellectual and / or inclined to the construction of an open and plural city participated almost exclusively. This sort of "rationalization" and / or "intellectualization" of the debate, which began with the preliminary interviews with about 50 opinion leaders of the town, has indirectly led to the auto-exclusion of all those who expressed those irrational fears that generally form the frame of the debates on Islam and who felt the difficulty of participating in a confrontation based on calm words and built on rational arguments. A second factor that led to the selection of participants was the fact that the debate was done without indicating the place where the mosque would rise, with the result that there was no NIMBY effect and that the debate was perceived, at least by some citizens, as too abstract. In conclusion, the participatory path has become a space of construction and legitimization of the idea of "future mosque of Florence" and not just the future mosque of the Muslim.

On the contrary, the function of the citizen participation in Bologna has been to give legitimacy to what had already been decided between the municipal authorities and the leaders of the Islamic cultural center. In Bologna, the debate was from the beginning strongly politicized and the indication of a precise place before the start of any participatory process were the source of an equally "natural" selection of the participants. Soon, intellectuals, lawyers and possible mediators were ousted or excluded themselves for the benefit of people driven by political and ideological reasons, or people who simply expressed the fear of having to share the land with the Other, the Muslim. These fears have not found limits in those who generally have the function to mediate through a process of rationalization. The assemblies were thus transformed into a place where fears and suspicions found a legitimacy of expression to the detriment of rights and rational arguments.

- **Muslims**

The Florentine participatory process was conceived in order to involve the whole Muslim community of the city. It had the great merit, recognized by all, to involve the three prayer halls of

the city, that met, confronted themselves and finally expressed themselves with a single voice. The participatory process thus triggered an evolution of the Muslim community, both individually and collectively. Pushed towards confrontation and debate, the Muslims had to "learn" to formulate their requests and to argue their responses in the public space and this resulted in a true individual and collective empowerment of usually marginalized or silent people. The participatory process has therefore resulted in a kind of partial democratization within the community, through the emergence of new leaders and individualities. In conclusion, the participatory process has allowed people previously marginalized or politically excluded to take the path towards "full citizenship" and the community to emerge as a legitimate social actor of the city.

In Bologna, the city administration has talked only with two representatives of the Centre of Islamic culture, without ever asking the question nor the purpose of the involvement of the other prayer halls of the city, which took absolutely no part in any phase of the urban debate. Beyond the two representatives, the Muslims of the Islamic cultural center have never been involved in public debates and therefore there has been no participation of Muslims to the path of Bologna. The Islamic community of the city therefore has come out of the path even more divided, while no empowerment, individual or collective, has taken place. Rather, the negative outcome of the public debate has led to a withdrawal of the Islamic Center onto himself and to divisions within its leadership, particularly among converted to Islam Italians and immigrants Muslims.

- **Policymakers and institutions**

The path in Florence was taken within an institutional framework made possible by the regional law on participation, but it was not "occupied" by public institutions or political parties. Managed by a third actor, the "mosque issue" has not become a ground for political confrontation and the parties have ended up participating only marginally in the public debate. This has certainly facilitated the structuring of a rational confrontation, centered on the specific issue, that is not just functional to the political arena, but also contributed to weaken the results of the path itself as public institutions have ended up not taking any concrete commitment.

On the contrary, in Bologna, the path was entirely managed by the municipality, with the subsequent extreme politicization of the issue of the mosque. Concrete talks on the specific theme quickly ceased, which ended up being just useful to the political confrontation between the majority and the opposition. Political parties were thus the real protagonists of the debate on the construction of a mosque in Bologna, while the voice of Muslims was extremely marginal, as shown by P.P. Amodeo (2012-2013).

- **Religions, intellectuals and associations**

The Florentine debate saw the active participation of intellectuals, academics and civil society organizations, as well as that of the representatives of various religious communities, who openly sided in favor of the building a new mosque, considering absolutely legitimate the request of the Islamic community. The active participation of religious actors has allowed - as write Talpin and

O'Miel - "a form of interfaith empathy around the need to be able to carry out their faith in decent condition" (2013:17). But, more importantly, it has allowed the Muslim community to come out of the isolation in which it usually finds itself in the debates over mosques. In other words, the active participation of these social actors prevented the structuring of the debate around the dichotomy citizens/Muslims, natives/ strangers, Us/Them.

