

# Social polarisation and urban security

Research in Umbria, Italy

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This project is co-funded by the European Commission, Internal Security Fund – Police Programme.

This publication has been produced with the financial support of the Internal Security Fund – Police Programme (2014-2020).

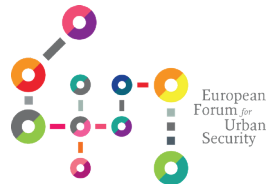
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# Building resilience to reduce polarisation: the BRIDGE project of the European Forum for Urban Safety in Umbria<sup>1</sup>

## I

### The BRIDGE project

Social polarisation is permeating our communities and eroding the space for dialogue, sharing and trust. Belonging to a social group is expressed through uncritical adherence to an identity model defined in terms of denial of the other, of opposition to the ‘enemy’, thus increasing the distance between people. Polarisation as a process of conflict radicalisation between social groups can lead to increased tensions and amplify the vulnerability factors of minority and/or marginal groups. To prevent its effects, it is necessary to understand how ‘us – them’ thinking, social opposition and hostility, take hold in our communities and how effective action can be taken to foster social cohesion.

This is what led to the creation of BRIDGE (Building resilience to reduce polarisation and growing extremism 2019), a European cooperation project committed to tackling polarisation as a process that often leads to radicalisation and violent extremism. It was promoted by the European Forum for Urban Security (EFUS) and 90% funded by the European Union Internal Security Fund – Police (2014-2020).

The project aimed to raise the awareness of local players, strengthen their capacity to reduce individual and collective vulnerability to radicalisation and mitigate the phenomenon by consolidating polarisation detec-

1. Following a public notice, the Umbria Region assigned the research-action activity within the BRIDGE Project to the Sociology of Law research group of the University of Perugia's Department of Law, coordinated by Prof. Stefano Anastasia and composed of Antonino Azzarà, Lorenzo Fanoli and Michela Morelli. The research report, together with its theoretical and analytical premises are in Anastasia 2021.

tion and management tools. With this in mind, it aimed to assist partners<sup>2</sup> to develop measures to address tensions and tendencies towards social unrest, while promoting community-based initiatives involving cooperation between public services and private actors and the relationship between local authorities and experts to address polarisation comprehensively.

The project was divided into four phases

- development of tools to analyse and monitor polarisation at a local level;
- design of local pilot schemes in the European countries involved;
- evaluation of polarisation using a tailor-made methodological framework and tools;
- development of preventive measures to mitigate local polarisation phenomena.

During the two years<sup>3</sup> of the project, meetings and seminars were held to allow a thorough follow-up of the progress of the local measures and exchanges of information, practices and knowledge between the participants, as well as a final publication and an international conference to conclude the work.

## 2

### The local project of the Umbria Region.

The Umbria Region is a member of the Italian Forum for Urban Safety (FISU), an association that has been active since 1996 and brings together more than 40 Italian cities, unions of municipalities and regions, whose aim is to extend the promotion of new urban safety policies in Italy as well. The Italian Forum also represents the EFUS National Section, to which more than two hundred and fifty European Cities and Territorial Administrations from ten different countries are associated. Until October 2019, the Umbria Region was vice-president of the FISU and a member of the Executive Committee of the European Forum. The relationships thus built

2. The 13 participants in the project were Brussels (BE), Val d'Oise Departmental Council (FR), Düsseldorf (DE), Government of Catalonia (ES), Genk (BE), Igoumenitsa (GR), Leuven (BE), Reggio Emilia (IT), Umbria Region (IT), Rotterdam (NL), Terrassa (ES), Stuttgart (DE), Vaulx-en-Velin (FR).

3. January 2019 - December 2020 (24 months), with an extension of a further 6 months due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

over time have made it possible to work on safety issues related to the EFUS network.

The pilot project of the Umbria Region is part of the wider context of BRIDGE and, in harmony with the principles and values of the Forum, it shares its objectives of respect for human rights and the implementation of security policies aimed at the social inclusion of the most vulnerable groups.

The complexity and specificity of the issues affecting the territory require joint action at several government levels, the activity of Local Police and Law Enforcement Agencies, but also the synergic cooperation of civil society, to be involved with a view to the effective implementation of an integrated and participated security system.

To investigate the phenomenon and to define the starting point for analysing, monitoring and preventing polarisation in the Umbrian territory, the Umbria Region, following the EFUS guidelines (2007), set itself the objective of conducting audits, focus groups and local surveys and training security professionals and the players involved, with assistance from the Sociology of Law research group from the Law Department of the University of Perugia, which has long been engaged in this area of research.

To structure and implement local actions able to prevent, mitigate and manage polarisation, guaranteeing improvements in individual and collective security, it is necessary to have a clear picture of the context, the subjects or groups at risk and possible protection factors or sources of resilience already present in the territory under investigation.

### 3

## Preliminary analysis of the demographic and socio-economic context of the Umbria region

Umbria is a region in central Italy that includes the provinces of Perugia and Terni and 92 predominantly small and medium-sized municipalities, with approximately 880,000 inhabitants and a demographic trend, including the immigrant population, in continuous decline.

