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ITALIANS IN BERLIN:
SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC ASPECTS

A Colorni-Hirschman International Institute:
"German-Italian" Scholarship to promote research on Italians in Germany

Index

Introduction

Stereotypes, clichés, and prejudices – both negative and positive – have always accompanied relations between Italians and Germans, and will continue to do so. However, this research aims to go beyond preconceptions and to discover, or rather rediscover, that profound bond of "love and hate" that has united the two peoples for centuries. The encounter – and often clash – between Italians and Germans is an inexhaustible source of exchange: practices, traditions, customs, ideas, and initiatives weave together in every sphere of public and private life.

The A Colorni-Hirschman International Institute has established a ten-month scholarship to support research into the Italian presence in Germany. By adopting an interdisciplinary perspective, the primary objective of the research is to explore how Italian communities have settled and interacted with the German sociocultural and economic fabric. It is therefore an interdisciplinary study because it integrates various fields to analyse the presence of Italians in Germany from multiple perspectives – historical, social, cultural, and economic – using a combination of bibliographic sources, historical analysis, qualitative interviews, and participant observation to offer a comprehensive and nuanced view of the processes of migration, settlement, and integration. This approach makes it possible to provide a more complete and in-depth understanding of the migratory phenomenon and its many implications. By identifying the main threads that characterize the Italian community and reconstructing the diverse profiles of Italians from multiple backgrounds, the project aims to offer an articulated vision of the processes of settlement and integration. The research also intends to delve into the cultural exchanges between Italy and Germany, highlighting the stories of interaction between Italians and Germans, the ties that are maintained with the country of origin, the ways in which people impact it even from afar, and the resulting issues. The investigation, which then focused on Berlin, aims to uncover the influence of Italians on Berlin (and on German society in general) from the economic, social, and cultural points of view, but also to understand how the Italian community fits in and integrates, and to what extent the two peoples are open or closed toward cultural exchange and interaction in the broader European context.

The choice of Berlin was not random: today the German capital is the multicultural heart of Europe. Even though it is within the Federal Republic of Germany, Berlin stands out for its uniqueness. A city with many facets, Berlin continues to exert an irresistible charm. Accounts clearly show the difference between Berlin and other German cities. Berlin is not a typical German

city; its division into twelve *Bezirke*, each with different traditions and cultures inherited from their past inhabitants, makes it a modern and open-minded metropolis, more open and inclusive compared to more traditional places like Munich, Stuttgart, Cologne, or Hamburg. In Cologne, for example, there is a large Italian community, but the migration to Berlin is distinct from that of the Gastarbeiter who settled in the South or North of the country where the industrial cities are located. Berlin is a destination for freedom, experience, and study. Here, everyone can be who they want to be, and is accepted for it. In contrast, the mentality of cities in Northern and Southern Germany is perceived as much more closed. Through work, study, and recreational experiences in various German cities, including Aachen, Cologne, Wuppertal, Frankfurt am Main, Hamburg, and even Maastricht in the Netherlands, one of the interviewees realized that "Berlin is unique; there is no other city like it anywhere else."[1]

The coming together of so many different cultures makes it an ideal laboratory to imagine a more united Europe. Studying Italian migration to Berlin means closely observing the processes of transformation of European identity and intercultural relations. Analysing migrants' experiences allows us to understand not only the opportunities and challenges of intra-European mobility but also the difficulties and potential of a truly united Europe in diversity.
The Italian community in Berlin proved to be so active and involved that I chose to focus my attention solely on it. My investigative journey in Berlin was a true adventure: a journey of cultural, professional, and personal growth. In such a vast city, loneliness was sometimes felt, but it was through interacting with the interviewees that I found the best part: listening to so many different life stories, seeing people put their trust in me, becoming emotional, angry, hopeful, smiling, and crying, made me realize the great value and uniqueness of every single migratory experience.

My family is very familiar with the journey of migration: my maternal grandparents, and even before them, my grandmother's father, left Monte San Giacomo – a small village in the province of Salerno – for Germany in the 1970s. Both of my grandparents were born and raised in Monte San Giacomo, but even so, their lives only crossed paths beyond the borders of their Italy and their hometown. My mother was born in Germany in 1973, and to this day, North Rhine-Westphalia remains home to many of my relatives, including my brother, who moved there in 2021 to train as an expert in the management of restaurant systems. My personal story is different, but in conversations with the Italian community I found many shared experiences, leading to common

[1] MMS-2nd Generation, Interview 12, 20.11.2024.

reflections. Since childhood I have felt suspended between two worlds – both Italian and German. The bicultural family environment in which I grew up has shaped every one of my choices, from my studies to my desire to explore the dynamics of migration. I am grateful to have had the extraordinary opportunity to grow up in a family where two languages and two cultures met every day.

The essay is structured in four main parts. The first two chapters provide a historical overview of the evolution of Italian emigration to Germany, with a specific focus on the city of Berlin. The third chapter is devoted to presenting field research, based on interviews and observations about the integration of Italian communities into Berlin's socio-cultural fabric, with in-depth analysis of two central themes: political inclusion and citizenship, and educational inclusion and schooling. The fourth and final chapter presents the testimonies collected, highlighting aspects of identity, integration, language, ways of life, values, and cultural exchanges. This last section of the work includes reflections on integration dynamics and on the relationships between Italian and German communities in the contemporary European context.

Methodology

The research is based on two pillars: a solid bibliographical foundation, the result of six months of study at the *Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin*, and on fieldwork. For the latter, I chose semi-structured interviews, with about twenty open-ended questions to allow space for personal narrative. Each interview, recorded and transcribed personally with the participants' consent, was coded to ensure anonymity and foster honesty. I collected thirty stories from Italians in Berlin, of varying ages, backgrounds, and places of origin, and with different lengths of stay. Analysing the transcripts, surprising similarities and differences emerged in the stories, regardless of age or personal background.

The interviews made it possible to explore the motivations for leaving, the choice of Berlin, expectations and feelings upon arrival, ties with the Italian community and other migrant communities, the impact of the new language, the process of integration into German society, job opportunities, differences between the two countries, connections with Italy, and the desire to "give back." Lively cultural exchanges emerged, as well as a mechanism of "giving and receiving" between Italy and Germany, alongside the preservation of Italian values in every aspect of life.

In addition to the interviews, participation in Italian community events allowed me to closely observe the social dynamics and the active involvement of Italians in Berlin. Participant observation enabled me to immerse myself directly in activities organized by the Italian community, from cultural events to social gatherings. In this way, I also became a "migrant", observing from within the social dynamics in real, unmediated contexts.

1. History and evolution of Italian migration to Germany

The Italian presence in Berlin has deep roots in a long migratory history that has intertwined the destinies of Italy and Germany long before the 1950s, when bilateral agreements triggered a massive wave of Italian labour towards the heart of Europe. Italian historians initially focused on the reasons for departure and returns, while German sociologists and political scientists investigated the mechanisms of immigrant integration and settlement. In the 1960s and 1970s, scholars' attention centred on the living, working, and housing conditions of immigrants; in the 1980s, however, the debate shifted to topics such as education, family, cultural integration, and the socialization of foreign youth. After 1989, with new migratory flows and changing destinations, Berlin transformed into a unique migration laboratory. Since the 1990s, research has concentrated mainly on the transnationalization processes of Italian communities, exploring the economic, social, and cultural ties between the two countries.

The migratory journey between Italy and Germany unfolds in several phases. It all begins in the nineteenth century, the so-called "era of our migration"[2], when many Italians left the country to improve their economic conditions, always with the dream of returning one day. After the establishment of the German Empire in 1871, Germany became a magnet for Italian workers, especially from the North, offering temporary jobs in construction, the metal and steel industries, and railway building. The main destinations? Bavaria, Baden-Württemberg, and, after 1890, the Rhine area.

It wasn't just men who left: women[3] and children also crossed the border, not only as "secondary migrants" following family members but also as "independent female migrants"[4], making a

[2] Brenna, Paulo G., *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana*, Libreria Editrice Mantegazza di Paolo Cremonese, Roma, 1928, p. 215. [my translation]

[3] With regard to female migration, the German sociologist Petrus Han stated that this issue was never addressed by sociological studies until the early 1980s, mainly due to the lack of interest in women's working and social reality in general. The cause was an androcentric view that placed men at the centre of everything, with women simply following them without considering the impact. This reasoning was reinforced by data showing that more adult men emigrated than adult women.

[4] Brenna, Paulo G., *op. cit.,* pp. 286-287. [my translation]

fundamental contribution to the German economy.[5] However, life for minors was extremely harsh: often deprived of rights and education, they worked in tough conditions, a situation that only improved with the introduction of laws regulating child and female labour.[6]

Italians settled mainly in Southern Germany, attracted by its geographical proximity and "the more liberal treatment reserved for foreigners."[7] In this way, Germany became the "most migratory nation in the world"[8], with Italians as the second-largest foreign group, active both in industry and as self-employed workers. Initially a seasonal movement, migration gradually became more stable. At the outbreak of World War I, there were as many as 325,000 Italians in Germany (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1995), but the conflict led to a massive return, especially after Italy entered the war in 1915.

The second major wave of migration began in the second half of the 1930s, encouraged by the rise of Hitler and his agricultural and armament policies, which required foreign labour. Migration, however, was meant to be only a temporary solution for "an emergency situation"[9], and it was more regulated than the first wave, with close collaboration between Italy and Germany, strengthened by the Rome-Berlin Axis agreements (1936) and the Pact of Steel (1939). Between 1937 and 1942, about 485,810 Italians moved to Germany[10], especially to the regions of Saxony Anhalt, Brandenburg, Berlin, Thuringia, Lower Saxony, Hesse, and Southwest Germany.[11]

After World War II and the birth of the Italian Republic in 1946, economic crisis and unemployment once again pushed many Italians, especially from the South, to emigrate. The bilateral agreements of 1955 between Italy and Germany kicked off a new mass emigration, with a significant female presence that found not only work but also greater independence in Germany compared to Italy.

Germany viewed this migration as temporary, adopting the Gastarbeiter (guest worker) system and a mechanism for rotating jobs.[12] This flow continued until 1973, when the oil crisis led to the

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[5] See Mazzi, Lisa, *Donne Mobili. L'emigrazione femminile dall'Italia alla Germania (1890-2010),* Cosmo Iannone Editore, 2012.

[6] See Brenna, Paulo G., *op. cit.,* 1928; Mazzi, Lisa, *op. cit.,* 2012; Bianchi, Bruna, Lotto, Adriana, *Lavoro ed emigrazione minorile dall'Unità d'Italia alla grande guerra,* Venezia, 2000, pp. 178-186.

[7] Pugliese, Enrico, *In Germania*, in *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana, voi*. Π, Arrivi (2002), Donzelli, Roma 2001, p. 127. [my translation]

[8] Brenna, Paulo G., *op. cit.,* p. 296. [my translation]

[9] Herbert, Ulrich, *Fremdarbeiter. Politik und Praxis des Auslaendereinsatzes in der Kriegswirtschaft des dritten Reiches*, Dietz, 1999, p. 53. [my translation]

[10] See Cajani, Luigi, Mantelli, Brunello, *Lavorare in Germania: gli italiani dall'Asse al Mercato Comune Europeo, in L'emigrazione tra Italia e Germania*, Manduria, Lacaita, 1993.

[11] Rurali di Mussolini, 1939, citato in Mazzi, Lisa, *Donne mobili*, 2012.

[12] Storti, Luca, *Italiani in Germania: Un'intricata Vicenda Migratoria*, Meridiana, no. 56, 2006, p. 178. JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23204187.

Anwerberstop, blocking the hiring of foreign workers. From that moment, "return migration"[13] was encouraged, with incentives and support for those who went back to Italy.

After 1973, arrivals decreased and many Italians returned home.[14] However, thanks to the freedom of movement guaranteed by the EEC, frequent transfers and "comings and goings" between the two countries continued, giving rise to fluctuating[15] migration patterns and "migratory commuting"[16], which made employment and educational integration more complex, especially for young people[17], and helped shape a transnational identity suspended between two worlds.
In the 1980s, migratory flows decreased[18], but picked up again after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, making the city an ideal destination for those seeking personal freedom and new experiences, difficult to find in Italy due to family social control.

"The most attractive features of Germany at that time were certainly the fresh air you could breathe right after the student upheaval, the break with the past thanks to Chancellor Brandt's new Ostpolitik, personal freedom, anonymity, and the possibility of having different experiences that would not have been easily attainable while staying in Italy, due to the 'social' control of family, relatives, and neighbours."[19]

Despite the fact that today Germany too is affected by economic problems and unemployment, migration has never stopped. The new arrivals, men and women often with academic degrees and professional qualifications, sometimes find themselves facing language barriers or difficulties in having their qualifications recognized, ending up accepting jobs that are less qualified than their training. This has led to talk of a new *Reservenarmee*.[20]
At the end of 2004, about 7 million immigrants were registered in Germany, with Italians as the largest EU community (548,194, of whom 40% were women), mainly concentrated in the South-Western Länder, attracted by large industries and geographical proximity.

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[13] Ibid. [my translation]
[14] Martini, Claudia, *Italienische Migranten in Deutschland. Transnationale Diskurse*, Verlag Reimer, Berlin, 2001, p. 68.
[15] See Von Breitenbach, Barbara, *Italiener und Spanier als Arbeitnehmer in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Eine vergleichende Untersuchung zur europäischen Arbeitsmigration,* Entwicklung und Frieden: Materialien, 14, München, 1982.
[16] Storti, Luca, *op. cit.*, pp. 180-181. [my translation]
[17] Ivi, p. 181.
[18] Centro Altreitalie, *La nuova immigrazione degli Italiani in Germania*, S.d. https://www.altreitalie.it/nuove_mobilita/dati_e_statistiche/istat/la-nuova-immigrazione-degli-italiani-in-germania.kl.
[19] Mazzi, Lisa, *op. cit.,* p.172. [my translation]
[20] See Pichler, Edith, *Italiani in Germania: nuova mobilità o classica Reservarmee?,* Neodemos, 2020. https://www.neodemos.info/2020/12/22/edith-pichler-italiani-in-germania-nuova-mobilita-o-classica-reservarmee/.

After the economic crisis of 2008-2013, rising unemployment pushed many young Italians, especially those between 25 and 34 years old and from the South, to seek their fortune in Germany. Experiences of student mobility, such as Erasmus[21], are often the prelude to more stable forms of migration. From 2010 to 2015, the Italian presence in Germany increased, especially in the tertiary sector, particularly in catering and commerce.[22] Until 2018, arrivals continued, with a growing presence of women and families looking for a better life, especially attracted to large cities like Berlin.

Since 2022-2023, a new phase of more reflective mobility has been observed: many "undecided" live and work abroad without registering with AIRE, while others become "modern undocumented migrants" who do not transfer their official residence.[23] In 2023, about 5.9 million Italians were registered with AIRE, of whom over 822,000 were in Germany. Research by the Fondazione Nord Est (led by economist Luca Paolazzi), presented in an article in the well-known newspaper "Il Sole 24 Ore"[24], highlighted that from 2011 to 2023, most young emigrants came from northern regions, with Lombardy at the top. The reasons? Seeking better job opportunities, a higher quality of life, or new prospects for study and training.

An interesting fact, highlighted in the 2023 Italians in the World Report, concerns the issue of return migration: between 2012 and 2021, 443,000 compatriots returned to Italy, about 12% of them from Germany, mainly to Sicily and Puglia. Among those who returned are also graduates and doctoral students, driven by the desire to contribute to the country's development. Another phenomenon is "roots tourism", with immigrants of Italian descent who return to rediscover their places of origin.

[21] Among the destinations chosen by Italian students, Germany ranks first (in 2012), partly because, together with Spain, these are the countries with the most affordable costs.

[22] Source: Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2016, in Pichler, Edith, *Gli italiani in Germania: ancora un Reservarmee per il mercato del lavoro tedesco?*, Neodemos, 2017, https://www.neodemos.info/2017/07/11/gli-italiani-in-germania-ancora-un-reservarmee-per-il-mercato-del-lavoro-tedesco/.

[23] Fondazione Migrantes, *RIM Rapporto italiani nel mondo 2023, Sintesi*, Tau Editrice, 2023, pp. 5-21.

[24] Tucci, Claudio, *Giovani in fuga: via 100mila nel 2022-23, ne rientra solo un terzo*, Il Sole 24 Ore, 12 febbraio 2025, https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/giovani-fuga-via-100mila-2022-23-ne-rientra-solo-terzo-AGgaGdpC.

2. History and evolution of the Italian presence in Berlin

Berlin, the vibrant German capital with its nearly four million inhabitants, has been a crossroads of peoples and cultures for centuries.[25] Within this multicultural mosaic, the Italian presence has taken on a unique character over time, significantly different from migration flows directed toward southern and western Germany. Although the early times did not see a true mass migration, the first traces of Italians in Berlin date back to the nineteenth century[26], marking the beginning of a fascinating and ever-evolving story.