In Bologna, the request of the Islamic cultural center found few supporters, beyond the municipal administration. Even those who were supposed to support the demands of the Centre simply ended up disappearing, suffocated by the political controversy, the inability of the leadership of the Islamic Centre to open to the city and the creation of committees of citizens opposed to the construction of the mosque, which meant that the whole Bolognese debate was from the start structured around the dichotomy citizens/Muslims, internals/externals, Us/Them. The Islamic Centre of Bologna, and in general the Muslims of the city, found themselves totally isolated and "opposed to the city", resulting in further ideologization of all positions in the field.

6. The outcomes of the public debate

The debate on the future mosque in Florence has been built leaning on an interreligious dialogue and previous cultural and social initiatives, which had created ties and mutual trust. Beyond a few isolated voices, in the public space of Florence no voice emerged that was openly opposed to the request of the Islamic community, especially because the debate over the mosque did not go beyond the local area, but maintained a constant link with the concrete reality of Islam and Muslims in the city. Consequently, the whole debate started from the observation that Islam had already been present in the city for more than twenty years and therefore the possible construction of a new mosque would just be an improvement on the existing situation, unanimously judged unsuitable and unacceptable for "*a city like Florence*". In addition, citizens who have participated in public meetings, though they were probably not very representative of the community as a whole, have explicitly recognized the symbolic importance of the future mosque. For this reason, the participatory process has provided clear recommendations on size, location and functions of the future mosque, which has been imagined by the participants *visible, central and big*, as a consequence of the idea that it would be a meeting place between the city and its Muslim minority. What the participatory process has produced is an appropriation of the mosque from the people who took part in the meetings, which have integrated the idea of the mosque into the city's history, along with the synagogue and the Orthodox church. The mosque has been imagined as the mosque of the city and not only of Muslims. On the other hand, the Islamic community has further open itself to the city, has strengthened its position and finally feels a part of the city of Florence. These conditions remain preliminary to an effective accountability on the part of the competent authorities, without which the process is likely to create frustration and self-retreat.

In Bologna , the debate on the construction of a mosque in the city has been severely hampered by the absence of any form of interreligious dialogue, the interruption of shared initiatives and an anti- Islamic discourse of the local Church. These factors, in addition to some of the

characteristics of Muslims community, have prevented the creation of spaces of mutual understanding and overcoming of the borders. In Bologna, the preconditions were simply absent for the debate to take place in a positive context, with the result that fear has prevailed over the law, and closure over openness. In fact, every construction project is being abandoned, any form of collaboration between local authorities and Islamic communities is gone and a general feeling of mutual distrust has been installed. The process is shipwrecked because of the affirmation of essentialist and discriminatory discourses, mainly based on fear and mutual closure, to the point that 6 years after the public debate, a wall of non-communication divides Islam and Muslims from the rest of the city. The Islamic Centre, and in particular its leadership, has shown itself to be incapable of opening to the city and now lives closed upon itself, while other prayer halls have sprung up, but without any visibility in the public space of Bologna. Muslims are simply invisible in the face of a population that seems refractory to any debate on the presence of Islam in the public space. From such a bleak picture, a new approach seems to emerge, stemming from the initiatives of a new generation of Muslims born and raised in Italy, who cannot accept social exclusion and political marginalization, and from some administrators who recognize the importance of re-establishing an interrupted dialogue.