The long-term demographic scenario<sup>4</sup> shows important trends such as the ageing of the population, the ‘simplification’ of family structures and

4. The data in this paragraph can be found at <http://dati.istat.it/> and <http://www.voxdiritti.it/>

a reduction in the average number of members, increasing nucleation of families and a decrease in those made up of several generations, an increase in single-parent families, as well as a postponement, compared to the past, of new generations leaving their family home and an increase in the average age of those who become parents for the first time. In addition, Umbria's demographic structure has certain weaknesses that are more pronounced than the national average: in particular, a negative turnover rate with a higher overall average age of the population, fewer children and adolescents and high rates of general dependency and elderly people.

Compared to the national average, the Region has a higher incidence of foreigners on the total number of residents: this has influenced, at least in part, the demographic balance, thus mitigating the ageing of the reference society.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, some important socio-demographic phenomena have revealed critical and significant factors of decline in terms of economic pauperisation, growing uncertainty and increased variability in household income trends. Also highlighted was a decrease in the cultural and educational resources of the resident population, a reduction in employment rates and progressive deindustrialisation; the data on electoral participation in Umbria is also significant, as it is in constant decline. Finally, the analysis of data from social media profiles located in Umbria on the spread and composition of hate messages shows migrants as the main recipients of hate speech.

### 3.1. THE MIGRATORY PHENOMENON IN THE UMBRIA REGION.

Given the results of the demographic and socio-economic survey, the Umbria Region identified immigration as an issue that deserves a central role in the local action and research project.

In the wake of the recent regulations aimed at containing migration flows, the simplifications of the political and media debate have produced such a misrepresentation of reality that there is an almost total overlap between the issue of security and that of immigration, which is thus the most polarised issue in the socio-political context, with a growing trend that is evident from the analysis of data on the perception of the link between immigration and crime (Fanoli 2021). Conveying news through narratives developed in binary codes such as 'good-bad', 'black-white', 'Italian-immi-

5. The Umbrian population has been growing almost exclusively due to migration for about thirty years.

grant', has the effect of creating social atomisation, a space between people where division proliferates, the fear generated by otherness, by difference, and where the shadow of sectarianism can provide cover for a pernicious tendency for discrimination that can degenerate into habitual racism.

Although Umbrian society is undergoing profound changes, it nevertheless descends from the Region which, until the 1970s, fostered Italian emigration (Tosi, 2007) to the Americas (Brazil, Argentina and the USA) and the countries of central Europe (France, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium and Luxembourg) and which, above all, can boast a series of important policies in support of emigrants and immigrants. In 1973, Umbria was the first region to legislate on emigration, setting up the 'Regional Council on Emigration and Immigration' and a solidarity fund for emigrant or immigrant workers and their families (Colucci, 2012).

It is only from a more complex and articulated vision of the migration phenomenon and its history that we can start to understand how it is linked to the Umbrian situation. Firstly, looking at the incidence on the demographic data, then at the levels of integration achieved, dissecting the unsolved problems, and finally evaluating the often-neglected contribution to the economy and taxation from immigrant workers.

During the first decade of this century, immigration reached unprecedented proportions in Italy<sup>6</sup>: if at the 2001 census there were approximately 1,334,889 foreign citizens resident in Italy, they became 4 million at the 2011 census, rising to more than 5 million at the beginning of 2018.<sup>7</sup>

The foreigners resident in Umbria on 31st December 2019 were 98,791, 55.1% of whom were women, and with an incidence on the total Umbrian population of 11.2%, the fifth-highest in Italy, compared to a national average of 8.8% (AUR, 2010): legal foreigners have increased by more than 10 times in 25 years, while the number of illegal immigrants is estimated to be almost constant over time.

The composition of foreign residents by origin sees Romanians accounting for 27% of the total, followed by Albanians at 13.0% and Moroccans at 10%. At the dawn of 2020, there were 60,416 non-EU foreigners with a regular permit<sup>8</sup> in Umbria, of whom 51.4% were women and 41.1% were married. Among those holding a long-term residence permit, those

6. During the 1981 census, there were 210,000 foreigners residing in our country, almost 60% of whom were European.

7. A number that is growing exponentially when non-resident foreigners and those who did not take part in the census are taken into account.

8. 61.6% hold a long-term permit, while 38.4% have a fixed-term permit.

granted for family-related reasons accounted for the largest share with 56%, followed by permits for work reasons with 23.3% (of which 0.3% for seasonal work), an important segment consisting of 12.4% for international protection and 5.1% with a permit for study purposes, a number that well expresses the traditional attraction that Umbria holds for foreign students from all over the world.

The details that emerge from the analysis of the foreign population in the Region show consolidation of immigration: the stabilisation of foreigner presence and family reunifications have brought about significant changes in the composition of the population, determining the shift from the immigration of young adults living alone to a conspicuous presence of families. In addition to the complex segmentation by country of origin (as many as 16 different nationalities represent 75% of the immigrants), the large-scale presence of successive generations of immigrants has been added over time. In the last decade, Umbria has become less and less a stopover area and more and more a destination for those wishing to stay.

Moreover, the work of migrants, such as construction, agriculture and care for the elderly now mainly sustains entire sectors of the Umbrian economy.