According to Pichler's classification[27], the first "Italo-Berliners," true pioneers, launched themselves into economic activities, facing no small number of difficulties, especially in accessing Italian goods and products. Forced to reinvent themselves, they came up with creative and innovative ideas, especially in the field of gastronomy[28], laying the foundation for a tradition that still characterizes the city today.

After the pioneers came the *Gastarbeiter*, the "guest workers" recruited through the bilateral agreements of 1955. Many of them arrived in Berlin after experiences in other German regions[29], such as the Ruhr area, Bavaria, or Baden-Württemberg, where job opportunities were more plentiful. However, it was from the 1960s, in a city still divided by the Wall, that the Italian presence truly began to take root, bringing with it a variety of stories, motivations, and career paths. Berlin, with its turbulent history and rebellious spirit, became a symbol of freedom and rebirth, attracting Italians eager to build a new life and a genuine community. Thus the "Italienische Ethnoökonomie Berlins"[30] took shape: an Italian ethnic economy made up of associations, unions, cultural organizations, religious centres, restaurants, and bars that still enliven the city today.

In the 1970s, the city welcomed more and more Italians, among whom stood out "the rebels", the third category of Pichler. Drawn by the myth of an alternative and lively Berlin, these young people were seeking not just work, but above all autonomy, anonymity, and emancipation.[31] They worked

[25] Ohliger, Rainer, Raiser, Ulrich, *Integration und Migration in Berlin: Zahlen – Daten – Fakten*, Berlin, Der Beauftragte des Senats von Berlin für Integration und Migration, 2005, p. 10.
[26] See Pichler, Edith, *Pioniere, Arbeitsmigranten, Rebellen, Postmoderne und Mobile: Italiener in Berlin*, Archiv für Sozialgeschichte, 42, 2002, pp. 257; Falanga, Gianluca, *Italien in Berlin*, Berlin, Berlin Edition, 2006, p. 16-19; De Salvo, Elettra, Priori, Laura, Ugolini, Gherardo, *Italo-Berliner. Gli italiani che cambiano la capitale tedesca*, Mimesis, 2014, p. 22.
[27] Pichler, Edith, *Migration, Community-Formierung, und Ethnische Ökonomie. Die italienischen Gewerbetreibenden in Berlin*, Berlin, Edition Parabolis, 1997; Id., *Pioniere, Arbeitsmigranten, Rebellen, Postmoderne und Mobile: Italiener in Berlin*, Archiv für Sozialgeschichte, 42, 2002.
[28] Id., *Community-Formierung, und Ethnische Ökonomie*, pp. 223-226.
[29] Ivi, p. 161.
[30] Ivi, p. 97.
[31] Pichler, Edith, *Dai Vecchi Pionieri alla Nuova Mobilità. Italiani a Berlino tra Inclusione e Esclusione*, in De Salvo, et al., *op. cit.*, p. 28.

in bars and restaurants, taught Italian, dedicated themselves to art and research, often involved in alternative projects.[32] The 1980s, marked by a climate of non-conformity, saw the flourishing of art galleries, innovative pizzerias, and venues that shattered the stereotypes of the "typical Italian."[33] In the multicultural neighbourhood of Kreuzberg[34], the squatting movement became a symbol of freedom and creativity.

Alongside the rebels emerged the fourth category: the apolitical "post-moderns".[35] Educated and enterprising migrants, they started new businesses not only in gastronomy[36], but also in fashion, design, art, and the creative industries.[37] However, the divided Berlin during the Cold War restricted each movement, and only after the fall of the Wall in 1989 did the Italian community begin to grow steadily, especially in the eastern part of the city[38], while in the same year West Berlin had 8,400 Italians, 2.9% of the foreign residents.[39]

The 1990s ushered in a new wave of migration: the "new mobiles," the fifth category of Pichler, young people from Northern, Central, and Southern Italy with varying levels of education and experience. Graduates and workers from the south moved to Berlin in search of stability and professional fulfilment. The "new European mobility"[40] was also supported by the first student exchange programs like Erasmus and Socrates.

At the end of 2013, the Berlin-Brandenburg Statistical Office recorded over 28,000 Italians, of whom 22,693 held Italian citizenship, mostly spread across the central districts.[41] In 2014, "the number of Italians living in Berlin reached and perhaps surpassed 30,000."[42] From 2010 to 2018, growth was steady: more and more women, not only single and university graduates but also those with high school diplomas and families, settled in Berlin.

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[32] Ivi, pp. 28-30.
[33] Pichler, Edith, *Community-Formierung, und Ethnische Ökonomie*, pp. 223-226. [my translation]
[34] The myth of multicultural Kreuzberg in the 1980s is a central element of Berlin's imagery, built on the idea of a rebellious, alternative neighbourhood full of community life in contrast to the rest of the city divided by the Wall. It was one of the poorest and most isolated areas of West Berlin, located right on the border with the Wall. This geographical isolation helped to make it a refuge for various groups: immigrants (mainly Turks, Italians and Greeks), artists, left-wing activists and squatters. Despite the coexistence of different communities, there were tensions, marginalisation and social conflicts. In addition, the neighbourhood was marked by economic problems and crime, and the coexistence between alternative Germans and immigrants was not always harmonious.
[35] See Pichler, E., *Pioniere, Arbeitsmigranten, Rebellen, Postmoderne und Mobile: Italiener in Berlin,* 2002. [my translation]
[36] Id., *Ma Berlino è sempre stata dei giovani!,* Neodemos, 2016. https://www.neodemos.info/2016/12/02/ma-berlino-e-sempre-stata-dei-giovani/.
[37] Id., *Dai Vecchi Pionieri alla Nuova Mobilità*, in De Salvo, E., et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 28-30.
[38] Del Pra', Alvise, *Giovani italiani a Berlino: nuove forme di mobilità europea*, Centro Altreitalie, 33, Torino 2006, p. 112.
[39] Source: Statistisches Landesamt Berlin, 1989.
[40] Pichler, Edith, *Dai Vecchi Pionieri alla Nuova Mobilità*, in De Salvo, E., et al., *op. cit.*, p. 26. [my translation]
[41] Ivi, p. 27.
[42] De Salvo, et al., *op. cit.*, p. 23. [my translation]

"Graduates are only a third of the total number of migrants, perhaps also because many don't register with AIRE. Young people are often at the centre of highly volatile arrival and departure patterns: this is called circular mobility, with young people moving from one country to another or returning to Italy. This also happens because many leave without real information about their destination country, which results in illusions and failed migration projects."[43]

Berlin continues to exert an irresistible allure, fuelled by the myth of a city where anything seems possible. But the reality, in recent years, has changed: the labour market has become more closed, the cost of living has risen, and urban chaos grows as the population increases. Yet, the city remains a treasure trove of cultural opportunities thanks to its inclusive and international spirit. Despite unemployment and relative "poverty" compared to other Länder, the migration curve continues to rise. "The city represents the decision to live in an open, free metropolis, with well-functioning public transport and communications, efficient bureaucracy, and a still fairly generous welfare system"[44]; perhaps it is precisely this that continues to make it so attractive to so many young Italians.

The socio-cultural and economic changes in Berlin are also reflected in the Italian community, which displays an extraordinary variety of personalities, backgrounds and lifestyles. Italians "form different milieux [...] and contribute to a continuous *Pluralisierung* / pluralisation of the community."[45]

The migration of the 'new mobile', motivated not only by the search for work but also by the desire to live transnational experiences, involves young people with little economic capital but rich in cultural and social capital, capable of integrating more easily into local society.[46] The new 'postmodern' migrants are promoters of innovative ideas in the economic, cultural and associative fields. Since 2000, European mobility has been encouraged by numerous training, study and cooperation projects. This wave of young people towards European capitals, led by Berlin, has created transnational social spaces where not only people move, but also ideas, symbols and cultures.[47] However, the reality is often different from what one might expect. The myth of Berlin can be misleading, distracting attention from the issues that animate the city. Berlin has one of the highest poverty and unemployment rates in Germany.[48] According to the *Bundesagentur für*

[43] Pichler, Edith, *Italiani in Germania,* 2020. [my translation]
[44] De Salvo, et al., *op. cit.*, p. 24. [my translation]
[45] Pichler, Edith, *50 anni di immigrazione italiana in Germania: transitori, inclusi/esclusi o cittadini europei?,* Saggi Germania. Vecchie e nuove mobilità, Centro Altreitalie, luglio-dicembre 2006, pp. 14-17. [my translation]
[46] Ibid.
[47] Id., *Giovani italiani in Europa*, Rivista Il Mulino, Bologna, Anno LXXII, Numero 524, 04/2023, p. 184.
[48] Del Pra', Alvise, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

Arbeit, in 2004 the unemployment rate was 32.8% in Berlin and 32.4% in Brandenburg. In 2011-2012, the unemployment rate among Italians was even higher than in other *Länder* (23.4%).

The "new immigrants" often have a high level of education and professional qualifications, but they are not always able to find jobs that match their skills, often ending up in precarious positions. The difficulties of integration are not only work-related: from a social and cultural point of view, many Italians

The 'new arrivals' often boast a high level of education and professional qualifications, but they are not always able to find jobs that match their skills, often ending up in precarious positions. The difficulties of integration are not only work-related: from a social and cultural point of view, many Italians struggle to adapt, and a lack of interest in integration or difficulties with the language can lead to them abandoning their migration plans.
Those who choose to stay often find work in the service sector, gastronomy, commerce, security, cleaning, call centres, trade fairs and, above all, the creative industries: teaching, translation, theatre, event organisation, media, IT, freelance work, public relations and tourism. Italians have always shown a strong entrepreneurial spirit, especially in catering and commerce. According to the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, there were 1,145 Italian businesses in Berlin in 2012. In a competitive market, success is also due to the creative courage of young Italians, who have been able to capitalise on the positive stereotypes associated with Italy, winning the trust of local and international customers.[49]

3. My research in Berlin

The "Italo-Berliner" or "Italoberliner"[50] integrate without ever fully assimilating and embody this dual sense of belonging: on the one hand, they integrate into Berlin society, while on the other, they cultivate a strong sense of Italian identity, which is expressed in daily life, civic involvement, and community engagement. This new form of loyalty translates into active participation in Italian political life, the promotion of culture and language, the transmission of values to new generations, and the creation of spaces for dialogue between the two cultures.

The accounts collected speak of an identity in constant evolution, where the decision to maintain, integrate, or modify one's citizenship is deeply personal, driven as much by practical reasons as by a sense of belonging.

[49] Ibid.
[50] De Salvo, et al., *op. cit.*, p. 24.

Italians who emigrate to Berlin arrive with high expectations of integrating into the new environment, bringing with them a rich heritage of values connected to Italian-ness. This concept is complex and multifaceted, as for some it can be difficult to define and locate their own cultural identity within a global migratory context. Italian-ness is a defining trait of Italians – one that resists a single definition within migratory cultures – and also reflects changing perceptions of Italian institutions: whereas in the past emigrants were seen as a problem, today they are recognized as "an important resource."[51]

As for the values Italians bring with them, each interviewee offered different perspectives, but what identifies them most clearly are certainly the Italian language and culture. I especially found Italian-ness expressed in the strong bond that many maintain with Italy, despite the geographical distance. This bond is clearly evident in their determination to not abandon their language and culture of origin, sometimes also deciding to pass on Italian values and traditions to their children.[52] The role of parents is fundamental in creating a connection with the country of origin. If parents live in Italy, they are the main reason for regular visits; if the parents of young migrants return regularly to the country of origin, social relationships are then passed on to the next generation. Family, and in particular parents, play a crucial role in maintaining national identity within transnational spaces, thus transmitting to their children the values of Italian culture and language. This is a precious heritage, one not everyone is fortunate enough to possess. Personally, being the child of two different cultures and languages, I know how complex but extraordinary it is to feel part of both worlds.

Two emblematic examples from the most recent interviews are VWG[53] and DWE[54], who have chosen to enrol their children in an Italian school so they can learn the language academically as well as at home. This is one way to maintain a strong bond with Italy while also creating solid roots in Germany. Both hope that their children will spend more time in Italy and experience everyday life there, so that they do not feel in the future "obliged to remain in one place or another."

In a highly international and multicultural city like Berlin, Italians are faced daily with multilingualism, but knowledge of the local language is essential for full integration. The interviewees keep up regular use of Italian, understand the importance of German to build a stable future for themselves, but do not always learn it—and even then not always with the intention to do so. Depending on the setting, they also use English for both professional and personal purposes.

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[51] Minutilli, Anna Maria, Commento al libro di Claudia Martini, *Italienische Migranten in Deutschland*, Centro Altreitalie 23, luglio-dicembre 2001, p. 98. [my translation]
[52] See Martini, Claudia, *Italienische Migranten in Deutschland*.
[53] VWG, Interview 21, 24.01.2025.
[54] DWE, Interview 27, 02.02.2025.

Socially, Italians are divided between those who seek out fellow nationals for support and closeness, and those who prefer to distance themselves from Italian social networks, viewing them as a barrier to integration. Italian social networks, often established in the workplace, can hinder learning German, as Italian remains the language of interaction. Many also establish relationships with Germans and people of other nationalities, trying to join German groups, but sometimes they encounter stereotypes about coldness, lack of empathy, and linguistic insularity typical of certain German contexts, which contrast with the conviviality and warmth characteristic of Italian relationships.

The Italian community in Berlin is an emblematic example of a transnational diaspora that manages to preserve its cultural identity without giving up genuine integration into the German social fabric. It contributes actively to both Italian and German society, embodying a dynamic Italian-ness that is not merely a legacy of the past, but a project open to the future, able to serve as a cultural bridge and a driver of participation and transformation, turning Italian-German relations into a source of transnational enrichment. Research on transnationalism describes these new forms of identity as multiple or hybrid[55], or as conflicting, or as "in-betweenness," "homeless mind"[56] – as oscillating and procedural.[57]

Transnationalism[58] and the ongoing connection between the country of origin and the country of residence have led the Italian community in Berlin to develop a complex social and cultural network, in which the web of relationships and initiatives demonstrates the migrants' ability to act as genuine bridges between cultures, actively contributing to both German and Italian society.

Albert O. Hirschman's triad of "exit, voice, and loyalty"[59], originally designed to explain how individuals and groups respond to situations of dissatisfaction, undergoes a profound transformation in the context of transnational migration. Here, migrants are no longer bound to choose between leaving (exit), protesting (voice), or staying loyal (loyalty), but can strategically

[55] See Appadurai, Arjun, and Breckenridge, Carol, *Why Public Culture?* in Public Culture, Bulletin of the Center for Transnational Studies, Philadelphia, 1988, pp. 5-9; Hall, Stuart, *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, 1990, in Jonathan Rutherford, *Community, Culture, Difference*, London, 1990.
[56] See Marcus, George E., *Past, Present and Emergent Identities: Requirements for Ethnographies of Late Twentieth Century Modernity Worldwide*, 1992, in Scott, Lash, and Friedman, Jonathan, *Modernity and Identity*, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1992.
[57] Schneider, Arnd, *Ethnicity, Changing Paradigmas and Variations in Food Consumption among Italians in Buenos Aires*, in Altreitalie, 7, 1992, pp. 84-95.
[58] See Nieswand, Boris, *Theorising Transnational Migration: The Status Paradox of Migration,* London: Routledge, 2011; Köngeter, Stefan, and Smith, Wendy, *Transnational Agency and Migration: Actors, Movements, and Social Support,* Routledge, 2015.
[59] Hirschman, Albert O., *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States,* Harvard University Press, 1970.

combine these options thanks to the ties they maintain both with their country of origin and with the country of arrival. As has been observed, "while in the classic scheme the listed categories actually had to be read with an "either-or" in between, it is transnational migration which brings full meaning to the "and" in "exit, voice, and loyalty.""[60] From this new perspective, Hirschman's categories become valuable tools for interpreting the behaviours of Italian migrants in Berlin and their impact on social, cultural, and economic dynamics between Italy and Germany.

Italian migrants in Berlin operate within a transnational social space[61], defined as "the everyday reality of things"[62]: they create networks and nodes that transcend national borders, cultivating relationships and constant communication between the two societies. Their "voice after exit"[63] is expressed through political, cultural, and social initiatives, the exercise of voting rights, participation in associations, and the sending of collective remittances, actively influencing both their country of origin and their country of residence. Migrant organizations become true transnational actors[64], mediators who strengthen the ties between Italy and Germany and promote the integration of their compatriots into German society.