TOOLS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The comparison between the cases analyzed allows us to point out tools and make recommendations that may be useful to the building of a public debate on Islamic places of worship. Our research has primarily highlighted some objective data, which is essential for the development of a new institutional practice towards Islam and Muslims:

- i. *Pluralization of Italian society:*** Italian society is rapidly pluralizing and, if Islam today is still largely an immigrants' religion, within less than one generation an important part of Italian citizens will be Muslim or otherwise related to Islam because of their origin. Beyond the perception or language used to describe it, Islam will no longer be (already partly no longer is) an external element, but an integral part of Italian society.
- ii. *Unavailability of the legal framework:*** The second objective fact is the unavailability of a legal framework that establishes universal rights and duties, which should be applied to all without any discrimination. The legal system should be the frame of reference of any public policy and thus determine not only the limits of institutional power, but also the limits and forms of public debate.
- iii. *Specificity of each local situation:*** The third finding is the specificity of each local situation. Despite the tendency to make a norm of the national and transnational levels of the public space, in which all the actors are eventually involved, the specific social and environmental conditions of the urban context make it so that forms of installation of Islam, and relations between Muslims and natives, are always different from one place to another.

7. Defining the objectives

The definition of the objectives is one of the major difficulties which both institutional and social actors have to face. Their definition cannot be done theoretically, but through the practice of governing, that is the interaction between the actors involved. Nevertheless, it is possible to discern from the research two general objectives, closely related to one another, which should guide the actions of institutions and Muslims in the construction of the public debate on places of worship:

1. The guarantee of constitutional rights;
2. The reinforcement of social cohesion.

The research suggests that these two general objectives can be pursued through two secondary objectives, which appear equally inseparable:

1. The gradual legitimization of the presence of Islam and Muslims in the public space, namely the acceptance of Islam as a new social actor called upon to contribute to the definition of the *polis*;
2. The gradual opening of Muslims community towards the city.

The question is thus the identification of tools and methods to achieve those objectives.

First recommendation: *Given the specificity of each local situation, the objectives cannot be defined a priori, but are the result of the interaction between the different actors composing the social body, starting with public institutions and Muslims. The guarantee of rights and the need to ensure social cohesion are the two points of reference in the definition of objectives.*

8. Preconditions at the public debate

The research has shown that these objectives can be pursued with a degree of success only if some preconditions are present.

- **Necessity and inevitability of conflict**

Being an architectural and social element that changes the urban landscape, the mosque is inevitably one of the key elements around which the conflict (or renegotiation) crystallizes for the management and the definition of the territory between insiders and outsiders, natives and foreigners, old and new citizens. The conflict is not only inevitable, but socially necessary for the expression of individual and collective fears, but also as a tool that allows a social and political repositioning of actors. The conflict around the mosque cannot be concealed or reduced to a mere urban problem, but should be taken and named for what it is, namely a conflict that has to do with the forms and methods of management and ownership of a given territory .

Second recommendation: *Public institutions cannot ignore the real roots of conflicts over the mosques, which are the fears of both sides. Only by taking into account the deep reasons of the conflict, can institutions have the possibility to create spaces and identify tools capable of providing adequate answers to dissolve individual and collective fears, and thus change the public debate on the mosque into an opportunity for the growth of the whole of the local actors.*

- **The T factor**

The T factor, time, is not only one of the key variables in the processes of integration or inclusion, but it is also a useful variable to understand the forms of conflict, its intensity and the ways to solve it. The concept of migration cycle explains the evolution of the relationship between the native social actors of a certain territory and its new inhabitants, those who come from beyond the borders, the "foreigners ", the "immigrants". The migratory cycle of Muslims and Islam is composed of different temporal phases, to which correspond different forms and methods of groups and individuals for remaining in the public space, which are expressed in different requests from Muslims towards other social actors and/or institutions. Consequently, the institutional response should be designed according to the specific phase of the migration cycle, which corresponds to a different visibility of Islam in the public space and, often, to the request of a different location (material and symbolic) of the mosque in the urban geography.

- **The timing of the conflict**

The demand for major visibility triggers almost inevitably some forms of reaction and resistance, which also have their own temporality and spatiality. As was pointed out (Saint-Blancat and Schmidt di Friedberg, 2005; Vitale, 2008), and as confirmed by the analyzed cases, the conflicts around the mosques have their timing, in a certain sense, their almost "natural" evolution, made of the times of expression of the individual and collective fears, of moments for the construction of places of confrontation, of pauses and phases of sedimentation. The Institutions, as well as the Muslims, are called to "give time" to the conflict to express itself and to settle down.