Nevertheless, Umbria has a higher degree of social than work integration: this is reflected in a policy plan that goes beyond the simple reception of migrants to building integration and inclusion paths between migrants of different origins and between Italians and migrants, favoured by a relatively receptive social fabric and a particularly advanced regional legislation on immigration (AUR 2010, pp. 613 ff.).

#### 4

### The Audit Phase

The project phase focused on audits, meetings and focus groups with representatives of institutions and civil society, NGOs and associations, painted a picture of the Umbrian context that is relatively complex, but with valid tools, projects and a social network that represent a sure index of resilience.

The Alisei Coop project, 'Building a bridge of inter-religious dialogue', to mitigate polarising phenomena aroused particular interest. As a way of integrating and exchanging knowledge between different cultures, it aims to foster cohesion in a secular, pluralist and multi-ethnic society.



The activities of the *Fiorivano le Viole* association are also of great value. Founded spontaneously by residents in a part of Umbria's capital, it uses art as a means for uniting and promoting cooperation between citizens, both Italian and non-Italian, and has led to the redevelopment of a particularly degraded part of town.

Another significant initiative is the project 'Mediation as a bridge between different cultures' by CIDIS ONLUS, a non-profit association founded in 1987 to encourage participation and guarantee equal opportunities<sup>9</sup> for all members of the community.

At the end of a careful survey of the regional framework, the audit focused on the institutional side with integration and reception policies in Umbria illustrated by Alessandro Vestrelli, Director of the Programming and Development Area of the network of social services and social-health integration.

The migratory phenomenon, in a multi-ethnic reality such as that of Umbria, can be a valuable resource for the Region if migrants encounter an adequate social, economic and cultural fabric. In this sense, the Regional Social Plan 2017/2019<sup>10</sup> presented by Dr Vestrelli is based on a positive vision of immigration, as it conceives cultural diversity as an asset useful to relaunch development and employment if the considerable resources available are not wasted. Migrant integration, seen also as a productive element, is therefore in perfect harmony with the host social fabric, especially given the gradual ageing of the Umbrian population compared with the respective decrease in the workforce that bears the costs of the health and pension system.

Umbria can boast significant planning and the last few years have seen numerous initiatives and new services aimed at containing marginalisation and potential social exclusion. These initiatives are mainly developed through annual regional programmes and European projects on mi-

9. CIDIS ONLUS has been running a regional cultural and linguistic mediation agency for several years, which has collaborated with USL Umbria n.1 and the External Criminal Execution Office of Perugia. The agency employs mediators from different backgrounds and cultures, trained and specialised in linguistic and cultural mediation in different areas of intervention with the specific function of supporting immigrants in decoding and understanding the host society, facilitating their access to and enjoyment of services and rights. This initiative is part of an integration process that goes beyond the initial assistance provided at the time of reception, with the aim of accompanying the migrant to interface with the various services provided in the local area.

10. Available at <https://www.regione.umbria.it/documents/18/9436380/Nuovo+Piano+sociale+regionale/43b6bf57-7444-43ef-b24a-62f2159e28fa>

grant integration. In particular: the annual programme drawn up based on Regional Law 18/90, which provides grants for projects put forward by associations, local authorities, educational institutions and other public and private bodies; the annual regional programme which, under art. 45 of Legislative Decree 286/98, allocates the share of the National Fund for Social Policies to ‘social zones’<sup>11</sup>; and projects using European funds for migrants<sup>12</sup>.

The objectives of the Umbria Region’s Social Plan 2017/2019 aimed overall at strengthening the levels of intercultural integration, empowerment and employability of migrants through capacity building, removing linguistic, social, economic and cultural obstacles to integration, and guaranteeing equal opportunities for access to services and enhancement of cultural identities.

According to the provisions of the Social Plan, between 2014 and 2017 the Umbria Region undertook numerous partnership projects with the third sector and local institutions (Police Headquarters, Prefecture, School, UEPE, Health) to structure and implement integration policies across the territory. Particular emphasis was given to language<sup>13</sup> and civic training for adult immigrants, the first real step towards their full integration into the local social fabric. Another significant regional intervention on the issue of immigration was assigned to the communications sector: the blog NIU’ (New Urban Identities)<sup>14</sup> was created, which, through stories and moments that bring together citizens of all nationalities, informs and educates citizens, raising public awareness of the added value of diversity.

## 5

### Population survey, survey results and their contextualisation.

In light of the results from the analysis of the socio-demographic context, the in-depth study of immigration in Umbria and the new aware-

11. Twelve social zones, corresponding to the health districts.

12. ‘EIF’ 2007-2013, ‘Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund’ 2014-2020 established by EU Regulation No. 516/2014.

13. The Region has set up a partnership with the University for Foreigners of Perugia, making it the main venue for teaching Italian to foreigners.

14. <https://blogniu.it/>

ness acquired during the audit phase, the research team<sup>15</sup> deemed it appropriate to conduct a field survey using a set of questionnaires proposed in the toolkit designed by EFUS to detect levels of polarisation.

The Umbria region population survey was mostly carried out through a quantitative questionnaire based on the Zero-Sum Polarization Mindset Measures model (Andrews Fearon, Good, Götz, Serapio-García, 2021), which could be used periodically to measure the degree of diffusion and incidence of polarisation phenomena. During our investigation, we examined how different types of zero-sum thinking relate to the various socio-demographic data that emerged in the Umbria region.

