

This is the peer reviewed version of the following article:

The Reggiane Factory and New Immigrants: Memory and Local History to Strengthen Integration / Zannoni, F., Michele, B. - In: Migrating Heritage. Experiences of Cultural Networks and Cultural Dialogue in Europe / [a cura di] Perla Innocenti. - FARNHAM : Ashgate, 2014. - ISBN 9781472422811. - pp. 237-239

Ashgate  
*Terms of use:*

The terms and conditions for the reuse of this version of the manuscript are specified in the publishing policy. For all terms of use and more information see the publisher's website.

10/06/2026 10:48

(Article begins on next page)

1	Chapter 19	1
2		2
3	The Reggiane Factory and	3
4		4
5	New Immigrants: Memory and Local	5
6		6
7	History to Strengthen Integration	7
8		8
9	Michele Bellelli and Federico Zannoni	9
10		10
11		11
12	<b>Introduction</b>	12
13		13
14	In Reggio Emilia, Italy, during the twentieth century, the opening of a large factory	14
15	producing planes, trains and tractors attracted workers from everywhere and led	15
16	to the building of new workers' and immigrants' living quarters. Nowadays,	16
17	immigrants that live in the former Reggiane workers' neighbourhood study the	17
18	history of their new city, learning from people's accounts and visiting places	18
19	around the old factory.	19
20		20
21		21
22	<b>The Past of the Factory and the Present of the District</b>	22
23		23
24	In 1904, in the city of Reggio Emilia, the Reggiane factory was opened to produce	24
25	railway equipment. In order to accommodate the workers, housing was built in	25
26	the district of Santa Croce, which became the first working-class area of the city	26
27	(Spreafico 1968, Canovi 1990).	27
28	During the Second World War, the Reggiane became one of the most important	28
29	factories in Italy, employing about 12,000 people and producing warplanes.	29
30	On 28 July 1943, workers called a strike demanding the end of the war. The	30
31	army crushed the strike by opening fire on the protesters, killing nine of them	31
32	and wounding dozens (Magnanini 1999). Despite varying fortunes and several	32
33	changes of ownership, the factory still produced rail and port equipment after	33
34	the war, until its closure in 2009. The district of Santa Croce partly followed the	34
35	fortunes of Reggiane: the number of local workers gradually decreased and they	35
36	were replaced by foreign immigrants, both as factory workers and as residents	36
37	in the neighbourhood. The current inhabitants of Santa Croce largely ignore the	37
38	history of their city and its old, big factory.	38
39		39
40		40
41	<b>From the Past to the Future, through the Present: the Project</b>	41
42		42
43	In 2010 the Istituto per la Storia della Resistenza e della Società contemporanea	43
44	of the Reggio Emilia Province and the Centro Territoriale Permanente (education	44

1 department) of Reggio Emilia carried out a project which had been devised 1  
 2 expressly for the foreign residents in the city of Reggio Emilia, especially for 2  
 3 those in the district of Santa Croce. Nineteen people (20–40 years old) from 3  
 4 Algeria, Austria, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, China, Egypt, Georgia, Ghana, Morocco, 4  
 5 Nigeria, Russia and Sri Lanka took part in the activities. Some of them had already 5  
 6 participated in previous projects aimed to promote the knowledge of the Italian 6  
 7 Constitution and to improve their language skills. 7

8 The project was been set up in three phases: 8  
 9 9

- 10 1. A guided tour through Reggio Emilia's historic and artistic sites. 10
- 11 2. Some lessons about the Reggiane factory's history. To explain the 11  
 12 importance of the factory in the history of the city, the project manager 12  
 13 and the institute's archivist showed the participants documents held in the 13  
 14 public archives, such as photographs, statistics on the labour force and 14  
 15 eyewitness testimonies about the 1943 strikes. 15
- 16 3. The renovation and the following opening of a memorial stone dedicated to 16  
 17 the memory of the nine workers massacred on 28 July 1943. 17

18 18  
 19 The project aimed to offer to the neighbourhood's new residents the chance to 19  
 20 learn, remember and celebrate the history of the old Reggiane factory and its 20  
 21 workers, in order to let them develop comparisons between the past and their 21  
 22 current life. 22

23 23

24 24

## 25 **Conclusions** 25

26 26

27 I think it is right that Reggio Emilia city offers this kind of opportunity to get to 27  
 28 know the history of this place. After this initiative I went home and I talked to my 28  
 29 housemates, they did not know anything about these stories.. I mean I was the 29  
 30 one who – as a foreigner – was telling them the history of their own homeplace! 30

31 31

32 (Olga from Russia, 28 years old). 32

33 33

34 The project participants shared their new experiences in their families and 34  
 35 communities; some of them organised meetings, events and lessons on the project 35  
 36 within various immigrant associations. 36

37 A documentary *Non vogliamo lavorare per la guerra* has been produced to 37  
 38 disseminate the project and the testimonies of the participants. The square where 38  
 39 the new monument has been placed has become a meeting point between old and 39  
 40 new residents of the neighbourhood, as well as a recently opened alcohol-free 40  
 41 bar run by immigrants. The project has contributed to improving the knowledge 41  
 42 of the city's history and of the Reggiane factory among locals. Despite these 42  
 43 achievements, the number of project participants was lower than expected, 43  
 44 considering the high immigrant population of the district. 44

1	The project organisers questioned themselves about the low number of	1
2	participants. In addition to some clear difficulties such as the knowledge of Italian,	2
3	some newly arrived immigrants are still strongly connected to their own culture	3
4	and they do not feel it a priority to learn about the past of their new country and city.	4
5	The crises, fears and conflicts that now characterise our cities lead people to	5
6	lose interest in the past, to not imagine the future and to limit their perspectives to	6
7	the present time. The past is no longer thought as a source from which to draw upon	7
8	in order to enrich the present; in the same way, the present does not feed on future	8
9	prospects (Augé 2007). Today in our cities, the residents of entire neighbourhoods	9
10	have little sense of belonging and feel estranged; they suffer the stigma of being	10
11	immigrants, and are often marginalised.	11
12	On the other hand, people's roots are not only in their personal history and	12
13	family life, but also in the collective memory of the neighbourhood where they live,	13
14	where they grew up, or where at a certain time they began to dwell. Knowledge	14
15	of history allows the development of a better understanding of the present and the	15
16	planning of a secure and successful future for the whole community. History is thus	16
17	a vehicle for integration, meeting and communication. It is therefore an essential	17
18	element for political, social and educational projects which want to address the	18
19	needs and the challenges of our increasingly multi-ethnic neighbourhoods.	19
20		20
21		21
22	<b>Acknowledgements</b>	22
23		23
24	The authors would like to thank Giulia Cantini for her language consultancy.	24
25		25
26		26
27	<b>References</b>	27
28		28
29	Augé, M. 2007. <i>Tra i confini. Città, luoghi, integrazioni</i> . Milan: Bruno Mondadori.	29
30	Canovi, A. 1990. <i>Nascita di una città, il territorio di Santa Croce: la storia, la</i>	30
31	<i>memoria, le Reggiane</i> . Milan: Franco Angeli.	31
32	Magnanini, G. 1990. <i>Il regime Badoglio a Reggio Emilia 25 luglio – 8</i>	32
33	<i>settembre 1943</i> . Milano: Teti.	33
34	Spreafico, S. 1968. <i>Un'industria, una città, cinquant'anni alle Officine Reggiane</i> .	34
35	Bologna: Il Mulino.	35
36		36
37		37
38		38
39		39
40		40
41		41
42		42
43		43
44		44

Proof Copy