***Third indication:** Starting from the observation that the integration processes have their own times, marked by forms of gradual rooting in the territory, while the forms of conflict also have their own times, public institutions must adapt the policy response to the different phases of the migration cycle, each one corresponding to different needs and demands of Muslims. The conflict itself has modalities and forms of expression that vary according to the T factor, with the result that public policy must "give time" to the conflict to express itself and to find forms of sedimentation and resolution.*

- **Social capital: a key resource**

The case studies have clearly showed that the public debate on Islamic places of worship is doomed to fail if it cannot be built on a set of inter-communitarian relations, interpersonal ties and shared initiatives between Muslims and other social and institutional actors. These relations, interpersonal or communitarian, allow the overcoming of the wall of non-communication, the building of forms of knowledge and mutual trust. They also allow the creation of shared languages able to bring down the Manichean approach Us/Them, Italians/Muslims, which is the major linguistic and conceptual obstacle to the inclusion of Islam and Muslims in the *polis*. In the urban space, proximity and slow temporality, allowing people to mix in real spaces such as roads, schools, workplaces, promote the building of social capital. Similarly, the sharing of activities and spaces by community representatives allows the building of forms of dialogue and a sense of trust between communities, as shown by the different forms of interreligious dialogue, which can produce "forms of interfaith empathy around the need to be able to carry out its own faith in decent condition". The social capital is thus a fundamental and indispensable resource first of all for Muslims.

***Fourth recommendation:** The public debate on the mosque should be based on a previous social capital. When there is no social capital, the public debate is almost inevitably destined to be structured on a Manichean confrontation, that is structured around the opposition Us/Them, interior/exterior. The public debate on the mosque may, at the same time, be an opportunity to build social capital, by creating opportunities and spaces of exchange and knowledge between individuals and between the involved actors: the participation changes who takes part in it.*

- **The location of mosque in urban geography**

If proximity and slow temporality are two characteristics of the local public arena that enable interaction and exchange, the physical and symbolic location of the mosque in urban geography can have a direct impact on social capital, on the degree of openness of the Islamic community and on the forms of acceptance or rejection of non-Muslims. Generally open in precarious places, mosques move to the city, following a path that generally witnesses the emergence of Islam as a social actor in the public space: from small to large, from hidden to visible and from peripheral to central. Where the mosque is inserted inside the urban crossings – that is not "expelled" from the real and symbolic center of the city – proximity and sharing of spaces between individuals and communities enable forms of communication and exchange, allowing the building of social capital. Where, such as in Bologna, there was a movement of the mosque from the center to the external borders of the *polis*, the Islamic community has come to be isolated and, at the same time, has isolated itself. It has become somewhat self-referential and finished almost inevitably by being viewed through a Manichaean prism that makes it fall outside of the *polis*, as an entity that is foreign to the city. The tendency to ghettoization or self-ghettoization by Muslims, among other things, risks perpetuating the confusion between Islam and the problems of social order (criminality, social degradation, unemployment, etc.).

***Fifth indication:** The location of the mosque in urban geography and the degree of openness of the community are often closely linked. Consequently, it is important that the mosque be not placed outside of the polis – that is outside of the urban crossroads, but that it maintain a close link with the other actors composing the social fabric. The geographical marginalization is also at the origin of the confusion between Islam and the problems of social order.*

- **Islamic leadership and representation**

Until now, one of the major shortcomings of Italian Islam was the immaturity of leadership – that is those who run the mosques and who represent Islam in the public space. Nevertheless, the Islamic leadership plays, or can play, a key role in the management and resolution of conflicts over mosques. In particular, a well-integrated leadership, who knows the language and easily uses socio-cultural tools, can facilitate the insertion into the fabric of the city through forms of dialogue and participation, as shown by the emblematic case of Florence. Its function is, in some cases, to make the actors involved giving space evolve along with the expression of needs, fears and expectations and to formulate responses capable of responding to fears and expectations of both sides. On the contrary, when the Islamic leadership does not speak good Italian and / or does not know the social and legal context in which it operates, or continues to look to their country of origin rather than to the context in which they live, it tends to avoid taking part in a conflict over which it has little control and therefore inevitably to push the community towards closure rather than confrontation. Although representation and representativeness remains first and foremost an internal problem within the Islamic community, the issue is necessarily also vital to local authorities, which too often have

negotiated with those who have little weight in the community, or have simply created their interlocutor.