Specifically, the aim was to assess the tendency of the population to perceive economic and social aspects of life and, in particular, the issue of immigration as a zero-sum game, partly by investigating the compatibility/incompatibility of the interests of different reference groups (Italians and immigrants). Participants were also administered an evaluation test to measure dehumanisation, a test on the categorisation of the self in a group and the identification of the antagonist group. Finally, the respondents were asked questions concerning socio-economic status, income satisfaction and other socio-demographic indicators.

A sample of 254 residents in various parts of Umbria responded to a survey distributed both in-person<sup>16</sup> and online in November and December 2019; of these, 90 were dropped from the analysis because they were incomplete or had below-average completion times or more than three standard deviations below or above the mean. The final sample comprised 164 participants (66 men, 97 women, 1 other).

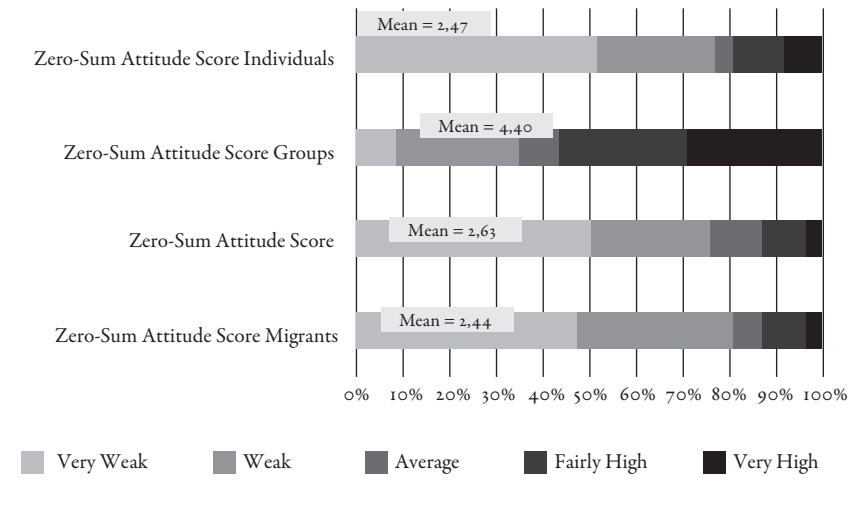
The data produced by the survey segment, analysed from the point of view of the socio-demographic characteristics of the population in Umbria, revealed phenomena specific to complex polarisation.

Although not excessively high, significant differences emerged in the distribution by gender of the scores related to zero-sum thinking on the subject of relations between individuals, economic aspects and attitudes towards migrants: men showed significantly more widespread and more pronounced zero-sum thinking than women.

15. With the technical support of Martino Ongis, Patricia Andrews Fearon and Eolene M. Boyd-MacMillan, identified as experts for the Umbria Region by the coordinators of the BRIDGE Project.

16. In particular in the waiting rooms of local doctors' surgeries, at hairdressing salons and railway stations.

FIGURE 1  
Distribution of the scores of zero-sum attitudes among the population resident in Umbria.



Score distribution according to education levels of the population reveals significant differences and somewhat high percentages of explained variance: as the education level increases, the prevalence and intensity of zero-sum thinking scores in all the factors considered decreases significantly, especially concerning attitudes towards migrants. These distributions take on considerable importance if assessed in the light of what emerged in the analysis of the socio-economic dynamics of the Region over the last decade, marked by a marked cultural impoverishment and a progressive reduction in the percentage of graduates among the Umbrian population as a whole.

The ‘age’ variable is not specifically correlated to the diffusion and intensity levels of the zero-sum thinking scores; however, one important phenomenon stands out, caused by widespread intergenerational conflict, for which young people display higher scores of polarisation regarding economic aspects, individual and group relations than the elderly and, on the other hand, are inclined to express less conflicting attitudes towards migrants.<sup>17</sup>

17. This combination of results is interesting and would suggest that young people tend to perceive themselves as a marginal and conflicted social stratum, feeling, also by virtue of this condition, closer to migrants.

Concerning respondent job status, data analysis, although hard to interpret using schematisation, nevertheless discloses some interesting elements: self-employed workers show higher levels of zero-sum thinking intensity than all the others, with particular reference to attitudes towards immigrants.

From the point of view of respondent area of residence, significant differences emerged between those living in urban centres and those living in the suburbs, especially concerning zero-sum thinking scores on economic aspects. Score distribution by municipality of residence also proved particularly significant and useful, especially with a view to future intervention for local operators.<sup>18</sup>

Another important indicator used in the questionnaire to assess the diffusion and intensity of polarisation is the judgement on a 1-7 scale of the interdependence or conflictual nature of migrants' interests with those of residents. The Circle City Scan Tool<sup>19</sup> /Circles scan tool? revealed a fairly significant polarisation<sup>20</sup> in Umbria, between a segment of the population that perceives a commonality of interests and another that, instead, tends to consider them conflicting and incompatible.

Starting from an awareness of such polarisation in the whole of the population living in the Region, we investigated the relationship between the distribution of the 'Circles' score and the various socio-demographic dimensions.