In Berlin, there is a dense network of Italian associations that promote civil, social, and political values, such as anti-fascism (ANPI Berlin), legality (*Mafia? Nein Danke!*), support for women (*Rete Donne Berlin*), the promotion of the Italian language (*Verba Volant*), support for workers (CGIL/INCA), and institutional and political representation (COMITES). The COMITES (Committee of Italians Abroad) is considered "the most important transnational political association of Italian migrants worldwide"[65] and serves as political and social support for Italians abroad in collaboration with the Italian State. The COMITES acts as 'advisor' to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and, with the support of the Consulates and German institutions, offers support to the Italian community by organizing informational activities and seminars. In addition to its social and political role in assistance and integration, COMITES acts as a bridge to Italy. The COMITES of the Berlin consular district is responsible for matters concerning Italians in Berlin, Brandenburg,

[60] Hoffman, Bert, *Bringing Hirschman Back In: Conceptualizing Transnational Migration as a Reconfiguration of "Exit", "Voice", and "Loyalty",* GIGA Research Programme: Legitimacy and Efficiency of Political Systems, N° 91, December 2008, p. 16.
[61] Martini, Claudia, *op. cit*., p. 34. [my translation]
[62] Pries, Ludger, *Internationale Arbeitsmigration und das Entstehen Transnationaler Sozialer Räume*: *Konzeptionelle Überlegungen für ein empirisches Forschungsprojekt*, in Zentrum für Sozialpolitik, ZeS-Arbeitspapier Nr. 6/1996, Bremen, 1996, p. 23.
[63] Newland, Kathleen*, Voice After Exit: Diaspora Advocacy,* Report on MPI (Migration Policy Institute), November 2010, https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/voice-after-exit-diaspora-advocacy.
[64] Stack, John F., *Ethnic Identities in a Transnational World (Contributions in Political Science)*, Praeger, 1981.
[65] Martini, Claudia, *op. cit*., p. 136. [my translation]

Thuringia, Saxony, and Saxony-Anhalt – a vast territory encompassing about 40,000 to 45,000 Italians.

In conclusion, the case of the Catholic Mission is also noteworthy as an example of continuity and cohesion in the Italian community in the postwar period. Founded in 1955 as the first institution dedicated to offering support and assistance to Italian workers, the Mission still retains its central role today, representing an essential point of reference for many compatriots.[66] Its emblematic message remains: "katolischer Glaube und die italienische Nationalität werden als zwingend verbundene Eigenschaften der italianità gesehen"[67], underscoring the inseparable bond between Catholic faith and Italian identity.

During the six months I spent in Berlin, I was able to closely observe the Catholic community by attending Sunday Mass, where I immediately felt an intense participation and a deep sense of belonging among those gathered. Religion, while perhaps less weighty than in the past, still serves as a fundamental adhesive that unites the Italian community, offering support through numerous activities: from catechism for children, to volunteering for those most in need, to social events and convivial moments after Mass, such as the traditional coffee with pastries. These occasions create a fabric of relationships that strengthen the sense of community, even far from Italy.

Italian associations in Berlin not only help migrants to integrate, but also act as "points of crystallization"[68] for the reconstruction of an Italian communal life abroad, keeping ties with Italy alive and offering concrete tools to exercise their voice and reinforce a sense of belonging.

As for future prospects regarding Italy, almost all interviewees, to varying degrees, look to their country with nostalgia and a desire to return. Very often, however, to the desire and the illusion of being able to return to Italy and build a future there, the response was: "the desire is there, but it's not realistically feasible", due to various reasons – work-related, economic, or personal. For many, having achieved a certain level of economic and social stability thanks to secure employment that allows them to feel gratified and satisfied, improving their conditions year after year, is reason enough not to go back.

[66] Among those interviewed, three people approached the Catholic Mission group.
[67] Martini, Claudia, *op. cit.*, p. 122, (my translation: "The Catholic faith and Italian nationality are two aspects that came together as typical characteristics of Italianness.")
[68] Martini, Claudia, *op. cit.*, p. 166. [my translation]

"Life in diaspora often generates agency by necessity"[69], and this very agency should be the driving force when considering a return; but often the fear of going back to a lower standard of living compared to what they have managed to attain and build in the 'new' country is reason enough not to take that risk, thereby pre-emptively hindering any innovative development in the country of origin. Going back only to have to start over without the prospect of landing an equally rewarding job seems unthinkable. DWR[70] often asks herself: "Would I ever be willing to have less and be treated as someone not fit for a certain role?" Her answer is no. The wish to return to Italy is solely tied to her family, but professionally she would not have the same opportunities to work on innovative projects with cutting-edge tools, in a stimulating and motivating work environment that allows her to live more peacefully and with greater security.

Only at retirement age does the idea have a greater chance of becoming reality, in some cases fuelled by the desire to invest what they've earned in family homes. What emerges is that Italians want to leave behind the typically Italian mentality and quality of work, but at the same time they miss their hometowns and places of origin, the landscapes, the warmer atmosphere, and the climate. Climate issues are frequently mentioned among the reasons for nostalgia and longing for Italy. DWE[71] admits to feeling a strong nostalgia for Italy and has never been able to tolerate Berlin's winter climate. There are those who, even after years in Germany, can't get used to the grey days, the very low temperatures, and the lack of sun, especially during the winter, to the extent that they live "in a state of depression and sadness."[72] Despite this, VWG never seriously considered moving away from Germany, first and foremost for family reasons, but also due to the experiences of friends who tried several times and then returned, since often all the knowledge and skills acquired abroad were not recognized in Italy. The mindset and quality of work are not very promising: there is no minimum wage; there is lots of work and little pay; the cost of living has soared.

There are plans for a future in Italy, even among younger people who want to open a business[73], or at least bring back the knowledge and skills they have learned in Germany. However, it is a desire too weak, one that sinks into utopia. The hypothetical return of highly skilled people with an innovative entrepreneurial spirit clashes with the resources and opportunities available in their

[69] Dahles, Heidi, *Return Migration as an Engine of Social Change? Reverse Diasporas' Capital Investments at Home*, in Köngeter, Stefan, and Smith, Wendy, *Transnational Agency and Migration. Actors, Movements, and Social Support*, Routledge, 2015, p. 78.
[70] Interview 5, 10.11.2024.
[71] Interview 27, 02.02.2025.
[72] VWG, Interview 21, 24.02.2025.
[73] Given that the employment situation in Italy is often unfavourable, DWC and DMM also considered giving up everything and returning to Italy to start an independent project such as a B&B, also taking advantage of DWC's language skills (Interviews 8 and 9, 17.11.2024).

homeland. The success of returns also depends on institutional and governmental factors, and if the home countries are not ready for a high-level return, the risk is unemployment or being relegated to less qualified work.[74] This is the case for MWG, a dancer and choreographer, who, after living for ten and a half years in New York, returned to Italy in 2018 for a year, but immediately noticed that the job situation was not as favourable as she would have liked. Dance companies in Italy, unable to secure significant funding, tended to hire young people paid "a pittance", and she had too much experience to be hired and paid as an entry-level. Again MWG, when she returned to Italy in 2018, did so with a project in mind to change and innovate the Italian artistic world, but her idea was not received as she had hoped, both because of an attitude resistant to novelty and to what is different and unknown, and because of an interest in mere financial gain. In other cases, when other dynamics such as family enter the picture, it is very difficult to even think of uprooting the whole life one has built in Berlin over the years.

An interesting issue highlighted in the Italian Report in the World 2023 focuses on the topic of repatriation observed over the decade 2012-2021. Do Italians return to Italy after a period abroad? The answer is yes. In this decade, the number of repatriations increased year by year, up to a total of 443 thousand returns. Two out of five Italians return from a European Union country, with approximately 12% of total repatriations coming from Germany, mainly heading to Sicily and Puglia. Additionally, looking at this "return migration movement" based on youth, education level, and gender, it was noted that in 2021 the number of returns among graduates or PhD holders was higher compared to the early years of the decade (2012-2021), with 9% coming from Germany. Those returning are often driven by the interest in "actively contributing to investing in the country", initiating a succession of benefits and improvements in a shared perspective. The thought of returning to Italy is very current for VWS, who is experiencing what she herself defines as "emigrant syndrome." At some point, a strong feeling of homesickness can emerge, especially if you've left behind a very strong welcoming and affectionate environment. If there hasn't been a complete uprooting, it's normal to think about returning around age 50 or after retirement, but without ceasing to have ties with Germany.

Recently, she spent two summer months in Italy, in her Lecce, during which she developed an interest in sustainability, which led her to reflect on campaigns and projects for her South. "I can't see myself growing old in this city" (referring to Berlin), but she imagines herself better in Puglia, doing good things and bringing back her knowledge and experiences. She started building relationships and connections with local people, which in a smaller and more confined area

[74] Dahles, Heidi, *Return Migration as an Engine of Social Change? Reverse Diasporas' Capital Investments at Home*, in Köngeter, and Smith, *op. cit.,* pp. 75-76.

compared to the large metropolis, allows her to get to know herself better and engage more unitedly for a single goal. In Lecce, she had the pleasure of seeing and feeling the more human dimension and the sensation of proximity, which allowed her to talk to people about the things she has seen and experienced in Berlin, thus triggering a cultural exchange between the two realities. At the crossroads between staying in Germany or returning, she feels Berlin is her home because she has built her professional and personal life there, yet a part of herself is still in Lecce. In her life, the two realities are equivalent: in Berlin lies the reality she has built, but Lecce is the reality she comes from. At the time of early student movements, the widespread idea was to study abroad and gain experience, but then return with a heavy package of new knowledge and skills. However, in many cases, for one reason or another, this did not happen, and many permanently settled in Germany.

Finally, another type of return involves immigrants born in Italy, but especially those of Italian descent (children and grandchildren of those born in Italy) who decide to return to discover their places of origin – a return linked to the previously mentioned theme of "roots tourism."[75] Among the interviewees, 3 were of the 2nd generation, born in Germany and children of Italian immigrants. For example, MMS[76] always spent holiday periods in Italy with her paternal family and also lived there for a year when she was 10-11 years old, with the intention of trying to live again in Sardinia. She still regularly returns to Sardinia and maintains contacts with her uncles and cousins, with whom she has a very strong relationship. "When I was eighteen, I went through a phase where I wanted to go to Italy, but today not. Who knows, maybe one day when I'm older and retired." At the present, only a job opportunity that establishes a connection between the two countries, could be a valid reason to consider a future in Italy; otherwise, the idea of living there is not feasible due to the too-different system and mentality.

The migratory experiences of Italians in Germany are marked by constant tension between *exit, voice, and loyalty* according to Hirschman's model. On one hand, emigration represents the exit from a context perceived as unsatisfactory, while on the other, *loyalty* to Italy remains strong, fuelling nostalgia and the desire to return. However, the possibility of making one's *voice* heard and actively contributing to the change in the country of origin often clashes with structural and cultural obstacles, making return difficult or unappealing. As a result, many Italians remain suspended between two worlds, maintaining emotional and cultural ties to Italy but finding in

[75] Fondazione Migrantes, *RIM Rapporto italiani nel mondo Sintesi 2023*, Tau Editrice, 2023, https://www.migrantes.it/wp-content/uploads/sites/50/2023/11/Sintesi_RIM2023.pdf. [my translation]
[76] Interview 12, 20.11.2024.

Germany the living and working conditions that encourage them to stay, at least until retirement age or more favourable conditions in their home country.

The two fundamental focuses that follow concern political inclusion and education, central themes for understanding the dynamics of integration of Italians in Germany. The analysis of political inclusion and citizenship choices highlights how participation and sense of belonging articulate between national identity and social integration. Attention to educational inclusion allows for observation of everyday challenges and opportunities for the children of immigrants, comparing different educational models and proposing insights for a more welcoming and inclusive society. These two themes are fundamental because they reflect crucial aspects of migrant life, influencing how this community roots itself and develops in the Berlin and German context.

3.1. Political inclusion and citizenship

During my research period in Berlin, direct contact with the Italian community through interviews and participant observation allowed me to closely observe identity dynamics, debates, and choices related to citizenship and integration. These field experiences deeply influenced my reflection on the complexity of migratory paths and on the strategies adopted by Italians in Berlin to maintain a balance between national belonging and integration into German society. It is precisely from these encounters and from active participation in community life that I developed the following considerations regarding the existence of transnational spaces, citizenship choices, and the meaning of political participation among Italian migrants in the German capital.

In the 1990s, the presence of transnational spaces – where Italian immigrants promoted the exchange of ideas and projects with a socio-political background and beyond – intensified further with the arrival of the new rebels, a new migratory wave of young people who were politically and socially active in Italy, and later also in Berlin. The Italo-Berlin community absorbed and was affected by all the social and political events shaking Italy, and thanks to its strong socio-political spirit and enterprising attitude, was able to create spaces where the two communities met and influenced each other through debates, exchanges of innovative ideas, and discussions on political themes.[77]

[77] Pichler, Edith, *Dai Vecchi Pionieri alla Nuova Mobilità*, in De Salvo, et al., *op. cit.*.

According to current regulations on the acquisition of citizenship by people from other countries, it is possible in Germany to obtain citizenship after 5 years of continuous residence (previously 8 years were required), regardless of the country of origin, whether EU or non-EU. To become German citizens, one must reach at least level B1 proficiency in the German language, be able to demonstrate economic self-sufficiency, pass a naturalization test, and have no serious criminal record. The required period of residence can be reduced to 3 years for those who reach C1 language level and demonstrate full integration into German society.

The requirements for obtaining Italian citizenship are very similar: one must demonstrate continuous residence, possess at least B1 language proficiency, declare a minimum income, and have no criminal record. The main difference concerns the number of years of residence required: in Italy, it is 10 years, reducible to 3 or 4 only in specific cases, such as for children of Italian citizens or EU citizens. The update to this law, which was put to a referendum on June 8 and 9, 2025, with a proposal to reduce the residency requirement from 10 to 5 years for non-EU citizens, did not reach the necessary minimum.

As for dual citizenship, since 1992, Italy has allowed people to maintain their original citizenship along with Italian citizenship, without particular restrictions. In Germany, however, the right to dual citizenship was extended to non-EU citizens only in 2024, with the aim of promoting greater integration between foreign communities and local society.

Many Italians in Berlin, despite having lived for many years in Germany, choose to maintain only Italian citizenship, feeling deeply attached to their national identity and actively participating in Italian political life through voting and social engagement. Most of those interviewed, even though they are EU citizens and have been residents in Germany for more than 10 years, do not see the need to acquire German citizenship alongside their Italian one. This demonstrates that after the "exit", they continue to maintain a strong political identity tied to their country of origin, despite the adaptation and integration process in their country of residence. Maintaining a single citizenship, the Italian one, is a clear example of "voice after exit"[78], since active participation in Italian political and social issues through exercising their right to vote is a way to keep their presence alive even from a distance, influencing decisions and changes in their country of origin. This choice stems from the desire to preserve a bond with their country of origin, contribute to its development, and in some cases, from the perspective of a possible return to Italy. However, this

[78] Newland, Kathleen, *Voice After Exit: Diaspora Advocacy, Report on MPI (Migration Policy Institute),* November 2010, https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/voice-after-exit-diaspora-advocacy; Burgess, Katrina, *Migrants, Remittances, and Politics: Loyalty and Voice after Exit*, The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs, vol. 36, no. 1, 2012, pp. 48-49.

position, while expressing a strong attachment to their home country, also limits political participation and access to certain rights in the country of residence, such as voting in German elections or access to specific professions. This attitude is often influenced by the sense of belonging and the idea of national identity that many Italians associate with citizenship. LWL[79], who has lived in Berlin for 29 years, stated: "When people ask me if I am of German nationality I say 'no, I am Italian and I will always remain Italian'." MMA[80], in Berlin for 16 years, has also never shown interest in dual citizenship and does not intend to apply for it unless urgently necessary, stating: "I don't feel I need to apply for German citizenship. I don't feel German in any way."

Many Italians living in Berlin choose to exercise their right to vote even from abroad, driven by a sense of responsibility towards their loved ones who remain in Italy. SWL[81], who has lived in Berlin for 12 years, is interested in obtaining German citizenship, but holds her Italian citizenship in high esteem and continues to vote because she considers it important to actively participate in the social and political life of her country of origin, especially regarding civil rights and, in particular, women's rights. Her commitment also stems from the desire to contribute to changes that affect the daily lives of friends and family in Italy.

An additional reason that drives many people to maintain Italian citizenship is the hope of being able to contribute to improving the country's economic, social, and political conditions, perhaps in view of a possible future return to Italy. DWC and DMM[82], who have been living in Berlin for six years, have not acquired dual citizenship and have no intention of doing so. Despite the distance, DWC still feels much more involved in Italian politics than in German politics, and both she and DMM continue to hope that the situation in Italy will improve, also with a view to a possible return.