Sixth recommendation: The issue of leadership and representation is and must remain an internal matter for the Islamic community. Public institutions should liaise with those who present themselves as leaders, but they must operate in order to enlarge as much as possible the spectrum of Islamic interlocutors to meet the different needs.

9. Building the public debate

The public debate on the possible construction of a mosque is generally structured by the chosen path, which has an inherent capacity to delineate spaces for discussion, select the actors and define the contents. Although the specificities of each local situation do not allow the establishing of specific or univocal recommendations, it is possible to, first, point out some principles, and then, some tools to ensure that the debate avoids slipping into discrimination and stigmatization, and can instead be an opportunity for the growth of the involved actors.

- **Universalism vs exceptionalism**

Although an exceptionalism related to Islam is well rooted in the collective imaginary, the research has highlighted how important it is that the public debate grow constantly within principles shared by all, that is in the frame of universal rights, thus able to stem the discourses on Islamic exceptionalism. In order for the universality of rights to have the ability to structure the public debate and to establish the limits of legitimate discourse, i.e. to determine what can or cannot be said, the sharing of universal rights must precede any decision relating to a particular group or community. Making universal rights the shared point from which to start allows the treatment of Islam and Muslims like any other group or community in the territory.

Seventh recommendation: The public debate needs to be built within the frame of the universality of human rights, the only really effective tool against forms of exceptionalism, essentialist discourses and, ultimately, against discriminatory attitudes towards the Muslim minority and vice versa.

- **De-ideologizing the debate: staying local**

As long as the public space is structured around the dichotomy of endogenous / exogenous, i.e. on the contrast between citizens and foreigners, Us and Them, Italians and Muslims, the conflict cannot find any form of sedimentation or resolution. In other words, the ideologization of the debate prevents the finding of shared solutions and the evolution of the actors. Those who speak an ideological discourse in fact transcend the real actors, while they tend to explain reality from a

strongly Manichean grid, borrowed from the ideology of the clash of civilizations. To prevent the ideological positioning of the actors, the public debate must be constructed from the real situation on the ground. As the case studies have shown, the degree or intensity of the conflict is in fact lower where the debate is still limited to the local dimension. The deconstruction of the Manichean approach must start from the everyday reality of the actors, and in particular the existence of precarious situations that need to find answers in the interest of the entire local community. Pragmatism is revealed therefore as an instrument able to avoid any slipping onto the ideological ground and to keep the debate within a local area.

Eighth recommendation: *The degree or intensity of conflict is lower where the debate is still limited to the local dimension and is built according to a pragmatic approach, i.e. one starting from the realities on the ground.*

- **The relationship between politics and public debate**

The politicization of the debate over the mosque issue increases the degree of conflict. The mosque is in fact an issue that, by leveraging social fears that the presence of the Other can generate, has the power to create or remove electoral support. Consequently, a primary role of representatives of local governments or political parties is to transform the specific topic of the mosque into a theme belonging to the political arena. The politicization of the debate and its structure, according to the dynamics majority / opposition, also has the effect of removing the Muslims, whose word end up being obscured by those of the political actors, if not relegated again to the space of illegitimacy. At the same time, an excessive de-politicization, i.e. the taking of a neutral position by institution and political actors, is likely to favor irresponsibility and a lack of engagement from local authorities, as the case of Florence seems to show partly.