As to respondent gender, women appear to be more inclined to consider migrants' and natives' interests compatible and more synergic than men.

Respondent educational levels are also specifically correlated to and predictive of the 'Circles' score intensity: university graduates tend to be more inclined (in 70% of cases) to perceive the interests of natives and migrants as synergic or complementary; on the other hand, people with fewer qualifications are more inclined to see them as conflicting.

18. For example, residents of the municipality of Foligno score significantly higher than those of the other municipalities in all the types analysed, with particularly high scores on attitudes towards migrants.

19. This tool proposes to the respondent seven pairs of figures showing two circles with various levels of intersection, from two almost concentric circles to two completely separate circles. These represent the perception of commonality of interests between the two groups: the greater the level of intersection, the greater the perception of commonality of interests and vice versa.

20. This phenomenon seems to involve about 85% of the residents of Umbria in the polarised positions. Those who express a substantially neutral opinion account for 15%.

FIGURE 2  
The Circle City Scan tool/Circles scan tool

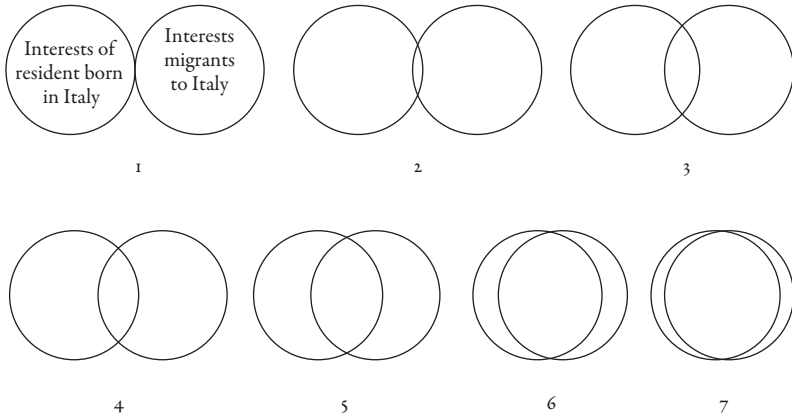


FIGURE 3  
Perceived compatibility of interests between Italian citizens and immigrants by gender.

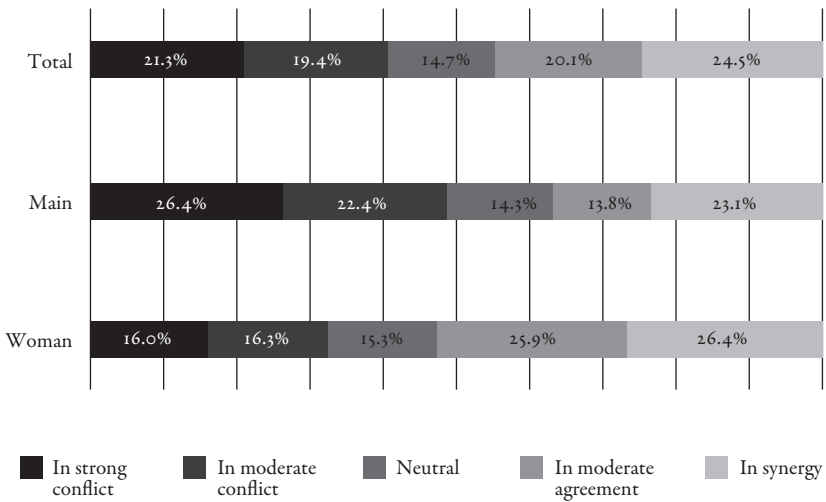
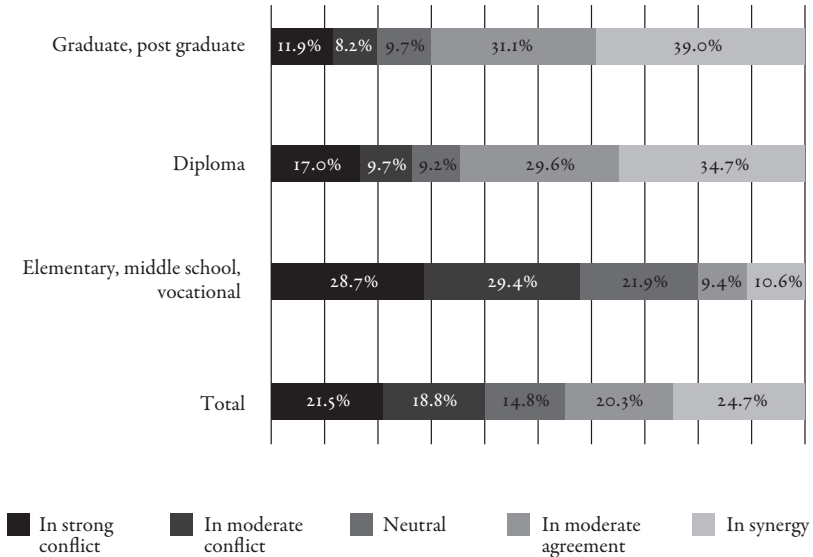


FIGURE 4  
Compatibility of interests between Italian citizens and immigrants perceived according to educational qualification.



