

Dissertation Project (outline)

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“No Longer Foreign Workers, but European Citizens!”: Italian Migrant Organisations in the Federal Republic of Germany after 1945

In historical research on transnational migration in the second half of the twentieth century, interconnections between labour migration, processes of decolonisation, and European integration have gained increasing attention (Deplano/Laschi/Pes [2020](#)). Recently published analyses of urban and regional history took a closer look at points of contact and interconnections between the trade union movement and the socio-political activism of migrants in German industrial areas and urban agglomerations (Goeke [2020](#), [2021](#); Carstensen/Hess/Riedner/Schwenken [2022](#)). The studies show that migrant organisations played a major role in representing the political and social interests of migrants, in fostering debates and discourses favourable to their social, civil and political rights, and, more generally, in the socio-political mobilisation of migrant minorities living in West Germany and other Western European countries (Prontera [2018](#); Caruso [2019](#); Pichler [2020](#); Caner [2021](#); Vizzarri [2021a](#); [2021b](#)).

The present dissertation project situates itself in this current of research. It focuses on the trade union, cultural and socio-political activities of Italian migrant organisations operating in the Federal Republic of Germany from the 1950s to the 1990s. Against the background of their political and cultural support activities, the following questions are posed: What political and social ideologies did these organisations bring to the public debate in the Federal Republic? Who worked in and for the organisations and from what social *milieus* did they come? Did Italian organisations cooperate with West German institutions, urban, regional, and federal authorities, trade union bodies and associations, political parties and other non-governmental organisations? What programmes did Italian migrant organisations carry out in order to integrate Italians into local or urban society? How did they promote the social and political mobilisation of Italian workers and what initiatives did they take to overcome mechanisms of exclusion with reference to citizens from abroad? A further question addresses the extent to which Italian migrant organisations contributed to the trans-urban and trans-regional circulation of knowledge, expertise, information and (cultural-)political ideas in Italian communities in Western Europe and thus to the transnationalisation and Europeanisation of Italian-speaking social and political networks?

In this context, I argue that Italian migrant organisations in the Federal Republic acted as agents for the “Europeanisation” of migrant discourses and debates. As key non-trade union and non-governmental actors, Italian migrant associations and federations generated public debates on civil, trade union, social and human rights, and functioned *de facto* as “social spaces” (Bourdieu [1985](#)) for the production and reproduction of a political culture that saw the transnational and European participation of migrant workers in West Germany as a key factor in the development of the labour and democratic movement in Western Europe. In other words, Italian migrant organisations promoted what I call “transmigrant Europeanism” or “trans-Europeanism”: a set of ideologies, political ideas and sub-cultural movements that emerged notably in the social networks and organisations of Italian migrants and served to advance inter- and multi-culturalism in European countries, to achieve greater political and social participation of migrant and ethnic minorities in their destination countries, and to democratise publicly regulated binational and international mechanisms of migration.

The research draws on a theoretical framework inspired by social and cultural history approaches. On the one hand, it is important to embed the study in a “transnational” perspective: theories of “transnational social spaces” (Glick-Schiller et al. [1992](#); Faist et al. [2011](#); Faist [2014](#); Paisley-Scully [2019](#)) and of “migrant networks” (Roger [2005](#); Fuhse [2010](#); Bommès/Tacke [2011](#);) are relevant to the analysis.

Italian organisations and associations were venues and transnational social spaces for the production, reproduction and transfer of “migrant knowledge” (van Wyck [2017](#); Lässig/Steinberg [2017](#); Westermann/Erdur [2020](#)): information, expertise, specialised knowledge, and professional, social and technical competencies that revolved around people who were not (or not exclusively) “guest workers”. Instead, they tended to come from certain social milieus, such as social workers, teachers, journalists, intellectuals and politicians. These actors played a key role as “cultural brokers” (Caruso [2000](#); Lotterer [2021](#)), since they functioned both as intermediaries between Italian and German institutions and as “brokers” of German-Italian and indeed European intercultural and multicultural exchange. Which is why, on the other hand, the study should be embedded in a cultural history approach, allowing it to highlight precisely this role of Italian migrant organisations in the development of a participatory democratic European “political culture” (Almond/Verba [1965](#)).

To support the above hypotheses, archival sources and research literature are used to emphasise the discursive dimension of the socio-political and cultural activity of these organisations. Unpublished material retained in the archives of the federations and associations are especially relevant: reports on meetings, conferences and congresses, correspondence with Italian, German and other (Western) European institutions (e.g., consulates and embassies, regional and municipal authorities, federal agencies). “Grey literature” resources are likewise significant: internal publications (e.g., weekly and monthly bulletins) that circulated in the networks of the organisations and associations only, commemorative volumes and periodicals, (auto)biographies of former association presidents and employees. In addition, I make use of non-written sources such as “narrative/discursive interviews” (Fedjuk [2018](#); Ullrich [2020](#)), photographic material, radio broadcasts, and documentaries.

On the basis of this corpus of sources, I intend to achieve two goals: Firstly, to expand contemporary historical research on the German labour and democratic movement and on the New Social Movement of the 1970s, of which the (organised) political mobilisation and civic engagement of migrant workers was an essential component. Secondly, to contribute to the history of “Europe” as a vision after the Second World War by examining the extent to which migrant ideas and political practices advanced the construction of post-war European societies “from below” and by exploring how these affected processes of Europeanisation and transnationalisation from the 1960s to the 1990s (cf. Severin-Barboutie [2021](#); Vizzarri [2021b](#)).