On the other hand, although fewer in number, I have listened to the testimonies of Italians who have chosen to acquire German citizenship as well, in order to feel fully integrated, obtain more rights and security, and actively participate in both German and Italian political life.

[79] LWL, Interview 19, 13.01.2025.
[80] MMA, Interview 11, 19.11.2024.
[81] SWL, Interview 7, 16.11.2024.
[82] DWC and DMM, Interview 8 and 9, 17.11.2024.

"All my life I voted for a country I didn't live in, but being abroad definitely gives you a different perspective on what happens in Italy, which can also be very positive because it allows me to compare the two European realities, as well as the international one."[83]

Therefore, dual citizenship is seen as a valuable resource for reinforcing integration and personal security, especially within a European context where national and transnational identities are increasingly intertwined. The choice between retaining only Italian citizenship or acquiring German citizenship reflects a delicate balance between identity, belonging, and integration, highlighting how contemporary migration operates on two levels: the bond with the country of origin and active participation in the host society. Although Italian citizens in Germany already enjoy European citizenship without automatically having to acquire German citizenship, many people feel a strong attachment to their country, understood as a "nation-state" – that is, a nation with a clearly defined cultural, historical, and social identity. This sense of belonging can make it more difficult to feel fully part of another nation, thus unconsciously slowing down a greater European integration. However, participating in the political and social life of the country where one lives means contributing not only to the national community, but also to the European one, promoting a more inclusive, cooperative, and open society, according to values shared by all member states.

3.2. School inclusion and education

Berlin, the interviews, and participant observation within the Italian and Italo-German community gave me a direct insight into the challenges and opportunities linked to school inclusion and education. Contact with parents, teachers, and associations involved in supporting people with disabilities prompted me to reflect on the differences between the Italian and German educational systems, particularly regarding the integration of students with special needs. This field experience formed the basis for deepening the topic of inclusion, highlighting how different models can offer valuable ideas for building a more welcoming and accessible school for everyone.

On January 24, 2025, I attended a seminar on school inclusion at the Herman-Nohl Schule in Berlin[84], in the Neukölln district. The event, the result of collaboration between the school principal Matthias Ziegfeld, the COMITES of Berlin, and the Artemisia Association, involved

[83] MWG, Interview 6, 12.11.2024.
[84] The Herman-Nohl Schule combines a primary school and a European State school (60% German children/40% Italian children). It is a bilingual school attended by many children who need special support due to motor and mental disorders (e.g. autism), as well as behavioural disorders that are not yet fully recognised.

Italian and German parents, teachers, and sector experts. *Artemisia – Inklusion für Alle*[85] is a non-profit organization founded in 2016 by Amelia Massetti to support people with disabilities and their families (Italian, Italo-German, single-parent, and LGBTIQ+) living in Germany. Amelia's personal experience, having moved to Berlin in 1988 and being the mother of a young woman with Down syndrome, motivated her to create this project, aimed at promoting a more inclusive and barrier-free society.

Two specialists were invited to the event to further explore the topic: Dario Ianes, professor of pedagogy and inclusion at the University of Bolzano, and Benedetta Zagni, developmental and educational psychologist and doctoral candidate at the University of Padua. During the seminar, the difference between the Italian and German school systems became clear, especially regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities. Since the 1970s, Italy has followed a path of integration that led to the closure of special schools, encouraging the inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream schools. In Germany, on the other hand, the so-called *Sonderschulen*[86] are still very common and many parents choose or are encouraged to enrol their children in these special schools.

"Inclusion is a fundamental value for building a fairer society that guarantees equal rights for everyone despite differences, especially in this historical period when selfish, individualistic, and repressive attitudes often emerge that tend to turn the school system backwards, separating neurodivergent people from the collective context."[87]

The problem of school inclusion in Berlin in 2025 mainly concerns the lack of necessary funds to hire or train qualified staff who can meet the needs of children with conditions related to behavioural and cognitive disorders. There is a lack of political will to invest in education and teacher training: all teachers, not just those specifically for support, should be equipped with the educational tools necessary to create conditions for inclusion. German bureaucracy is a major obstacle that slows down any needed assistance; in the face of this, Italian parents tend to be less tolerant, since in the Italian context they were often used to receiving all the necessary support.

[85] https://www.artemisiaprojekt.de/it/home/.
[86] The German school system is not uniform and is influenced by the federalist structure of the state. It differs in several ways from the Italian system. In Germany, there is still a particular type of school, the *Allgemeine-Förderschule/Sonderschule* (formerly known in Italy as the "scuola differenziale", in English "special-needs school"). These schools are intended for children with physical or mental disabilities, but also for pupils who, in some cases, simply learn more slowly than others (Il Sistema Scolastico Tedesco, Comitato degli italiani all'estero. Circoscrizione consolare di Colonia, https://j3.comitescolonia.de/148-scuola-4.html).
[87] Speech by Amelia Massetti, Founder and President of the Artemisia Association. [my translation]

The Italian experience serves as a model for Germany, offering useful insights to understand both the strengths and the challenges of a fully inclusive school system, identifying areas of success and those in need of further improvement.

In fact, despite the fact that many Italian schools today promote an inclusive climate and the integration of all students, there are those who are sceptical about it and still think about the damage and chaos this could create in the classrooms. There are questions about whether inclusion is truly feasible; if it is the right intervention for people with disabilities; if it could harm or slow down the learning of classmates; if this does not take away the possibility and freedom for parents to choose between two alternatives.

In Italy, students with any intellectual, motor, and sensory disabilities must be integrated into schools of any order and degree. Most teachers believe that inclusion is something 'non-negotiable' and necessary, but this sentiment often clashes with the reality of the facts. In fact, the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, ratified by both Italy and Germany in 2006, establishes that the necessary conditions must be created to ensure the inclusion of persons with disabilities, both in terms of removing architectural barriers and integrating them into schools and the workplace. However, between saying and doing, difficulties, and problems arise in the training of teachers who are unprepared for certain situations and do not know how to act and react. In Germany, the opinion of teachers on the topic varies greatly from *Bundesland* to *Bundesland*.

Initiatives like this seminar are essential to stimulate a change in the German school system, taking examples from the Italian model (which still needs continuous improvement).

Continuing to reflect on the educational differences that emerged from the comparison between the two countries, the personal experience of observing the growth of my cousins in Italy and Germany, and the testimonies of some of my interviewees, allowed me to reflect on the profound differences between the two educational systems and the effects they have on childhood. In Italy, children often live in a highly protective environment, where parental concern for safety is always very present: they are constantly monitored, have little freedom of movement, and rarely can explore the world without adult supervision. In contrast, many German children experience greater autonomy from an early age: they are encouraged to move around on their own, to play freely even outdoors, and to make decisions independently while parents maintain a subtle role of supervision. This difference is also reflected in school, where in Germany practical activities, free time, and personal responsibility are valued, while in Italy a more theoretical and rigid approach still prevails, with less room for children's initiative and autonomy.

VWS[88], drawing on her experience as both a mother and a member of the "Verba Volant" association, highlights how the German school system offers many more extra-curricular activities during school hours, allowing children to focus on their homework and have free time to develop hobbies and personal interests. In Italy, however, the school is perceived as more rigid, with a predominantly theoretical approach and little emphasis on children's autonomy and responsibility. This approach limits personal growth and preparation for the workplace, while in Germany the education system aims to develop critical thinking and independence. LWL describes Italy as a country that is still too bureaucratic, where the school enrolment for his son turned out to be a tiresome and outdated process compared to the experience in Germany, where the school appears more modern and open, and social interactions among children and parents extend beyond school hours, fostering a sense of community that seems to be lacking in Italy. In Italy, moreover, there is a strong anxiety about safety: children are constantly protected and rarely allowed to explore and play without adult supervision. VMS[89], an educator in a private multicultural kindergarten, emphasizes how attention to children in Italy is very different compared to Germany. In his role, he tries daily to integrate the control and care typical of the Italian approach with the greater freedom granted to children in Germany, recognizing the importance of finding a balance between autonomy and safety.

I believe that neither model is perfect, and these kinds of experiences suggest that a dialogue between the two educational systems could lead to a more balanced model, capable of combining the protection and attention typical of Italian education with the freedom and autonomy promoted by the German system. Creating an exchange between these two realities would allow the strengths of both educational methods to be valued, offering children the opportunity to grow up secure yet independent, ready to face the world with responsibility and creativity.

[88] VWS, Interview 3, 01.11.2024.
[89] VMS, Interview 29, 21.02.2025.

4. Voices of the Italo-Berliners

Directly listening to the testimonies collected through interviews and actively participating in various initiatives of the Italian community in Berlin, several significant issues and topics have emerged. These reflect both the potential and the difficulties encountered along the migratory and integration journey. It is a voyage made up of encounters, exchanges, and emotional tensions that mirror the complexity of those facing the challenge of building a new life far from their roots, torn between the desire to live fully and the need to survive. These aspects, where identity intertwines with language, relationships, and the sense of belonging, are explored in the various subchapters, ranging from linguistic and integration issues, to the crucial role of information, to the differences in ways of living and working, and to the kaleidoscope of identities formed in this very unique city. On every page, the voices of those who feel Italian in Berlin but also, in their own way, Berliners, echo. They reveal a mosaic of emotions, challenges, and achievements that make this experience unique and deeply human.

4.1. Living and surviving in Berlin: between identity, language, and integration in a city in transformation

The decision to embark on a migration experience to a country different from one's own requires a great deal of courage and determination. Leaving behind one's home, family, and friends – those who until then had represented the entirety of one's reality – is sometimes a huge leap into the unknown.

In Berlin, the voices of Italians echo everywhere: on the U-Bahn, in libraries, on the streets, in squares, in restaurants, bars, shops, museums, and churches. According to statistics, the total number of foreigners in Berlin is about 1 million (DESTATIS, 2023), of which about 36,000 are Italians (Statista Research Department, 03.06.2024), ranking sixth after Turkey, Ukraine, Poland, Syria, and Russia (in descending order).

The reasons for emigrating are many and vary from person to person. People no longer move just for work and better living conditions, but also to gain experience, for study, to seek freedom, and to become independent. The economic, financial, and institutional crisis that struck Italy in 2012[90] was the main reason that led MMF to leave the country and continue her professional and work training in Germany, in Berlin. And she is not the only one. Two years later, in 2014, SMP, driven

[90] The 2012 crisis developed within the broader European sovereign debt crisis, which began in Greece in 2009 and then spread to several Eurozone countries, including Portugal, Ireland, Spain and Italy.

by desperation, moved from the province of Naples to the German capital without knowing a word of German and without knowing anything about Germany or even Berlin.

Since the 1990s, Erasmus, Socrates, and other university and professional programs have enabled a great movement of young people. These short stays, discovering a new reality different from the Italian one, often turned into permanent relocations. This was the case for VWS, who in 1997 began her semester abroad thanks to the Erasmus program. After a short time in Karlsruhe, she realized she wanted to stay in Germany, specifically Berlin, for both professional and personal reasons.

Similarly, four other interviews showed how Erasmus experiences became extended into permanent stays. These were LWL, DWE, GWS, and GMN. LWL moved to Düsseldorf for a year, later deciding to return to Germany, this time to Berlin, to establish herself professionally as an artist and photographer – a field very different from her degree, which she was able to pursue in Germany thanks to an *Ausbildung*, or professional training. DWE, of mixed Italian-German heritage, with a German mother and Italian father, spent her first 25 years in Rome and the next 25 in Berlin, where she moved in 1998 thanks to an Erasmus scholarship at Humboldt University, where she continued her studies in Aesthetics. The experiences of GWS and GMN, both at the Freie Universität Berlin, are different and more recent. GWS moved to Berlin in 2014 for a six-month Erasmus grant, which, contrary to her expectations, turned into a permanent stay in the German capital. Besides professional and work-related motives, social pressures – especially those affecting women – had a significant impact. The autonomy she enjoys in Berlin would not be possible in Naples, her hometown, which she now only visits as a "tourist" when she returns on vacation. GMN, instead, moved to Berlin in 2016 and, after his six months of Erasmus, never went back. Despite the cultural clash with Berlin – a city that seemed cold and transient to him, where it was difficult to build real and lasting relationships – the university environment, different from the Italian one and perceived more as a workplace, gave him and still gives him much stimulation, which has allowed him to establish himself and obtain many more opportunities as an Italianist.

Berlin is a special case. Berlin's migration has mostly been characterized by groups of Italians curious about the context the city could offer. Berlin, after the fall of the wall, was the city that had to rebuild and reunite all its parts to get back on its feet and, in this process, managed to offer countless work, cultural, social, and other opportunities. Unlike other European and world capitals, the city was also more accessible in terms of cost, making it possible for everyone to integrate into its socioeconomic fabric (although this has changed and is still changing over the years). Ten years ago, it was one of the cheapest European metropolises. Moreover, the city had an astounding

cultural level, and even with little, one could do anything. Berlin has so much to offer in every respect, although over time the city has changed for the worse, for example with the rise in prices, the process of gentrification, and mass layoffs after the pandemic.

This aspect greatly affects migratory flows, which, despite everything, continue to be substantial. Berlin still remains a very attractive destination for Italians, both young and old. Just take a look at Facebook groups like "Italians in Berlin" to realize how many people, attracted by the "myth of Berlin", post their announcements of future relocations every day. The city has a very strong and alternative cultural personality that allows everyone to be who and what they want in the most creative, unconventional, and international environments. However, this 'myth of Berlin' often becomes a trap for the many migrants who plan their journey with expectations that do not match the reality. The idea of a city where everything is possible and feasible without great difficulty is now a distant dream fuelled by false information circulating on social media and blogs. "There are many groups to refer to and many reasons that drive emigration, but it must be remembered that the migratory experience does not always go well."[91] Many arrive without having gathered information and without having researched how a system different from the Italian one works. Wrong information often circulates on social networks and forums of Italians in Berlin. Many arrivals correspond with many returns and failures of the migration experience. This is also why the COMITES of Berlin has published various guides over the years to help newcomers: the guide "Primi Passi in Germania per la Terza Età"[92]; a guide dedicated to those arriving in Berlin to start entrepreneurial activities; a guide on the functioning of consular services; and an informative brochure on vocational training to inform Italians about the existence of *Ausbildungen* and the methods of access.

Migrants, for one reason or another, flock to this metropolis, which exerts a strong attraction from a creative and cultural standpoint, as well as its open-mindedness on various issues including inclusivity and emancipation. However, from an economic standpoint and in terms of job offers, it becomes increasingly difficult to succeed, especially if you think you can do it effortlessly. A problematic point is the wrong narrative that the Italian media propose. Abroad is painted as "a better place where everything is possible"[93], but this is not always the case. "Berlin offers a wide range of job opportunities, and even though over the years it has become increasingly difficult, the search for qualified people who have something to offer continues to exist. At the same time, the issue of poverty should not be underestimated. Unfortunately, not everyone is so lucky and for

[91] (MMF) Federico Quadrelli, President of COMTES Berlin, Interview 4, 05.11.2024.
[92] "First Steps in Germany for Senior Citizens". [my translation]
[93] Ibid.

various reasons, or due to a weak professional profile or poor language skills, many find themselves struggling. It's wrong to think that Germany or Berlin is 'the Mecca' of work. On the contrary, there is a lot of competition."[94]

Berlin is an international and multicultural city, where "if you want to survive, English is enough, but if you want to live, you need to know German."[95] This is one of the reasons why it is still today, as in the past, one of the preferred destinations for Italians. Berlin, due to its international character, could be the most favourable context for job hunting, especially if knowledge of the German language was lacking.

"In Berlin, everyone maintains their basic language. There's English that everyone shares, and perhaps some also learn German. The fact that you don't necessarily have to learn German makes the city welcoming. I don't know of another place in the world where you are accepted without learning the local language. For example, in the artistic field, as in many other professional sectors, English is the working language."[96]

Language is an identifying cultural element that creates a distinction between different realities. During my childhood, I learned two languages at the same time, Italian and German, and the use of one language over the other was associated with a place, a context, and a different culture. In the migratory experience, knowledge, even minimal, of the local language represents an important will to integrate, if by integration we mean seeking a meeting point with the other to minimize differences between peoples as much as possible. On a personal and daily level, there are many cultural divergences between Italians and Germans. There is mutual influence, but it often involves adapting to the other for emotional reasons or out of the need to embrace the other culture. In daily life, there isn't complete integration. "The German remains German, the Italian remains Italian, maybe they become a bit Germanized and the German a bit Italianized."[97] In this case, integrating does not mean assimilating and losing your own cultural identity, but trying to understand each other in order to learn and 'exchange,' and to feel comfortable in the new context: "if you know how to say 'I' in the language you are learning, and you identify with that 'I', in the end, the language belongs to you a little more."[98]

[94] DWM, Interview 10, 17.11.2024.
[95] SWL, Interview 7, 16.11.2024.
[96] MWG, Interview 6, 12.11.2024.
[97] LWS, Interview 28, 17.02.2025.
[98] VWS, Interview 3, 01.11.2024.