Job status has a significant impact on the perception of synergy or conflict of interests: self-employed workers and housewives tend to perceive the interests of the two social groups as conflicting; conversely, students, in particular, followed by teachers and managers, are the most likely to value synergistic elements, while the labourer sample tends towards a non-polarised position.

Although from a purely statistical point of view a direct correlation between the age of the respondents and the Circles score does not seem to emerge, analysis of the distribution based on the aggregate scores shows a certain polarisation between people over 60 and people under 30: the former tend to perceive a fairly significant conflict of interests, the latter conceives them, instead, as being in total or partial synergy.

The analysis of data distribution according to the municipality of residence confirms and accentuates the impressions that emerged about the intensity and diffusion of scores on zero-sum thinking. In particular, residents in the municipalities of Foligno and Spoleto show wide-

FIGURE 5  
Compatibility of interests between Italian citizens and immigrants perceived according to age.

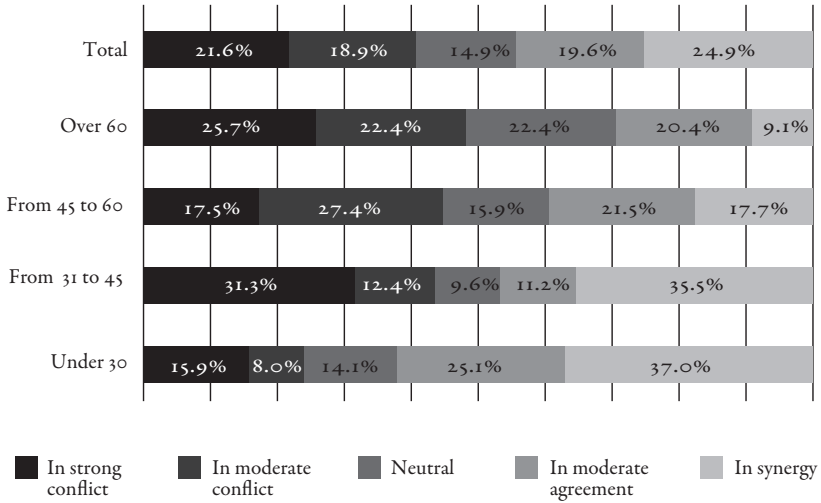
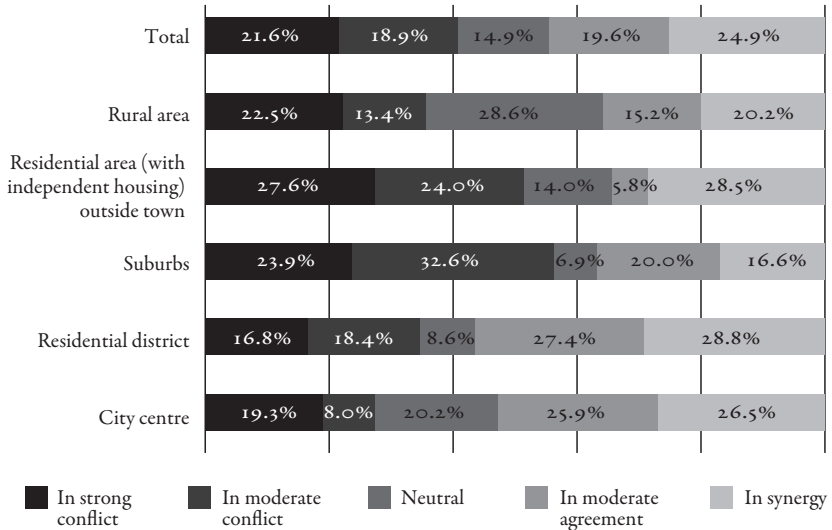


FIGURE 6  
Compatibility of interests between Italian citizens and immigrants perceived according to the area of residence





spread distrust towards migrants and the percentage of respondents who perceive a contrast between migrants' and natives' interests is well above 70% in Foligno and 60% in Spoleto; finally, also data concerning the distribution of Circles scores by area of residence show a marked polarisation between residents of suburbs and rural areas.

## 6

### Concluding phases of the project

The research made it possible to proceed to the next phase, regarding the achievement of the final objectives of the Umbria Region pilot project: to shape and spread culture and awareness to prevent polarisation, to build a territorial network to co-ordinate and develop prevention measures over the region, to spread the results of the research in the field and the contents of the training, and, finally, to develop awareness-raising measures linked to in-depth contents through the BRIDGE project.

Thus, a training pathway was prepared and activated for the main actors identified at the local level as capable of mitigating polarisation, from members of the Police Force and local Police to those working in the legal profession, members and representatives of social services and local institutions and members of associations and organisations representing civil society.

The training, divided into 6 modules of three hours each in a period between June and September, due to the spread of the virus, was delivered online with the support of the University of Perugia e-learning platforms. A total of 79 people took part: 22 from the police force, 32 from the local police, 16 from local authorities, 3 lawyers, 4 from NGOs, 2 from the Italian Forum for Urban Security<sup>21</sup>.