Ninth recommendation: *The politicization of the debate on the mosque increases the degree of conflict and denies Muslims the right to speak and the opportunity to participate as citizens of the Islamic religion. The issue of the mosque must be subtracted from the confrontation between majority and opposition but, at the same time, an excessive de-politicization can be at the origin of the irresponsibility of decision-makers and politicians.*

10. Tools and good practices

- **Decision-making process**

The need to arrive at shared decisions, which are able to support the growth of the actors involved, to respond to the right to the place of worship for Muslims and allay the fears expressed by part of the population, must be placed at the center of construction of the debate on Islamic places of worship. To this end, the case studies clearly show that the location and characteristics of mosque should be the last step of a decision-making process that must first of all start from some shared

general principles, generally enshrined in the Constitution. These principles must not be used and interpreted as exclusive rights at the service of the Other, of a specific group, on pain of delegitimization of their quality and strength as universal rights. The sharing of the principles must be followed by the identification of criteria that are shared as much as possible in order to make a choice. To this end, the participation or involvement of Muslims and non-Muslim citizens in the decision-making should be interpreted as a resource as it allows the granting of legitimacy to the decisions and to institutional action. Binding decision-making is, therefore, just the last piece of a decision-making process that must give time to the conflict to express itself and to calm down, that is for the different actors to express their fears, to formulate their demands and to find appropriate responses.

- **Knowledge of the local and selection of stakeholders**

For decades, one of the major difficulties that public institutions had to face in Italy was the relative inaccessibility of local Islam, not only because it was not visible, but also because the linguistic and cultural tools to know it were missing. At this stage, with the gradual emergence of Islam in the public space and the arrival of a new generation, the authorities are called to overcome the obstacle of ignorance. In this sense, a good practice is always to start from a mapping of the actors in the field and the existing controversies. Such a practice would also better equip the institutions to distinguish between representation and representativeness of local leaders. In the same way as they would do with any other group or community, local administrations must start from the principle of adapting to the reality in which they operate, taking as their interlocutors those who present themselves as such or that are available. At the same time, the perspective must be to broaden the spectrum of stakeholders as much as possible, to avoid "imposing" their referents to the Islamic community and to make the different needs emerge.

- **Recognition and social participation**

One way to overcome fear and mistrust is the creation of spaces for sharing, that is of places and initiatives in which different social and institutional actors can operate in a mutual recognition. In this sense, although they may seem formal, the participation in institutional events of Muslims, or the participation of representatives of institutions to the festivities of the local Islamic community, are not only symbolically important moments, but also ones able to create social capital, to generate knowledge of each other and to formulate a shared language. The granting of public spaces for collective celebrations of holidays or to teach the language of the country of origin is often experienced by Muslims as an important recognition, which dilutes the feeling of exclusion and injustice that they often experience. Equally important is that Muslims participate directly in the debate on Islam and Muslims, meaning that they should be co-authors of their history in the particular territory in which they live, without depriving themselves of the tools of citizenship.

- **Practical and ideological reasons**

With regard to the arguments against the opening of the mosque, it is appropriate to make a clear distinction between the ideological arguments, expressing a "cultural concern" and having to do with Islam itself (such as : the Islamization of the West, the condition of women, reciprocity in Muslim countries, etc.), and "concrete arguments" or estimated as such (such as : problems related to viability, the social vulnerability of a neighborhood, the risk of ghettoization, the degree of integration of Muslims, etc.) . If the first require a long time and complex ways to find an answer, precisely because they are ideological or cultural, the latter can arise from practical problems and can therefore find pragmatic solutions in the local arena. If, on the ground, often, the two types of arguments overlap and reinforce each other, the inclusion in the public paths on the mosque of those who put forward concrete and tangible arguments can allow the reduction of ideological arguments and the focus on issues that depart from the ground. It also allows the resolution of the bond between the two types of arguments and the "isolation" of those who are against Islam in principle, that is the exclusion of what is irreducible to the debate, and thus the de-legitimization, from the very beginning, of racism, prejudice and stigma.