In the expression reported by the majority of my interviewees, and I quote again: “to survive in Berlin you just need to know the English language, to live it's necessary to know German”, the two verbs, survive and live, reflect the way Italian migrants in Berlin choose to spend their migratory experience abroad.

And it is precisely on these two terms that I would like to focus my attention, seeking to explore and problematize the open or closed attitude of the Italian community towards the language issue. From my point of view, “living” means being active, involved, present, and fully and purposefully enjoying not only positive experiences but also the negative ones; whereas “survival” takes on a rather negative connotation if it refers to a state one is subjected to almost obligatorily. A situation of survival offers no room for choice or freedom of action and thought. This reveals a dramatic life condition that emerges from SMP's words: “In 2014, I left the province of Naples out of despair, and from that point on my life was only work and home. I didn’t come here to go clubbing – I came because I had no opportunities in Italy and wanted to help my mother and father.”

On the other hand, however, “to survive” can also reveal another perspective. The decision to leave one’s own country and start a life elsewhere shows an awareness of one’s situation and a desire to improve it, and that takes great courage. Adapting to a new environment is not immediate or easy for everyone, which is why “when you are abroad, it’s inevitable to band together with other Italians to survive. If you intend to live in a foreign country in the long term, it’s natural to seek out people like yourself.”[99] DWC and DWM, a young couple from Abruzzo, had two different migratory experiences. DWC’s studies in English and German at the Universities of Urbino and Modena led her to undertake an internship in Berlin in 2018. She liked the city so much that in 2019 she asked her partner (DMM) to join her. Thanks to her prior knowledge, she managed to reach a good linguistic level, even though her working language is English and among friends in an international environment, people tend to speak English. By contrast, after attending an accounting institute for programmers, DMM worked at several pizzerias, and while he saw an improvement in terms of employment, socially he felt better in Italy. “I have never studied nor ever wanted to study German. I’m aware that’s a mistake, but my conviction that I wouldn’t stay here forever made me decide it wasn’t necessary.”

“When it comes to integrating with Germans in Germany, it’s essential to know the language very well. Even though in Berlin it’s not indispensable and you can get by without it, it would be better to learn it because not everyone is always willing to meet you halfway.”[100] And often it is precisely

[99] DWC, Interview 8, 17.11.2024.
[100] Ibid.

the language barrier that gives rise to unpleasant episodes in which Germans refuse to speak English and react rather rudely and impatiently. MWA has been the victim of many such incidents. Until a few years ago, she would ask for permission before starting to speak in English, and only in this way would she get any help in return. "One evening I went to a *Späti* to buy a bottle of wine. I checked the price so that I'd have the exact amount of money, just to avoid conversation, but the man at the register asked me in German, 'Where are you from?', and as soon as he realized that I didn't understand, he stood up and with his arms open exclaimed in English, 'This is Germany!' And that's not all. In the building where I live, there was a couple who often organized parties with loud techno music until 8 in the morning. Everyone in the building knew and the police never did anything, despite the complaints. One evening, tired of the situation, I called the police and in German asked if I could explain in English. The police officer's answer was a curt 'Nein.'" This situation should be considered absurd as well as discriminatory and illegal. Law enforcement is required to provide assistance and help in case of emergency, regardless of the language used to communicate. Only when she raised her voice did the officer begin to speak to her in English. Unfortunately, episodes like these are not isolated cases.

In Berlin, Italians face a trilingual environment, and only a minority are fluent in all three. All the interviewees maintain a strong bond with the Italian language and continue to speak it daily. The connection with the mother tongue is perhaps the deepest and most rooted, the one you do not want to sever and which is not easily broken. In Berlin, English dominates many professional environments, reflecting the professional background of many of the interviewees, however, despite its multicultural openness, Berlin remains a German city, and many stress the importance of knowing German for the future, to aid integration and handle bureaucratic, social, or emergency situations.

Berlin is a complex and very large city, and in addition, "the language barrier does not allow for complete integration with locals and with the German system, confining Italian migrants in a bubble."[101] All these reasons make it very difficult to establish social relationships with Germans. In the large metropolis, a sense of anonymity is reproduced among Italian immigrants. "Anonymity in Berlin guarantees a strong sense of freedom, emancipation, and autonomy. However, not everyone experiences it the same way."[102] For some interviewees, anonymity is experienced positively as an opportunity for independence, but for others, it is not always so: "A difficult period

[101] MWA, Interview 1, 22.10.2024.
[102] GWA, Interview 2, 31.10.2024.

due to health problems made me open my eyes to the negative aspects of being far from my loved ones. Until then, it was independence, not loneliness."[103]

"Berlin is a very large city. No one sees you, you can do what you want. It's a freedom with pros and cons."[104] In such an extensive city, communication can become an obstacle in building social relationships. "In Berlin, it's very complicated to maintain connections and establish lasting and strong ties. It's a city-system that doesn't work well for friendships and social relationships"[105], especially if there is very little willingness to integrate and adapt. "It's easy to have random encounters, but more difficult to find steady points and support."[106]

The attitude of linguistic and cultural closure in the Italian community makes it more difficult to meet others. "In my opinion, the Italian community is somewhat closed and doesn't interact much with Germans. From what I've seen, Italians tend to be a little more isolated and try to maintain their way of life within closed groups with only Italians. They have their bar, their circle."[107] Looking at the experience of his father, who never wanted to learn German well and never liked German culture too much, GMF thinks that perhaps it's a typical Italian thing to value their own culture by developing a certain aversion towards the German one.
Some people do it because they want to, others do it out of necessity. "I didn't seek out Italians, Italians just came. Among those I've met and socialized with, I encountered many who were looking for the 'familiar' and with it, that sense of familiarity you only perceive with someone who shares 70% of your path, along with similar cultural references and issues."[108]

Italians often remain closed within their Italian bubble, or in an "international bubble, expat bubble"[109], which isolates them from their surrounding context, often making them very critical and complaining about the place they live in. This develops a lack of willingness to integrate and adapt to a mentality and culture different from one's own.[110]

In many cases, however, this attitude of closure can create a trap for those belonging to the same linguistic and cultural family, generating a circuit of exploitation among Italians, far from the idea of a united and supportive family. The consequence is getting stuck in a work environment where the same systems and conditions are reproduced.

[103] LWC, Interview 22, 27.01.2025.
[104] LWL, Interview 19, 13.01.2025.
[105] VMS, Interview 29, 21.02.2025.
[106] LWC, Interview 22, 27.01.2025.
[107] GMF-2nd Generation, Interview 15, 28.11.2024.
[108] LWC, Interview 22, 27.01.2025.
[109] DWC, Interview 8, 17.11.2024.
[110] MML, Interview 24, 29.01.2025.

In Italy, people tend to be very territorial, and this attitude, in addition to raising a sort of wall, produces a feeling of greediness and unwillingness to share. “In Italy, I've always perceived the fear that someone might invade the territory others have built for themselves. Very often, those who promote activities only aim to satisfy their personal goals, without considering the community dimension.”[111] Italians can be very empathetic, available, and sociable, and at the same time opportunistic and cunning, driven by personal interest to get something in return.[112] Even my grandparents, whose migratory experience began back in the 1970s in the towns of Nordrhein-Westfalen, about 400 kilometres from Berlin, immediately perceived this way of doing things. “We always had more German acquaintances and friends than Italians. With Italians, you couldn't get too close because they either tried to exploit you or criticized you. Some had the habit of visiting us at home to look for something. Back then it was said that there was a lot of envy among compatriots.”

This opposition is also reflected in many Italian activities in Berlin (especially in those related to the catering sector). SMP managed to enter a German work context immediately, which was a stroke of luck because Italian restaurant owners don't offer much help and support. “There are few honest ones who help with pleasure and without wanting anything in return. The Italian community didn't provide support, on the contrary, they are used to exploiting other Italians who arrive out of desperation, paying them much less than the minimum wage.” Once you enter this exploitative work circuit devoid of contractual protection, it's hard to get out.

“If you decide to come to Berlin to work in Italian establishments, you often find the same conditions existing in Italy.”[113] In Italy, entrepreneurs have a different work approach compared to those abroad, and you only notice this when you start working for Italians abroad. Somehow, the notion that ‘working is a gift’ granted to you continues to be transmitted. Conversely, abroad, there is more respect and mutual support between employer and employee, establishing a more equitable give-and-take relationship.

“It's true that very often in Italian-managed restaurants, the same working conditions and problems present in Italy are 'exported', but this depends on both the employer and the employee. It's true that, just as it happens in Italy, workers' rights are often not respected, but sometimes Italian employees also arrive in Germany with the idea of not having work obligations.”[114]

[111] MWG, Interview 6, 12.11.2024.
[112] DWE, Interview 27, 02.02.2025.
[113] MMP, Interview 23, 28.01.2025.
[114] MML, Interview 24, 29.01.2025.

Therefore, like MML, other interviewees have decided to distance themselves from the Italian community, contesting this attitude of closure. “There are Italians who 'hate' the Germans and those who ‘hate’[115] the Italians.”[116] GWA managed to integrate and, after leaving Italy, matured in the early years a “sense of superiority”, as they now belonged to a State that, without nepotism and recommendations, worked much better. Her choice to emigrate was one of heart and hope, compared to those who did it almost out of necessity to ensure a more stable future economically and work-wise. She understood this detail only later, but in the early years she reveals she felt almost a sense of annoyance towards complaints and negative comments about Germany from non-Germans or Italians. “Many Italians didn't seem convinced of their choice and continually kept one foot here and one foot in Italy, consequently always living with the thought and intention of returning.”[117]

“Having too many contacts with fellow countrymen does not allow you to evolve within the new country,” and although contact with other Italians represents great help and support for newcomers, isolating oneself in a group of only Italians does not offer the opportunity to learn the foreign language well or integrate into the new system.[118] For both VWS and VMS, communication with locals – thanks to their knowledge of German – was fundamental in their integration experience. “I completely immersed myself in German culture and in Germany I only spoke German.” Once in Berlin, VMS began attending German courses with the intention of opening up to a new language and culture, and “this allowed me to appreciate many of the positive aspects. I made the decision to come to Berlin and integrate, so I gave up all the Italian groups.”

“Building solid relationships with Germans is not easy, but trying to learn the language can help establish lasting and genuine relationships over time. By learning German and perfecting my English, I became more and more a part of the city.”[119] Simply demonstrating a commitment to learning the language makes Germans much more friendly and willing to help. “I believe that I am a guest here, so it is my duty to put in the effort to learn at least the basics of the language.”[120]

[115] In these cases, the term “hate” is obviously used hyperbolically to indicate the feeling of division among Italians towards their fellow countrymen and Germans.
[116] GWL, Interview 25, 30.01.2025
[117] GWA, Interview 2, 31.10.2024.
[118] SWL, Interview 7, 16.11.2024.
[119] MMP, Interview 23, 28.01.2025.
[120] MWG, Interview 6, 12.11.2024.

The collected testimonies highlight a division of opinions and different ways of facing the migratory experience, which strongly affects the construction of migrants' identities – an identity in continuous evolution, complex and multifaceted, difficult to define or place in the global migratory context. Each of them is, in their own way, "Italian in a Berlin way"[121], and depending on their different shades of identity[122], they integrate without ever fully assimilating, but maintain their Italian identity in symbiosis with their new Berlin identity, according to different and personal ways. Situating oneself in a culture, a language, and a city, and defining one's identity in times of transnational migration, is a complex challenge that everyone faces in their own way.

What I have realized, reflecting on my entire experience with Italians in Berlin, is that Italians tend to close themselves off within their group and isolate themselves, but at the same time they understand the importance of unity and meeting others. Every cultural identity is unique in the world and it is important to preserve it, but this does not mean it should remain rigid and fixed; on the contrary, its openness and fluidity can allow people to meet in their differences and coexist with the utmost respect. My identity, like that of many Italians I have met and interviewed, is without boundaries and limits, it cannot be defined. Knowing more than one language in addition to one's mother tongue is a tremendous asset that facilitates integration. Those who decided not to learn German while living in Berlin because Berlin is international and English is enough, have chosen to limit themselves and give up an extraordinary cultural immersion. Yes, because knowing the German language also allows you to understand Germans and their ways of doing things. Communication is the key. And I am not the only one saying this, but I can confirm it. Nonetheless, the solution often becomes the problem. Communication becomes the problem.

[121] De Salvo, et al., *op. cit*., p. 24. [my translation]

[122] The expression "identity nuances" (in Italian "sfumature identitarie") refers to the richness and variety of identities that characterise "Italo-Berliners". Each person brings with them a unique story, made up of different migration experiences that depend on their family background, region of origin in Italy, age, professional path and personal motivations that led them to move to Berlin. These elements contribute to building a complex and multifaceted identity, in which Italianness blends with the new reality of Berlin without ever losing its originality. In this way, each "Italo-Berliner" lives and expresses their Italianness in a personal and constantly evolving way, reflecting the dynamic nature of transnational migration.

4.2. The weight of information: between rules, responsibility, and the future in Italy and Germany

In Germany, newscasts and newspapers do not only cover crime news or gossip, but the way information is delivered aims to educate citizens on political and economic issues that concern the entire world. Although perhaps less frequent in the interviews than other topics, this issue is no less important and is actually extremely relevant. An informed and aware citizen is able to develop participation and civic sense, elements that are often lacking in Italy. Italian citizens tend not to keep themselves adequately informed or to form independent opinions on matters relevant at the national and international level. This problem does not come only from a lack of interest among people, but also from the fact that information channels and the media often give priority to content that is not geared towards educational news or deep food for thought.

"The news communicated by the TV news is different. In Germany, they talk about national and international politics, about what happens in the country and the world. In Italy, they broadcast mainly news about disasters and murders."[123] The information transmitted through newspapers and TV news is different between the two countries. "German news is much more focused on politics, whereas Italian news is mostly about crime stories and criminality. The same goes for newspapers. And even when they do cover political issues, they do so only by mentioning events that touch people's emotions."[124] Journalism is completely different, as is the way citizens are informed, and this greatly influences the way of thinking and the topics discussed by Italian and German citizens.

"At home in Germany I don't have a television and when I say this in Italy everyone is shocked. In Italy, many of the news and advertisements on TV are about medicines and diseases, which then become one of the most frequent topics of discussion among friends and families. The result is that often attention is diverted from more important news to focus instead on less relevant things."[125]

Speaking with some interviewees and reflecting together on the issue, it became clear that it is a social and political problem: citizens often end up being at the mercy both of those who hold political power and of those who control the media and news dissemination. This situation creates difficulty in developing an independent critical thinking about the events and realities that directly influence their daily lives. As a result, public attention is often distracted from issues of real

[123] LWL, Interview 19, 13.01.2025.
[124] GMF-2nd Generation, Interview 15, 28.11.2024.
[125] LWL, Interview 19, 13.01.2025.

importance in favour of less relevant and often manipulated topics, which limits the ability to deal knowingly with the challenges that especially the new generations will face in the future.

"There is a lot of political frustration in Germany as well, but in Italy things are even more complicated. Every political action seems to be focused only on personal interests, and this harms Italian development, as well as undermining citizens' trust in political representation. Italy spends too much time on symbolic projects and issues to appeal to people's emotions, but there is no substance in the facts. The economy is seen by many as a 'boring' topic and so it's not brought up to the public, who, in general, feel very disconnected from politics. Politics has become one scandal after another, overshadowing what is truly being done and preventing citizens from seeing how the country is really doing."[126]

For example, the issue of climate change, which is perhaps one of the most important topics of this century, is barely discussed or understood and still today leads to wrong behaviours – by individuals as well as by larger, more impactful groups. "The issue of climate change is one of the main reasons I don't see much of a future in Italy. Germany and Northern European countries are less exposed to the effects of climate change, and this gives them greater security, at least for now."[127] Nevertheless, Germany seems to be making much more of an effort to reduce its environmental impact and raise public awareness. "Civil engineering certainly can't change the world and eliminate climate change, but construction causes a lot of CO2 emissions, and using materials that pollute less than others could help reduce these effects. In Germany, they do this. In Italy, they don't."[128]

The climate issue very much concerns Italy, but interest in it is not as high as it should be. Without wanting to generalize, GMF told me: "Italy seems to me to be a slightly more selfish country. People are much more interested in their own business than in future generations. There are also people in Germany who are close-minded and think this way, but in my opinion, at least in politics, those who hold power tend to think a bit differently."