21. The training course was led by academics from six different Italian universities, scholars and experts in urban security: in the first module, Martino Ongis (EFUS), Maria Caterina Federici (University of Perugia) and Giovanni Moro (University of Rome Sapienza) dealt with the topic 'Polarisation and urban security'; in the second module, Uliano Conti, Lorenzo Fanoli (both from the University of Perugia) and Matteo Gerli (University of Bologna) dealt with the topic 'Crime and security. Data, social representations and prejudices', while in the third module Gian Guido Nobili (FISU Coordinator), Roberto Cornelli (University of Milan Bicocca) and Prefect Alessandra Guidi (Deputy Director General in charge of the Coordination and Planning of Police Forces, Ministry of the Interior) dealt with 'Governance and urban security policies: legislation and new orienta-

The training and participation of stakeholders represented a particularly important moment for in-depth analysis, comparison and approach to the issues of urban security and polarisation, and allowed for further reflection and consideration. In particular, it was noted that the spread of COVID-19 initially led to a dominant mood of social support, born out of a collective attitude to limit contagion. Over time, this sentiment weakened, revealing polarisation phenomena that course participants believe should be tackled and mitigated above all through inclusive, non-contradictory and non-emotional institutional action and communication.

The needs and the challenges put in place by the agencies that act directly for the security of citizens through multi-level and integrated measures encounter resistance due to public attitudes and perceptions that do not always correspond to the concrete evidence of the phenomena (for example, the perception of danger caused by migration flows). It was also highlighted how the hate messages spread on the Internet are strongly characterised by victim depersonalisation and show a significant recourse to mechanisms of moral disengagement (Bandura, 1986)<sup>22</sup>.

The survey carried out for the BRIDGE project on the diffusion of zero-sum thinking showed that the greatest risks of polarisation are found among residents in the outskirts of cities, in marginal areas and among people with medium-low educational qualifications. The chal-

tions'. The fourth module focussed on 'Urban security projects and tools: urban and social policies and situational prevention' by Mariano Sartore (University of Perugia) and Marco Sorrentino (AMAPOLA); in the fifth module Valeria Ferraris (University of Turin) and Silvia Brena (Vox Osservatorio Italiano sui Diritti-Università Cattolica, Milan) dealt with 'Hate speech, exploitation of deviance and victims: problems and projects', while the sixth module was centred on the BRIDGE project in its European dimension, thanks to the participation of Tatiana Morales (EFUS) and its implementation at local level with an in-depth study of the pilot project in the Umbria Region, presented by Antonino Azzarà, Michela Morelli and Lorenzo Fanoli (University of Perugia).

22. In the work cited above, Bandura identifies eight mechanisms of moral disengagement, some of which refer to immoral conduct made easier to accept inwardly by reference to higher principles that serve as moral justification; others use advantageous comparisons with actions worse than one's own, the sharing of responsibility for immoral actions across various people or the shifting of responsibility onto others to minimise or distort the consequences of one's actions. Finally, Bandura identifies two mechanisms based on the role of the victim: the dehumanisation of the victim, which leads to the annihilation of the victim's dignity by equating him or her with an animal or an inferior being and, finally, the blaming of the victim, who is held responsible for what he or she suffers.

lenge is to implement strategies that effectively counteract the real risk of isolation of these population strata through economic and social support measures, actions aimed at increasing liveability and socialisation in areas considered to be at risk partly through innovation in the field of urban planning, income support, promotion of micro-enterprises and integration measures directed towards multicultural exchange.

The collection and processing of the materials produced during the audit sessions, the diagnostics, the survey, the data analysis and the training, completed by a final section dedicated to the possible measures to counter polarisation for concrete situations, finally converged in a publication drafted in Italian and English, published in a first complete version in paper format, and in a more streamlined and usable open-source electronic format, intended to be distributed among stakeholders, operators of the sectors involved in the project and previously identified, students and teachers of secondary schools and universities of the Umbria Region.

Distribution of the publication, planned through the network already consolidated during the training activities and in the secondary schools, brings to a conclusion the Umbria Region pilot project and, at the same time, lays the first brick in the construction of what it is hoped will be a solid bridge, able to assist a resilient community cross through the times of new identity polarisations.

### Practical tools and recommendations for countering polarisation at local level (*Michela Morelli*)

The final part of this study focuses on identifying practical tools and methodology useful for tackling polarisation in its multiple forms at the local level.

The tools proposed in this section concern urban security, in the broad meaning outlined by Law 48/2017, referring to diversified and coherent competencies, programmes and interventions, aimed at ensuring better security standards for the local areas, both of vertical subsidiarity with the partnership of multiple levels of governance – integrated security –, and of horizontal subsidiarity in terms of participatory security.