- **One mosque / many musalla**

The question of whether to create a single big mosque, or instead several small prayer rooms, is the background of almost every public debate in Italy. The first possibility, that of creating a mosque symbolically important to bear witness to the presence of Islam in the *polis*, is the one that triggers the greatest resistance on the part of local actors, usually led by the Catholic Church, precisely because of the symbolic meaning that it brings with itself. The other option, that of an Islam of proximity, that means organized in small prayer rooms scattered around the city, in principle tends to respect the Islamic pluralism and has a lower impact in terms of conflict, but lacks the symbolic recognition of the presence of Islam in the *polis*, as is more and more asked by part of the Muslims. In reality, we must start from the fact that the two options are not mutually exclusive to each other, and a way to reach a joint decision is first not to put the two options as alternatives, but present to all actors in the field the advantages of both, as well as the critical aspects they bring with them.

Tenth recommendation: *The decision-making process should be as inclusive as possible. Participation offers the possibility of social recognition to marginalized actors, the empowerment of actors little legitimized and the creation of spaces for overcoming fears and mistrust. The decision-making process must start from the sharing of principles that apply to all, universal, while the decisions taken should be the last step of a decision-making process that should be conceived as an opportunity to transform conflict into opportunities for growth.*

CONCLUSION

The issue of the mosque cannot be solved solely just by legislation. A law on religious freedom or the signing of an agreement (*Intesa*) would certainly help to give answers, but it would certainly not be sufficient to respond to the concerns of the institutions and political parties, worried about losing electoral support, and much less to those citizens expressing fears that, even if they are often unfounded, must find adequate assuagement. Beyond the legal dimension, the issue of the integration of Islam and Muslims in Italian cities has to do with identity and, therefore, with profound, long-term dynamics and appropriate tools. But the processes that are rapidly transforming Italian Islam, beginning with the emergence of a new generation, require that institutional actors abandon the policy of not deciding and irresponsibility, which confines part of the inhabitants of a territory to the margins of public life and the exclusion of political legitimacy. The formation of a new response from the institutions will also be crucial to the internal confrontation between those Muslims who want to maintain a certain degree of separation and those who aspire to be an integral part of the society in which they live and in which their children are growing up. The need for a new institutional practice is further reinforced by the bond that seems to emerge between the legitimacy of the presence of Islam in the public space and the degree of openness of the Islamic community. City per city, then, the issue of Islamic places of worship should be taken not as a "problem" to hide or to be put off, but as an opportunity that can help reconcile rights and social cohesion and that can make the involved actors evolve, on one part by allowing the departure from marginalization and on the other by responding to the fears that the presence of the Other may cause. The public debate on the mosque should be thought and interpreted as an opportunity for those who take part in it. For Muslims, the space of public debate may be an opportunity to get out of a condition of marginalization or stigmatization, to be known and to impose their demands on public attention, thus acquiring political legitimacy. As shown in the case of Florence, the public debate on the mosque may produce an individual and collective empowerment of Muslims, who may present themselves as interlocutors and so emerge in the public space as "Islamic believers". The public debate makes it possible to "learn" how to better interact with the institutions and other social actors, including citizens and the media, through the need to formulate public questions and to find the "appropriate" answers to appease the fears of others. In addition, it allows the gaining of confidence and awareness of one's own rights, abandoning a victimized approach that ends up relegating Muslims to a subordinated position. The public debate becomes an opportunity in so far as it is able to provoke a reflection on "being Muslim" within the urban context, that is a reflection on the meaning and the ways of being a minority that calls for political and social recognition. But the public debate can also be an opportunity for those citizens and social actors, non-Muslim, who participate, because it allows them to find answers to those fears that come from lack of knowledge of whom is perceived and described as the Other, the one who comes from outside known and secure boundaries. In addition, participation in the public debate on the mosque allows social actors to access a reflection that is not obvious on identity proper, on the context in which people live and on the changes that are taking place and to which everybody inevitably participates. With a little

hardiness, we could even say that it makes it possible to reduce the distance between an image that people may have of themselves, as open and welcoming, and the reality, too often made instead of rejection and stigmatization.

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