The widespread indifference toward current issues that affect everyone and the world we live in results in little interest in others and in all the beauty that surrounds us. Italians often show little sensitivity toward safeguarding and protecting these common goods, which are essential to guarantee their preservation over time. This behaviour is also due to the fact that many people are unaware of the real consequences of even the smallest human actions on the environment, mostly

[126] GMF-2nd Generation, Interview 15, 28.11.2024.
[127] DWR, Interview 5, 10.11.2024.
[128] Ibid.

because the media do not cover the topic thoroughly and there is a lack of effective information that could encourage genuine interest and thoughtful reflection on these matters. As a result, respect for what is public and shared is, in most cases, less deeply felt, among both the young and adults and elderly alike, with negative effects on social cohesion and collective quality of life. "One very positive thing Italians should learn from Germans is their civic spirit, respect for the rules, respect for others, and for the things around us."[129]

In my everyday personal experience in my small hometown, Monte San Giacomo in the province of Salerno, I have noticed during some conversations – especially with the older generations – a profound ignorance regarding environmental issues. In their words I detected a certain selfishness, focused only on the here and now, without considering the future that awaits our planet. I have often heard phrases like: "I'm alive now, I won't be there in the future, so it'll be someone else's problem." Small actions like recycling waste, not littering plastic, eating less meat, relying less on private vehicles, or only buying from the supermarket what you need to avoid waste are seen as impossible to put into practice. Unfortunately, in a mountain village like mine, nature and mountain preservation seems almost non-existent. This was also evident in my own initiative to pick up all kinds of litter along mountain roads. However, recently I have noticed a positive change: more interest in climate topics and respect for the environment among the young. During a school play, the kindergarten children sang a song dedicated to protecting the environment, showing me that environmental topics are now being addressed in schools as well. This small sign gave me a glimmer of hope, which I trustingly place in the next generations.

And it's not just about climate and environmental issues. "In Germany, there is much more respect for public property, while in Italy Italians are much more individualistic. This attitude manifests itself in many areas, for example, when it comes to paying taxes. If an Italian intentionally and knowingly decides not to pay taxes and tells a friend, he is viewed with 'admiration' and almost seen as someone to imitate. If the same thing were to happen between Germans, in the most extreme cases, they might even report you. In Germany, there is greater respect for common goods and for the State."[130]

Respect for rules and a strong sense of civic responsibility are important; however, in some cases, this typically German inclination for strict and severe observance of regulations leads complete strangers to call out someone who, in their view and according to the law, is not behaving properly. "As an Italian, it was difficult to understand the German mentality, especially with regard to the

[129] MMP, Interview 23, 28.01.2025.
[130] VMG, Interview 26, 31.01.2025.

issue of great respect for the rules. If you break the rules, even strangers will point it out to you, and that was hard to accept for me."[131] While this attitude reinforces the sense of order and collective responsibility, on the other hand, it can at times be perceived as excessively judgmental or intolerant, especially in social contexts where the dynamics of coexistence are more informal or less regulated. An online article, published on January 31, 2021 on the website "Obiettivo altrove", addresses precisely the German rigor in respecting rules and the sense of civic responsibility compared to Italy. The article *Perché a volte vivere in Germania è frustrante* ("Why Living in Germany Can Be Frustrating")[132] encapsulates MWG's thoughts, who often felt almost watched by Germans and their sense of superiority.

"Sometimes Germans come across as too rude, cold, and rough when telling the truth. It's right to tell the truth, but being too direct and transparent in a brusque manner doesn't always make the other person feel good or at ease. Germans lack the charm of knowing how to tell a white lie for someone's own good. It's right to tell the truth, but it's important to do so in a nice way and with a bit of tact, empathy, and sensitivity. In Germany, a bit of basic good manners has been lost, the kind that's taught to children, the *Kinderstube*[133]. Everything has become a bit 'primitive' in some way."[134]

On the other hand, some Italo-Berliners, after spending time in Germany, have adapted to this way of behaving and replicate it even when they return to Italy. This is the case for VMS: "When I go back to Italy, I no longer feel at ease, especially when I'm on the street or driving. Every time I see an infraction, I want to point it out and call people out on it. In everyday life, I feel more German than Italian."

The reflection that emerges from the comparison between Italy and Germany concerns not only the differences in the way information is conveyed and in the quality of journalism, but also how these factors profoundly affect civic participation and collective awareness. In Italy, the lack of in-depth information geared towards political and social education contributes to widespread indifference and passivity, whereas in Germany, more comprehensive and targeted information fosters the development of more conscious and active citizens. This divide is also reflected in the relationship with the environment, in respecting rules, and in caring for the common good – key elements for a sustainable future and social cohesion. However, there are signs of change,

[131] MWG, Interview 6, 12.11.2024.
[132] Maria, *Perché a volte vivere in Germania è frustrante*, Obiettivo Altrove, 31 Gennaio 2021, https://obiettivoaltrove.com/perche-a-volte-vivere-in-germania-e-frustrante/.
[133] 1. (*kleines Kinderzimmer*) children's room; 2.(Erziehung) (good) upbringing, *eine gute Kinderstube haben* means to have a good upbringing, to be well-mannered, the upbringing one receives as a child (in the cradle).
[134] DWE, Interview 27, 02.02.2025.

especially thanks to the new generations and those who, although raised in different contexts, bring with them more responsible behaviour models oriented toward mutual respect. Thus, it is crucial to work on information, civic, and environmental education to build a more attentive, critical, and supportive society, capable of meeting present and future challenges responsibly.

4.3. Between tradition and innovation: two *Lebensstile* compared in ways of Living, working, and values

The comparison between the different *Lebensstile* of the two peoples, as highlighted by the interviewees, has brought to light the differences in the way both professional and personal life are approached.

Italians tend to structure their lives according to the image they want to convey. "In Italy I always felt that people focused too much on appearances and judged each other based on that, and that often made me feel uncomfortable. Berlin isn't like that; first you get to know someone, and only then are judgments made."[135] The focus on appearances, and the excessive attention to aesthetics, presentation, and lifestyle, often results in feeling the pressure of great expectations both in professional and personal spheres.

"When I arrived in 2013, Berlin was much more meritocratic compared to Italy. One thing I noticed right away is that even in the most important international agencies, no one really cared about appearances or how you dressed; what mattered was doing your job well."[136] In Italy, on the other hand, this almost obsessive attention to aesthetics translates into social pressures that not only influence everyday life but also shape how people plan their futures. "While in Italy people think about buying a house, getting married, and having children, in Berlin you can be whoever you want without social pressure"[137] – pressures that weigh especially on women. "One difference between the two peoples concerns freedom of thought and expression. German women have a different conception and idea of their future, when it comes to work, marriage, and children."[138] From the earliest migratory flows of young Italian women to Germany, this difference was clear, to the point that "women migrated to seek emancipation and freedom of expression."[139] Already in the seventies, the first feminist movements in Italy and Germany, the various reforms and

[135] DWR, Interview 5, 10.11.2024.
[136] VWG, Interview 21, 24.01.2025.
[137] LWC, Interview 22, 27.01.2025.
[138] GWS, Interview 17, 05.12.2024.
[139] Interview to Lisa Mazzi in DossiER, *Qual è stato il ruolo delle donne nell'emigrazione storica e quali caratteristiche ha la mobilità femminile ai giorni nostri?,* Quarta Puntata, 18 novembre 2021, https://www.migrer.org/collezioni/dossier-4-emigrazione-femminile/. [my translation]

student and workers' struggles, and collectives within factories and universities, allowed many Italian women to start a path toward emancipation compared to their previous situations. German women were seen as influential within society, enabling them to obtain greater freedoms both socially and within the family, while in Italy the woman's role was still strongly connected to that of wife and mother, caring for the domestic sphere and dependent on her husband or, before that, her father. Germany thus represented an ideal destination for the courageous young women of those years who wanted to be independent and fulfilled.[140] Certainly, things have changed for the better today, but there is still a long way to go to put an end to patriarchy and achieve gender equality. "In the workplace, women's abilities and intelligence, just like men's, are valued and appreciated. On the other hand, my experience with gender equality at work in Italy was not very positive."[141]

Italians feel the need to live up to a certain standard of living, often because of constant comparisons with others. "In Italy, it happens that some families maintain a higher standard of living than they can actually afford, just to show it off to others. A family has at least one car, if not more. In Germany, however, having one car per family is already considered a lot, and this isn't related to their financial means, but rather to the fact that there simply isn't a perceived need, since people often use public transportation or bicycles."[142]

Compared to Germans, "Italians are more conservative and more closed off culturally"[143], much more attached to traditions and the value of material things. For example, on a personal level, the issue of divorce is approached differently. The idea of breaking up and ending a marriage after many years together is not considered an option in many cases. This is especially true in smaller towns, where people's opinions are considered fundamental, and such a decision would be judged negatively. It's even worse if the couple has children. Italians also tend to be less innovative in the field of work. "In Germany, there is greater open-mindedness and willingness to explore different possibilities. There isn't a habit of sticking to one profession for a lifetime – many Germans change their work goals and interests over the years."[144] "While many Germans decide to change their lives even at an older age, Italians often tend to stay 'on track' and keep the same job forever, perhaps also to avoid risks and economic instability. On the one hand, the German way seems very appealing because a person continues to evolve and change over time, but on the other hand, a negative side emerges as well. If at a certain point something goes wrong and a problem arises, instead of solving it, there's a tendency to avoid it without making even a minimal effort, which

[140] Mazzi, Lisa, *op. cit.*, pp. 172-174.
[141] DWR, Interview 5, 10.11.2024.
[142] LWL, Interview 19, 13.01.2025.
[143] VWG, Interview 21, 24.01.2025.
[144] LWL, Interview 19, 13.01.2025.

contradicts the stereotype of the always-organized German."[145] The idea of typical German punctuality is a stereotype that doesn't always reflect reality. A practical example is the poor functioning of Deutsche Bahn, the main German railway company. Not only based on the interviewees' experience, but also from my own personal experience in Germany, it's common for trains not to be on time, and sometimes they are even cancelled at the last minute.

"For the average Italian, Germans are super punctual, everything works perfectly, they only work, and there's no time left for leisure. That's not what I found. Germans are punctual, but they do everything calmly, and there's no obsession with work. Germans work, but once they have finished their tasks, they don't do more than expected and they always look to get as many benefits as possible. Germans don't see work as an obligation, but as a means to live well. In Italy, this mentality doesn't exist, since it often feels like you have to be grateful just to have a job."[146]

The way of working is different. "In Germany, many people don't work at 100% so that they have free time for family and themselves."[147] When it comes to their approach to work, "Germans are 'slow' and do everything very calmly. In Italy, on the other hand, we are used to being faster and more energetic at work in order to be more productive, especially in certain fields."[148] For this reason, perhaps, it would be necessary to move beyond the stereotype of the tireless, always hyper-efficient and punctual German worker.

The work system is different from the Italian one and, especially in Berlin, there is the philosophy of *kein Stress* (no stress). MMP, used to the Italian work pace, used to push his colleagues to give more when needed, but Germans don't want to stress themselves. Their work culture is to do their job well, but without giving that little extra. "Italians may even be harder-working than Germans, in the sense that they tend to keep working even in less-than-ideal health conditions. One reason could be Germans' awareness that they are better protected at work."[149]

This Italian attitude toward work is also reflected in their jobs abroad, which is highly appreciated by employers. Italians are often well-regarded in the workplace because they are efficient and creative, ready to adapt to many different situations, and able to react to problems with confidence and promptness. In her personal experience, DWC, contrary to what her partner DMM had stated, said that Italians are very well thought of, especially in the professional sphere. Their commitment and work ethic is recognized and allows them to advance in their careers.

[145] LWC, Interview 22, 27.01.2025.
[146] Ibid.
[147] LWL, Interview 19, 13.01.2025.
[148] MML, Interview 24, 29.01.2025.
[149] MMP, Interview 23, 28.01.2025.

From a work perspective, Germans have a more regulated and pragmatic attitude. “What was always appreciated was the open-mindedness in the design projects I presented. While the Berliners’ projects were rigid and static, the Italian and Spanish projects were always more colourful, free, and lively.”[150] Many Italians have the advantage of being creative and possessing great adaptability and problem-solving abilities, even in the most absurd situations. This attitude becomes a sense of confidence in their abilities, which, in turn, can become a flaw if it turns into arrogance. Germans, on the other hand, are much clearer, more direct, and more rigid, but this positive aspect can also become negative, risking crisis if there is any disruption in the system’s process.[151]

The different ways of living and working are reflected in various economic values. Italians, in order to afford a certain standard of living, work hard and always try to be willing to work. Deep down, this is a positive trait that shows determination and commitment to achieving personal life goals for the future. “In Italy, people work to save in order to invest in a house for the future”[152], and as in the past, this vision remains very much alive today. It’s enough to recall that among the reasons for the emigration of the first generations of Gastarbeiter – the guest workers who arrived in Germany starting in the 1950s – was the hope of finding a job and improving their circumstances, with the initial plan being for a temporary stay, so they could set aside their earnings to invest in a house and a future back in Italy. “Nearly all emigrants have the *esprit de retour*”[153], literally the spirit of return – that is, the desire to improve their condition and ‘make it’ so they could eventually return to their homeland. Even if things didn’t always go that way, my grandfather couldn’t wait to return to Italy. There, he felt free. In Germany, on the other hand, his life was work and home, always hoping to save as much as possible to return as soon as he could to Monte San Giacomo. In his work “Die italienische Minderheit”[154], published in 1995, Christian Giordano examines the transnational aspects[155] within the sociocultural context of Italians from Southern Italy, and in the economic field, he highlights the identity-shaping importance of owning a house in one’s country of origin.[156]

[150] VWG, Interview 21, 24.01.2025.
[151] GWL, Interview 25, 30.01.2025; VMS, Interview 29, 21.02.2025.
[152] MML, Interview 24, 29.01.2025.
[153] Brenna, Paulo G., *op. cit.*, p. 243. [my translation]
[154] Giordano, Christian, *Die italienische Minderheit*, 1995, In: Schmalz-Jacobsen, Cornelia, Hansen, Georg, *Ethnische Minderheiten in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, München, 1995.
[155] This term and concept, introduced into economic studies in the 1960s, is directly linked to migration phenomena, as migrants have managed to create dense networks of social, economic and political relations in both their country of arrival and their country of origin, overcoming national borders.
[156] Martini, Claudia, *op. cit.*.

Today, as in the past, “Italians are more prone to save. This remains a significant difference compared to their German peers who were born and educated in Germany. None of them have ever had the intention of buying a house, perhaps also because they didn’t share the idea of family as an extended network that gathers in the same place.”[157]

However, as with everything, there is another side of the coin. The obsession with work commitments can push aside other important aspects of a person’s life. Each of us is a social being who needs to build relationships with others. In my personal and family experience, I have seen how the ambition to save for a house or for the future more and more reduces a person to a single goal – earning money – excluding from their life any other activity outside of work. “According to this typically Italian outlook, which differs from the American or German one, buying a house is considered an investment, but in reality, I see it as an expense. When I try to explain my point of view on the matter, my different opinion is not always accepted. One reason is that those who haven’t lived abroad and had a chance to know a reality different from the one they’re used to can hardly understand, or want to understand.”[158]

From the analysis emerging from the experiences and words of the interviewees, it is clear how cultural context significantly shapes life choices and work dynamics. While in Italy, the value of appearances, the traditional family, and stability seem to dictate the rules of daily life, in Germany, there is greater freedom of expression and a more pragmatic, meritocratic, and flexible view of work and personal life. This difference is not just a cultural gap but also reflects the different social expectations and opportunities available in the two countries. Understanding these differences can help overcome prejudices and stereotypes, fostering constructive dialogue that values both Italian creativity and passion and German pragmatism and balance. Looking at these differences with openness can be an opportunity to enrich both peoples, learning to balance commitment and quality of life, tradition and innovation.

[157] GWS, Interview 17, 05.12.2024.
[158] MML, Interview 24, 29.01.2025.

4.4. Italian-Berlin kaleidoscope: Italian identity and Europe through encounters and exchanges for a common future

The Italian community in Berlin, while maintaining its cultural identity, actively integrates into German society, becoming a dynamic bridge between the two cultures and a driver of participation and change. The stories and testimonies collected show how Italian migration to Germany, and especially to Berlin, is a complex and ever-evolving phenomenon, able to reflect the changes in contemporary society and the aspirations of new generations. In this context, key words emerge forcefully: encounter, exchange, openness, and inclusion – fundamental concepts for the broader project of greater European integration.