## GENERALISED APPROACHES

The different approaches outlined below originate from the common denominator of *understanding polarisation*, which is articulated in a series of fundamental principles:

- Know how to identify polarising dynamics and/or factors ('us-them' narratives, oversimplification of reality, scapegoating, social disintegration, hate speech, etc.): recognising the symptoms of polarisation, giving due weight to phenomena and maintaining a vigilant and reactive approach, enables early action to be taken on the problem, avoiding dangerous degeneration. (e.g., implementing web monitoring and intervention strategies to suppress hate or discrimination messages from local users).
- Do not be unprepared: training and awareness-raising among the social and institutional players involved regarding the complex phenomenon of polarisation are fundamental on two fronts, that of identifying polarisation (described in the previous point) and that of reacting to it (described in the next point).
- Do not fuel the clash with words or actions: polarisation, as repeatedly specified, feeds on a binary communication (us-them, Italian-immigrant), with extreme simplifications of reality, lack of empathy and mutual understanding, a communication marked by the mechanism of moral disengagement (those internal justifications that allow the individual to carry out damaging behaviour, silencing his or her personal conscience and removing feelings of guilt e.g. the recourse to superior aims – 'I steal to survive' –, or the recourse to advantageous comparison – 'I stole but he killed', to the dislocation of responsibility – 'it's the state's fault if we die of hunger' –, to the division of responsibility – 'everybody does it', to dehumanisation – 'they are beasts/war machines/pieces of meat' – and to victim-blaming – 'they wouldn't have died at sea if they hadn't left'). Not using this kind of language to communicate is important to avoid providing fuel for polarisation.
- Create immediate response mechanisms to the first signs of polarisation, avoiding underestimating or under-representing situations, words and actions.
- Multilevel cooperation between the various local actors to foster pluralism in the analysis and approach to the various issues: this allows, among other things, an assessment and response to the phenomenon that reflects different points of view, experiences and good practices previously adopted that can potentially be used to counter polarisation.

*Strategic communication* plays a key role in countering polarisation. Once polarisation has been identified and defined at the local level, it is necessary to:

- Identify the target audience: it is important to understand the type of people you are addressing, make communication flexible, adapt it to subjects and contexts to make the content usable (e.g., it would be pointless to use complex language with a six-year-old child).
- Identify a credible voice to convey inclusive messages: once the most effective communication style to reach the target audience has been identified, it is useful to have a ‘spokesperson’ with recognised credibility in the target topic and who can intercept and convey mediation and inclusion (e.g., use a sports champion in a campaign to raise anti-racist awareness).
- Choose the messages to be conveyed.
- Use language that is clear and understandable to the target audience.
- Use a mediating language able to stimulate empathy and trust.
- Encourage group work, inclusive activities, creative and awareness-raising campaigns to form counter-narratives of social cohesion and respect.
- Involve the media to keep the spotlight on the delicate role played by information channels in polarising dynamics.
- Encourage fact-based communication that can effectively counter fake news and misinformation.

TARGETED APPROACHES

Area of Polarisation	Characteristics and Indicators	Aims	Action Strategies	Action Strategy Actors
Communication	Us-them binary narratives, oversimplification, hate speech, mechanisms of moral disengagement, scapegoating, fake news, disinformation with the institutions, poor participation.	Restore trust in the institutions, political participation, management of “hard decisions”, social cohesion.	Transparency and inclusion in decision-making processes, valuing all positions on the issue, not ignoring online hate speech (direct intervention to generate inclusion), organising seminars and meetings to co-create inclusive social policies, investing in listening and encouraging multi-level dialogue, media strategies aimed at transparency.	Political actors, institutions, local authorities, local police, law enforcement, third sector.
Access to Services (Housing, Social Services, Health Services, Welfare Contributions)	Us-them binary narratives, zero-sum thinking, lack of participation and involvement in decision-making processes, lack of trust in institutions, oversimplification, hate speech, marginalisation, scapegoating, dehumanisation, disintegration, moral disengagement mechanisms.	Social cohesion, pluralism, inclusion, trust and participation.	Reporting hate crimes and fostering an effective response by the competent bodies, promoting storytelling and cohesive narratives, avoiding conflict, avoiding negative bias by using positive bias to arouse empathy and break down stereotypes, creating awareness campaigns, promoting civic sense, proximity and neighbourhood networks, educating the youngest and most vulnerable sections of the population, empowering the media.	Institutions, Local Authorities, Equal Opportunities, Local Health Authorities, Local Police, Law Enforcement, Associations, NGOs.

Area of Polarisation	Characteristics and Indicators	Aims	Action Strategies	Action Strategy Actors
School	Marginalisation, bullying, hate speech, division and disintegration, binary narratives, simplification and stereotyping.	Convey the importance of critical thinking, inclusiveness and cohesion; have clear rules and shared value systems.	Creating a climate of empathy, trust and security that enables pupils to communicate their emotions, listening and understanding the mechanisms that trigger polarising dynamics, involving families, remaining sensitive to conflicts and dealing with them immediately, but without haste or simplification, promoting activities, projects and awareness-raising campaigns.	Ministry of Education and Equal Opportunities, Institutions, Families, Teachers, School managers, NGOs, Associations.
Diversity	Discrimination, us-them binary narratives, zero-sum thinking, oversimplification, fake news, hate speech, marginalisation, scapegoating, dehumanisation, social disintegration, prejudice, stereotypes, moral disengagement mechanisms.	Pluralism, acceptance, social cohesion, inclusion.	Reporting hate crimes and fostering an effective response by the competent bodies, promoting storytelling and cohesive narratives, avoiding conflict, avoiding negative bias by using positive bias to arouse empathy and break down stereotypes, creating awareness campaigns, promoting civic sense, proximity and neighbourhood networks, educating the youngest and most vulnerable sections of the population, empowering the media.	Equal opportunities, Local authorities, Institutions, Social cooperation, Associations, NGOs, Foundations, Law enforcement, Local police.

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