"Italians in Berlin are divided. Some have developed a sense of disdain for Italy and want to become 100% German, while others are more nostalgic and keep comparing the two realities. The extremes are always mistaken, as both peoples have their negative and positive sides. Above all, those who have close relationships with German men and/or women have been able to find common ground to live peacefully. It's important to find a common ground between the two cultures, and it would be wonderful to take the good things from both."[159]

The strong Italian presence in Germany encourages intercultural dialogue and strengthens ties between the two countries, also contributing to better mutual understanding of their respective needs and priorities within the European Union. Migration, in addition to being an economic driver, represents a factor of dynamism and social enrichment for both nations. "There is the famous Italian-German love-hate relationship, but that's what makes Europe beautiful. It's beautiful because countries and cultures influence and enrich each other, and because they can 'borrow' from each other what they lack. It's important for everyone to maintain their own identity and personality, but at the same time, it's important to seize the opportunity to grow by getting to know others. The value of Europe is that despite only a few kilometres' distance, there are so many great differences between countries. It is a tremendous opportunity for diversity, and for this reason we should all meet each other halfway – not to become the same, but to smooth out our rough edges by learning from others. We should correct each other without feeling attacked or obliged to do so, but rather to improve ourselves. We should be more kaleidoscopic."[160]

[159] LWC, Interview 22, 27.01.2025.
[160] DWE, Interview 27, 02.02.2025.

The Italian community in Berlin is highly engaged and involved in activities concerning both Italian and German culture, touching on various relevant social and economic topics. This demonstrates a clear determination to make their presence and voice known, promoting initiatives and events that foster encounter and the sharing of opinions and ideas on multiple fronts. Italian contributions to Berlin's cultural scene have been significant, to say the least. The sheer size of the Italian community has certainly had an influence on local realities. In her essay "Ricchi, Poveri & CO. Il Contributo Italiano alla Scena Culturale Berlinese"[161], Silvia Mazzini distinguishes between two groups, or rather, "two not necessarily opposing tendencies, important because they serve as guides and are rarely found in a pure state."[162] These are "italiata" and "italiante." The first refers to all associations and institutions promoting initiatives closely tied to Italian culture. The second refers to institutions, initiatives, associations, and activities founded and managed by Italians "but for whom their Italian origins are just one among many aspects of their identity"[163]. In other words, this includes initiatives that aim (in different ways, depending on various factors and interests) toward full integration into Berlin's socio-cultural fabric. A third group corresponds to "germitalianti" activities, which aim to 'unite' the two cultures and realities by bringing Italian topics to light and into debate for the German public, thus encouraging a cultural and intellectual exchange of opinions, ideas, and perspectives.

An example is the association *Mafia? Nein Danke!*[164] Laura Garavini, the association's founder and now an Italian senator, is its honorary president, and together with others, created a strong group of restaurateurs and entrepreneurs from diverse backgrounds but sharing the same goal: keeping the mafia out of their honest businesses. The aim was to internationalize this issue, so that "the anti-mafia movement may be perceived by German public opinion as true Italianness."[165] Many Italian-run restaurants had been voluntarily avoided for fear of violent and criminal groups. This group decided to react to the situation, and with great courage launched a concrete action plan: reporting threats, refusing to pay protection money, avoiding purchasing goods from those linked to the mafia, and not employing staff imposed by the mafia. The initiative met with very positive results, along with support from the German police.

[161] Mazzini, Silvia, Ricchi, *Poveri & CO. Il Contributo Italiano alla Scena Culturale Berlinese*, De Salvo, et al., *op. cit*.
[162] Ivi, p. 75. [my translation]
[163] Ibid. [my translation]
[164] The association *Mafia? Nein Danke!* was founded in the summer of 2007 on the initiative of a group of restaurateurs in response to the Duisburg massacre and media portrayals of Italy linked to mafia stereotypes.
[165] Garavini, Laura, *Mafia? Nein Danke! Italo-Berliner contro la criminalità organizzata*, in De Salvo, et al., *op. cit*., p. 88. [my translation]

The current goal is to make both Italians and Germans more aware of this problem and its complexity. “In the fight against organized crime, cooperation between Italy and Germany, and more generally among European countries, could be much more effective.”[166]

“The Italo-Berliner community has acted as a sort of ‘seismograph’ for the host society, reflecting what was happening in Italy in terms of social and political issues.”[167] Thanks to their strong socio-political spirit and initiative, they were able to create spaces where the two communities meet and influence each other through debate and the exchange of innovative ideas.

Italians in Berlin are active in associations that promote discussions on a range of relevant social and cultural issues, encouraging the exchange of ideas and viewpoints. A significant example is *Rete Donne Berlino (RDB),* an association of Italian women recognized by both the German and Italian governments, and part of a wider network of women’s associations across many German cities. Rete Donne Berlino brings together women from various professional and creative backgrounds, united by an awareness of their role in the German context and their commitment to better integration. Founded in 2013 by Lisa Mazzi, originally from Modena and living in Germany since 1975, the association is now led by Alessandra Pantani.

Another important group is the association Verba Volant, founded in 2009 on the initiative of parents seeking to give their children the opportunity to learn Italian as a second language starting in preschool. This project, still active today and developed at the *Schule am Senefelderplatz* in the Mitte district, represents a new development in Berlin’s landscape as it introduces Italian into the regular school curriculum, going beyond the traditional afternoon offerings. The initiative, supported by the Italian Cultural Institute, has had a significant impact, attracting many Italian families to the Mitte and Prenzlauer Berg districts, areas historically lacking bilingual schools. As VWS points out, with *Verba Volant* “the idea is to be active in associations to create a ‘good Europe’ that works by learning from different cultures. Above all, young people living in multicultural environments develop what Europe needs, thanks to an understanding of differences.”[168] Thus, the migration experience becomes an opportunity for personal and collective growth, where the choices to emigrate and to return are lived as expressions of freedom. “The associations of the newly mobile have a cross-cutting, interethnic, and intercultural character”[169], embodying a contemporary migration in which migrants are no longer merely “emigrants” but

[166] Ivi, p. 91. [my translation]
[167] Pichler, Edith, *Dai Vecchi Pionieri alla Nuova Mobilità*, in De Salvo, et al., *op. cit.*. [my translation]
[168] VWS, Intervista 3, 01.11.2024.
[169] Pichler, Edith, *Dai Vecchi Pionieri alla Nuova Mobilità*, in De Salvo, et al., *op. cit.,* p. 38. [my translation]

active players in a transnational space. They affect and reshape both their societies of origin and of adoption, contributing to redefining identity, participation, and solidarity from a European and global perspective.

In Germany, as in all of Europe, Italy definitely has a strong impact culturally – more so than economically, politically, or bureaucratically. "There is the pleasure of having Italy close by, thanks to its landscapes and culinary culture."[170] Italian culture becomes a shared good at a European level and, inevitably, when two worlds, two cultures, two peoples come into contact, a mechanism of 'give and take' is triggered – an exchange that is sometimes more visible, sometimes less so. This depends largely on the willingness to open oneself to a different culture and to learn about it, striving to draw out its most positive aspects in order to continually improve. VMS, after arriving in Berlin, started an online blog to share the differences between German and Italian reality. The comments from Italians, often negative, revealed a closed attitude toward the possibility of change and improvement. "My points of reflection were not welcomed, but instead, a wall was put up."[171]

"Europe has different cultures. Italians and Germans can find common ground, but on some topics, I don't think they'll ever fully intersect. Maybe, just maybe, in a few years."[172] Some sensitive topics, such as sex education and sexuality, are approached differently in the two countries. In his experience as an educator in a Berlin kindergarten, VMS noticed how naturally and casually illustrated booklets – containing explicit images and words – were used to explain sexuality to young children. Such a practice in an Italian kindergarten would probably not be seen positively by parents, likely causing outrage and disapproval. On the other hand, there have been improvements over time in other areas, and Italians and Germans have managed to learn from each other. For example, "trains in Italy are now much more punctual than in Germany; or when it comes to educational inclusion, Italians are more 'advanced' than Germans."[173] School integration is a cornerstone for building a more inclusive Europe, in both Germany and Italy and other European countries.[174] In France, for example, the path toward full inclusion of students with disabilities is still evolving, with a combination of specialized institutions and forms of partial inclusion. Despite ongoing challenges with inclusivity in Italy as well, the model adopted stands out for its regulatory and organizational approach aimed at full inclusion. The encounter between

[170] LWL, Interview 19, 13.01.2025.
[171] VMS, Interview 29, 21.02.2025.
[172] Ibid.
[173] DWE, Interview 27, 02.02.2025.
[174] See Paschetta, Luciano, *Come si sta evolvendo in Europa l'inclusione scolastica?,* Superando, 7 dicembre 2018, https://superando.it/2018/12/07/come-si-sta-evolvendo-in-europa-linclusione-scolastica/.

these two cultural realities should be seen as enrichment for both parties, and "seeing one's own country and culture from an alternative and external perspective is formative."[175]

In this process of interaction, transnational social spaces can become resources for migration and within migration itself. The relationships developed between Italians and Germans can be defined as 'transnational' and can represent a great resource on a personal, cultural, linguistic, and economic level. Coming into contact with another people and forming bonds inevitably leads to an exchange that should be welcomed with open arms for the creation of a more united and integrated community, beyond national borders. In meeting the other, a change in one's own mindset is necessary. "Regardless of nationality, when two people with different cultures, values, and mentalities meet, they should be smart enough to pick up and learn something good from each other. In the workplace, for example, Italians tend to create a climate of competition rather than collaboration, unlike Germans."[176]

"I love Europe, I am fascinated by it and have always seen it as 'united we are stronger'. On the other hand, I am fascinated by the cultures of individual places, the variety of languages and dialects. Every country must maintain its own identity, but we are part of a common system in which we must adapt."[177] The business run by MML in Berlin is a neighbourhood pizzeria and therefore has a different format compared to the restaurant in Naples. All pizzerias abroad have a more extensive menu, giving customers the chance to try something new each time, while still being connected to ingredients and flavours typical of Italy and Naples. At the same time, the pizzeria is managed as "a corner of Italy" where some foreign practices are avoided, such as pairing cappuccino with pizza. "It's important to adapt, but without losing the sense of 'Italian-ness' that is characteristic of our local cuisine."[178]

Relations between Germany and Italy today are very intense and strategic, both bilaterally and within the European Union. The two nations work closely together on many fronts: politics, economy, industry, science, culture, and civil society. This collaboration is the result of a long historical, political, and economic closeness, as well as the need to face together the challenges of European integration and the transition to a greener, more digital, and more competitive Europe.

[175] GMM, Interview 30, 27.02.2025.
[176] MML, Interview 24, 29.01.2025.
[177] VWS, Interview 3, 01.11.2024.
[178] MML, Interview 24, 29.01.2025.

"My work as an interpreter makes me a 'bridge' between Italy and Germany. On the state and institutional level, all the twinning initiatives and collaborations between the two countries on an intercultural level signal strong integration and cooperation at the European level."[179] A prime example is the *Italienzentrum*, a research centre and department dedicated to the promotion of Italian culture and language through courses in literature, history, and other humanities, within the Freie Universität Berlin. Even though it operates in an academic context that is traditionally conservative, the *Italienzentrum* consistently strives to build bridges between Italy and Germany, encouraging scientific and cultural contacts between the two realities. Its mission is to coordinate and strengthen cooperation in research and teaching between the universities of Berlin and Potsdam and those in Italy, organizing conferences, seminars, and cultural events for both specialists and a broader public. Moreover, it facilitates joint research projects and academic exchange programs, thus establishing an interdisciplinary and transnational dialogue.
GMN and GWS are professors at FU. "Every place you go changes your perspective on things. Learning about another culture and language changes your cultural outlook and your approach to things. However, the academic field remains a conservative one. Merging the two dimensions would be ideal, but even though Italian university policies are open to internationalization, changing the system is not easy. The *Italienzentrum* continuously attempts to build links between the two countries to establish contacts between different realities; and this is similar to what people do when they return to Italy after having lived abroad."
FML worked for two years in Berlin as a *Gastdozent* in the Department of Philosophy, where he teaches three courses for six months: Italian public law, Italian private law, and a course on non-contractual liability for students at the centre, Erasmus students, and German students who have at least a minimal knowledge of Italian. "During my experience in Berlin, I tried to build a network, also organizing conferences with guests from all over Europe, under the organization of the Department of Law. Given my intention to maintain a connection with Germany, I've sought to establish and keep contacts in Berlin, and I believe that what I'm building here will be of great help to me in Italy."

The European dimension must be seen as a strength that connects the two countries and their peoples and cultures. Problems arise when institutions and organizations, or even worse, individuals themselves, choose not to open up.

The theme Federico Quadrelli is most passionate about is vocational training, the *Ausbildung*, which in Germany combines practical work in a company with theory at school. It lasts two to three years, is paid, and leads to a recognized qualification. It is available in many sectors

[179] LWS, Intervista 28, 17.02.2025.

(healthcare, technical fields, administration, etc.) and is also open to foreigners, provided they know German (at least B1 level). After the *Ausbildung*, it is often possible to obtain a permanent employment contract. "Even if you don't live in Italy, it is possible to send input and ideas from a distance. The problem arises if those on the other side don't listen and don't want to listen. In Italy, there is huge provincialism and everyone, including politicians, thinks in the short term and does not consider the future perspective." Thanks to a new collaboration with the German Chamber of Commerce, the COMITES of Berlin has distributed a brochure on vocational training to inform Italians about what the *Ausbildung* is, how it works, and how to access it. This collaboration with German institutions was designed to offer a valuable service to Italians, who all too often remain imprisoned in circles tied only to the gastronomy sector.

"On a personal and daily level, many differences between Italians and Germans come to light. We influence each other, but it often comes down to the need to adapt to others for emotional reasons or survival. In everyday life, I don't think there is total integration. Germans remain German, Italians remain Italian. Maybe the Italian becomes a bit more Germanized and the German a bit more Italianized, but I don't think there will ever be an integration like that between Italy and France or Italy and Spain, which are more alike. Germany and Italy aren't as similar, unfortunately."[180]

The Italian community in Berlin stands out as a dynamic and pluralistic actor, capable of maintaining its cultural roots while promoting active and mutual integration with German society. Through associations, cultural and social initiatives, and transnational exchanges, this community encourages dialogue, inclusion, and innovation, contributing not only to the strengthening of bilateral ties between Italy and Germany but also to a European project based on valuing diversity and intercultural collaboration.

[180] LWS, Interview 28, 17.02.2025.

Conclusion

The stories and testimonies collected highlight how Italian migration to Germany, and in particular to Berlin, is a complex and constantly evolving phenomenon, capable of reflecting the changes in contemporary society and the aspirations of new generations. In this context, key words emerge powerfully, such as encounter, exchange, openness, and inclusion – fundamental concepts for the grand project of greater European integration.

Whatever the reasons that led Italians to leave Italy and settle in Germany – and, more specifically, in Berlin – from the interviewees' experiences the importance of maintaining a living bond with their country of origin emerges clearly, despite the distance. This is, therefore, not a definitive departure, but rather a separation that does not turn its back on Italy irreversibly. Each interviewee explained how this choice has influenced their sense of Italian identity and their relationship with Italy, and how, day by day, through different methods and initiatives, they wish to preserve, maintain, and pass on the essential bond with their homeland. Emigration represents a form of exit, but this decision never completely separates from voice and loyalty: many migrants maintain an emotional and cultural connection to Italy, actively participating in forms of protest or civic engagement to improve conditions in their country of origin.

What is immediately apparent is a strong participation and involvement of the Italian community in activities that concern both Italian and German culture; significant social and economic issues, often related to questions of gender; a deep attachment to the Christian religion that unites different generations; a concrete interest in helping those in difficulty, whether compatriots or members of other migrant communities; and the desire to pass on life stories and stories of migration. In general, a clear determination emerges to make their presence and voice heard, promoting activities and events that encourage meeting, sharing opinions, and exchanging ideas across many areas.

Reflecting on the experience with Italians in Berlin, one notices that they tend to close themselves off within their own group, but at the same time they recognize the importance of unity and dialogue with others. Stereotypes and prejudices, both negative and positive, exist and will persist, since, even though they cannot be generalized, they are often based on partial truths. The essential thing is to overcome these preconceptions with a genuine desire to get to know others and seek common ground. What's the point of emigrating to another country only to isolate yourself in an "Italian bubble"? Cultural exchange and integration do not mean losing one's identity, but rather enriching it. Every cultural identity is unique and should be preserved, but it must not remain rigid

and unchangeable: its openness and fluidity allow people to meet in their differences and coexist in mutual respect.

My identity, like that of many Italians I have met and interviewed, has no fixed borders and cannot be defined rigidly. The multicultural reality of Berlin exposes everyone to a multitude of traditions, customs, songs, foods, and languages. Knowing more than just your native language is an extraordinary asset that facilitates integration. Those who choose not to learn German, relying only on English because Berlin is international, limit themselves and miss out on a deep cultural immersion. Knowing the German language also means understanding the ways of the Germans. Communication is key, however, what should often be the solution turns into a problem: communicating becomes the main challenge.

Every day I am grateful to have grown up in a multicultural family: not only Italian-German, but also a bit Turkish and a bit Russian. Each of these pieces has helped to build my increasingly multifaceted identity. For me, Europe is ideally a place where we are all equal but different, a reality in which each person can change based on the context: I feel Italian in Italy, German in Germany, but I can also become very German in Italy, and vice versa. The possibility of possessing multiple identities and personalities that, like in a game of Tetris, move and constantly fit together within a single large supranational and European identity is what I like most about myself.

This research represents a first step in analysing the complex dynamics of Italian migration to Berlin, offering a preliminary look at the identities, networks, and integration practices that characterize this community. However, the richness and diversity of the experiences that emerged invite further exploration, which could expand the field of investigation in terms of geographic dimensions as well as social, cultural, and political variables, to help outline new models of integration that go beyond national borders, promoting a more cohesive, open, and cooperative Europe, in line with the grand European project of pluralism and inclusion.

Appendix

Below a list of the 30 Berlin interviews with a brief description of the subjects.

Interview 1 – MWA 22.10.2024	43 years old, originally from Veneto (Venice). In Berlin since 2019. Corporate employee and artist with a background in painting, photography, and visual merchandising. Before working in Berlin, she gained work experience in Italy.
Interview 2 – GWA 31.10.2024	Originally from Emilia Romagna. In Berlin since 1997. Jurist, graduated in law in Bologna and currently employed in the German public administration. Active in a women's association in Berlin. She developed her first work experiences in Berlin.
Interview 3 – VWS 01.11.2024	Originally from Puglia (Lecce). In Berlin since 2001. She studied architecture in Florence but completed her studies at the University of Karlsruhe, where she moved in 1997 thanks to the Erasmus program. After graduation, entering the job market was not easy due to strong competition and the 2008 economic crisis. She worked as an architect in architecture firms, but is currently not working. Very active from an association perspective as a co-founder of the group "Verba Volant" and as an active member of a women's association in Berlin.
Interview 4 – (MMF) Federico Quadrelli 05.11.2024	38 years old, originally from Toscana (Pietrasanta). In Berlin for 12 years. He studied Sociology of Organizations and Economics in Milan. In Berlin, he pursued a second master's degree in European Studies after working for two years at a private company. Currently he teaches politics at a *Fachschule*, as well as volunteering at the COMITES of Berlin, of which he has been the president since 2022.
Interview 5 – DWR 10.11.2024	28 years old, originally from Lazio (Frosinone). In Berlin since 2022. She studied civil engineering in Rome and Milan. She works at an engineering agency with projects abroad as well. She had no previous work experience in Italy.

Interview 6 – MWG **12.11.2024**	Originally from Piemonte (Biella). She studied dance at the *Scuola del Balletto di Toscana* in Florence. Before Berlin, she lived and worked in New York for ten and a half years. She has lived in Berlin since 2019. She is a dancer and choreographer and has also experimented with film-making. Currently she freelances and also works at the Deutsche Oper.
Interview 7 – SWL **16.11.2024**	38 years old, originally from Lombardia (Brescia). She has lived in Berlin since 2013, but previously she also lived in London, Amsterdam for 3 years, and Torgau (near Leipzig) for 10 months. She studied advertising graphics at a Vocational Institute. In Berlin, she worked as a team leader in customer service for 10 years, before being laid off due to department closure. Currently she is a student training for certification in IT.
Interviews 8 and 9 – DWC and DMM **17.11.2024**	DWC: 31 years old, originally from Abruzzo. She has lived in Berlin since 2019, but already in 2018 she did a curriculum internship there thanks to the Erasmus study program. She studied Business Languages in Urbino and Communication in International Enterprises and Organizations in Modena. She works as a project manager for a well-known company. She had no previous work experience in Italy or Germany, aside from some part-time work as a waitress. DMM: 33 years old, originally from Abruzzo. He has lived in Berlin since 2019. He attended a vocational institute in Programming Accounting. In Italy, he worked as a pizza chef for 2 years and continued to do so in Berlin for 4 years. Currently he works in Customer Service for the same company as DWC, but still works as a pizza chef once a week.
Interview 10 – DWM **17.11.2024**	33 years old, originally from Campania (Nola). She has lived in Berlin since June 2023. She studied European Languages and Literatures and Literary Translation in English at the University *L'Orientale* in Naples. In Italy, she worked for a couple of years in the Nola area at a language school. In 2019, she moved north to Piemonte to work as a substitute teacher. She lived there for 3 years before deciding to move abroad. She turned down a permanent teaching position in Italy obtained after passing a national competition in order to move to Berlin. In Berlin, she worked as a teacher in an international school and now teaches English at a private university, halfway between education and corporation.

Interview 11 – MMA **19.11.2024**	Originally from Lazio (Rome). He has lived in Berlin since 2009, but for the first few years he did not have a fixed housing situation. He studied law and became a lawyer in 2000. In Berlin, he started working at a law firm in 2011/2012, but continues to work simultaneously in Rome as well.
Interview 12 – MMS **20.11.2024**	40 years old, originally from Eschweiler (Kreis Aachen, North Rhine-Westphalia), with Sardinian roots. He has lived in Berlin since 2021. He studied Economics and Commerce in Wuppertal. Before being transferred to Berlin, he worked for the Ministry in Cologne. He is a project manager at the Ministry of the Interior, where he handles digitalization projects for the *Bundesregierung*. His maternal grandparents and mother migrated to Germany after the fifties. His father also migrated in search of work. Originally from Sardinia, his parents met through the Sardinian Italian centre and currently live in Aachen.
Interview 13 – SMP **23.11.2024**	51 years old, originally from Campania (San Giorgio a Cremano). He has lived in Berlin since 2014. In Italy, he was involved in Wi-Fi router installation. Following a mass layoff, he worked door-to-door for an Italian electricity and gas company. He moved in hopes of improving his working and living conditions. In Berlin, he worked for 10 years at a well-known American pizza chain. Currently he works in the logistics sector at a company that exports appliances worldwide.
Interview 14 – FML **25.11.2024**	33 years old, originally from Veneto (Verona). He has lived in Berlin since 2022, but not permanently. He studied law in Trento, where he also completed his doctorate in 2021. During his doctorate, he did two research periods abroad – one in the Netherlands in Nijmegen for 6 months, and another 6 months at the Max Planck Institute in Hamburg. He worked as a visiting lecturer at the Freie Universität in the Philosophy Department, in the *Italienzentrum*, a research centre and department promoting the teaching of Italian literature, culture, and history.
Interview 15 – GMF **28.11.2024**	21 years old, originally from Crailsheim (Baden-Württemberg), with roots from Piemonte. He has been living in Berlin since 2021. He is a Political Science student and for the third time he is doing a paid internship at the Parliament.

	His father studied engineering in Italy and moved to Germany in 2000 for work reasons and out of a desire to travel. His mother is German.
Interview 16 – MWR 03.12.2024	Originally from Düsseldorf, with roots in Apulia. She has been living in Berlin since 1993. She studied languages, German studies, and Romance studies, and is involved in adult education. She has been working for 11 years for an association that offers counselling for the professional and work integration of women. In 1966 her parents emigrated from a small town in the province of Taranto to Düsseldorf, Germany.
Interview 17 – GWS 05.12.2024	34 years old, originally from Campania (Naples). She has been living in Berlin since 2014, after a 6-month study period thanks to the Erasmus program. She studied Italian studies in Naples at Federico II. She teaches Italian language and literature and medieval French literature at the Freie Universität. She has not had work experience in this field in Italy.
Interview 18 – GMN 05.12.2024	Originally from Emilia Romagna (Piacenza). He has been living in Berlin since 2016. He studied Italian literature in Milan. During his final year of his master's degree, he spent a study period in Berlin thanks to the Erasmus program. He completed his PhD in 2023 and since then has been employed as a postdoctoral research associate at the Freie Universität. He teaches Italian literature and Spanish literature in German, Italian, and Spanish.
Interview 19 – LWL 13.01.2025	52 years old, originally from Sicilia (Syracuse). After 8 years in Milan, during which she started attending the faculty of foreign languages and literatures, she moved first to Düsseldorf for a semester abroad with the Erasmus program, then to Berlin in 1996 thanks to a scholarship. In Berlin, she began an *Ausbildung* to train as a photographer. She worked for 14 years at the photography studio where she did her training and then decided to work independently.
Interview 20 – MWZ 21.01.2025	48 years old, originally from Calabria (Catanzaro). Her studies in architecture in Rome first took her to Berlin in 1999 to study and carry out research on site. The charm and atmosphere of the city convinced her to move there in 2009. Despite linguistic difficulties, while working at a studio

	she developed her own idea, which is now her sole occupation. She offers a service as a cultural mediator in Italian, through which she tells the story of the city – architecturally and otherwise – to guests, school groups, and other groups.
Interview 21 – VWG 24.01.2025	39 years old, originally from Toscana (Grosseto). In Italy, she studied industrial design and moved to Berlin in 2013 for more and better job opportunities. It took a couple of years to fully integrate into the German job market; in fact, during the first years she did internships and also did some 'expat' gigs to support herself. Later, she worked as a graphic designer for various companies and also as a freelancer, mainly in the editorial and digital design field.
Interview 22 – LWC 27.01.2025	31 years old, originally from Veneto (Mestre). She studied communication in Padua and Verona before moving to Berlin in 2018, due to frustration in job searching. In Berlin, she started with an au-pair experience for 4 months before beginning to look for housing and work. Initially, she worked part-time at a start-up and at the same time was a waitress and took German lessons. Later, she worked as a content creator for a larger company and currently works as head of internal and external communication at a start-up.
Interview 23 – MMP 28.01.2025	34 years old, originally from Campania (Marcianise). In Italy, he studied economics, but at the end of his studies he realized he had a strong passion for being a pizzaiolo and wanted to turn it into a real business. In Naples he attended a course and began working in various pizzerias in different Italian cities. The working conditions were unbearable, so he decided to move to Berlin in 2018, although he has been living there permanently since 2022. He worked in some pizzerias managed by Italians, and the conditions were not ideal compared to those managed by Germans. In addition to being a pizzaiolo, in his last two jobs in Berlin he also took on the role of kitchen manager, handling staff management, raw materials, and menu preparation.
Interview 24 – MML 29.01.2025	33 years old, originally from Campania (province of Naples). In Italy, he worked in the restaurant industry and private security. In 2020, he took a training course to become a pizza maker and moved to Munich, Germany, where he worked for a pizza chain before returning to Italy after 8-9 months,

	and then leaving again for the United States, where he worked as a pizza maker. He has been living in Berlin since October 2023 after receiving an offer to manage a well-known Neapolitan pizzeria. Berlin allows him to develop his business, but if his American project succeeds, he would like to move to California, as the American environment is more in line with his ambitions and his desire for personal and professional growth.
Interview 25 – GWL 30.01.2025	47 years old, originally from Lazio (Frosinone). After graduating in law, she began a musical tour with her rock band, before returning to her passion for writing once she moved to Berlin in 2014. In addition to odd jobs to support herself, she worked as a freelancer in communication and content production for clients and websites. She owns a communications company and, after starting as a simple collaborator, since 2021 has become the owner and co-editor of a well-known magazine that serves as a reference point for many Italians in Germany, around the world, and also in Italy.
Interview 26 – VMG 31.01.2025	52 years old, originally from Veneto (Padua). She studied International and Diplomatic Sciences at the University of Trieste, then completed a Master's degree at the College of Europe in Bruges, Belgium, specializing in European and Institutional Affairs. She left Italy in 1997. Before arriving in Berlin in 2005, she worked for 8 years in Brussels, first as a consultant, then at an industry association representing various sectors, and finally at the European Commission. In Berlin, she works at a multinational pharmaceutical company, currently in the communications sector. She is responsible for communications for this company in 4 countries: Italy, Spain, France, and Portugal.
Interview 27 – DWE 02.02.2025	51 years old, Italian-German, with a German mother and an Italian father. She lived the first 25 years of her life in Rome, where she attended the German school, and the next 25 years in Berlin. She graduated in Art History. She saw Berlin for the first time in 1998 thanks to an Erasmus scholarship at Humboldt University, where she studied Aesthetics. In the past 25 years, she has never been permanently based in Berlin, but due to her husband's work with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, she has also lived in Rome, Barcelona, Miami, and New Delhi.

	In 2005, she opened her own art gallery in Berlin and achieved great success, also thanks to the press, which helped her become known. She no longer owns her gallery, but now handles public relations for other art galleries. Every now and then, together with a collaborator, she organizes private art sales to exhibit her works.
Interview 28 – LWS 17.02.2025	33 years old, originally from Lombardia (Milan). After finishing high school, she continued her university studies in Munich, where she graduated in Translation and Interpreting and specialized in Conference Interpreting. After 7 years in Munich, in 2018 she moved to Berlin to start her own business and work as a freelance translator and conference interpreter. She also teaches at a language school that offers courses in German and Italian. After almost 15 years in Germany, she decided to obtain German citizenship both to feel more integrated and to be able to vote, as well as for work-related reasons.
Interview 29 – VMS 21.02.2025	39 years old, originally from Piemonte (Turin), but with Apulian roots. In Italy, he was part of a national association that offered him training and refresher courses to become a sports educator. Before leaving the association to move to Berlin, he worked on projects in kindergartens, elementary and high schools, and with the elderly and disabled. In Germany, his educator qualification was not recognized and he had to attend a vocational training school for three years in order to continue his profession, which he now carries out in a multicultural private kindergarten.
Interview 30 – GMM 27.02.2025	43 years old, originally from Emilia Romagna (Parma). He works in contemporary art, mostly with photography, dealing with both technical-productive aspects and with promotion and sales to collectors. He moved to Berlin in 2016, attracted by the international character of the city and the vibrant art scene.

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Acknowledgments

I would like to start by expressing my deep gratitude to all the people who, in different ways, accompanied and supported me along the path that led to the accomplishment of this research, which is so meaningful to me.

A special thanks goes to ACHII, A Colorni-Hirschman International Institute: without their support, this project would never have seen the light. It was thanks to Professor Saggiomo, my lecturer in the International Development Cooperation course at the University "L'Orientale" of Naples, that I discovered the Institute and the "German-Italian" Scholarship. This scholarship allowed me to study the phenomenon of the Italian presence in Germany in depth, with a special focus on Berlin, analysing its social, cultural, and economic implications. Besides my academic interest in languages and cultures, I believe that my family history also motivated me to apply: just while I was looking for a thesis topic, the memory of my grandparents' migration to Germany in the 1970s resurfaced. Following the Professor's suggestion, I applied and was selected as the scholarship recipient.

I would like to sincerely thank the Institute, in particular the president Prof. Luca Meldolesi, the vice-president Prof. Nicoletta Stame, Dr. Tommaso Di Nardo, and Prof. Marianne Egger de Campo (HWR Berlin), for giving me the opportunity to delve directly into the topic of Italian migration while in Berlin.

Thanks to the Institute's generosity, I was able to spend six months in Berlin, devoting myself intensively to research at the *Staatsbibliothek* and actively participating in the life of the Italian community. During this period, I was fortunate to meet and interview thirty fellow Italians, whose openness and willingness greatly enriched my work. Moreover, my stay in Berlin gave me the joy of embracing my grandparents and family again, whom I only rarely see.

I am grateful to all the people who helped me during my stay in Berlin: each interviewee contributed not only by sharing their story, but also by offering me support and companionship in the most difficult moments.

A special thanks goes to Prof. Marianne Egger de Campo, who enthusiastically introduced me to the particularities of Germany and gave me valuable advices at the beginning of this experience. To Dr. Tommaso Di Nardo, I am grateful for his constant attention and the suggestions he offered throughout the research process. Sincere thanks also to Prof. Nicoletta Stame for her input during our virtual meetings, the valuable discussion we had in Rome that gave me new insights and

motivation, and for her constant presence especially in the final stages, which was crucial to completing the work. Thank you.

My thanks go to Prof. Saggiomo for the support she never failed to give me, especially during the most difficult moments: her closeness was fundamental both professionally and personally.

A special thought goes to my maternal family and my parents, who since I was a child gave me the chance to live between two worlds, two languages, and two cultures. Without you, I would never have embarked on this research, nor would I be the person I am today. I have cherished everything I learned from our two realities, the similarities and the differences, which I hope to one day pass on. Distance has often been an obstacle, but it has never weakened our bond: every time we see each other again is an immense joy. To my brother Davide, I want to say how proud I am of you and what you have accomplished in recent years. The courage you showed in leaving for Germany is uncommon. I am happy for you and your successes, and I am sure that, despite the challenges, you will achieve all your goals. I wish you the very best, always.

In conclusion, I would like to once again express my gratitude to everyone who, each in their own way, contributed to the fulfilment of this research, which has enriched me deeply and allowed me to rediscover my family roots as well.