

# ***Much Ado About Nothing: the Issue of Private Care Policies in Italy and the Invisibility of Illegal Migrants***

## **Irregular migration: theoretical perspectives and current findings**

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**(draft, please do not quote)**

### **1. Foreword: The “badanti” on the limelight**

The gap between the expanding demand of care services and the supply offered by public facilities is at present responded in Italy by low-cost private services performed mainly by immigrant women from the Third World. And old world -“badante”- have been re-used to name those who “care” (from Italian verb “badare”, to take care of) someone on a long term basis in the Italian households and families<sup>1</sup>. The “badanti” are the centre of what Castegnaro called “the hidden revolution in caring elderly people” (2002). Ignored for years, the issue of how to better insert such private caring work into the Italian public welfare system is at last the object of careful attention by politicians, professionals, media, trade unions, for and non profit organizations at large. Their role in Italian local welfare by assisting Italian families is permanently reminded by the press<sup>2</sup>. Rosy Bindi, the Italian Ministry for the Family, declared just some weeks ago that the help of the family assistants (the “badanti”) is a private answer that deserves to be collectively supported<sup>3</sup> and also that this “homemade welfare” should be legitimately considered part of the public service network because it copes with personal needs, not private needs<sup>4</sup>. Though late, such statement shows that the Italian Government has finally acknowledged the important social role played by immigrant women and the strain supported by families to pay and organize it. Meanwhile, many local administrations are already trying to work out modest regulatory answers to this “hidden welfare” (Gori 2002), performed by the “badanti” and supported by private resources. In the Italian northern/central regions there is a kind of “badante’s drunkenness” (Costa 2004): almost all social districts<sup>5</sup> have taken some kind of action in favour of the private care market, either addressed to the “badanti” or to the

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<sup>1</sup> The first mention to the “badanti” as “assistants to members of a family affected by pathologies and/or by handicaps able to reduce their self sufficiency is contained in art. 33 of Act n° 189/2002, the so called “Bossi-Fini act” on immigration (Barbera, Alessi, Bertocchi 2007).

<sup>2</sup> On 28<sup>th</sup> June 2007 Google yielded 48100 references in Italian when asked about “welfare locale +badanti”.

<sup>3</sup> On site [www.qualificare.info](http://www.qualificare.info) see the interview to Rosy Bindi under the title: Care and family policy, n° 8, February 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Press agency “Emigrazione notizie”, 22nd 2007.

<sup>5</sup> The social districts are the regrouping of single municipalities created under the Act n°328/2000, reforming the Italian assistance system. They are responsible for social planning and in some cases, for the organization of services.

families, often supported by the third sector. A quick look to internet sites of the most important Italian towns shows the extent of this move. In the South there are initiatives in progress but not so widespread as in the Centre/North.

The purpose of this paper is to explain and to critically discuss what the local level is doing to somehow regulate the private care market in Italy<sup>6</sup>. The academic and policy makers vast literature on the issue “badanti” is here used even if not always recognizable and fully cited because the accent is placed on policy issues emerging from this attempts of regulation and not on the myriad of implications and questions that the specificity of Italian private market poses. The present analysis is based on different research projects performed by me and by the staff at the Laboratory for Social Policies of the Politecnico of Milan since 2005 and on the field work performed by the students of the course on “Local Welfare Policies” held in 2006 and 2007 by me under the degree of Urban Planning of the same University<sup>7</sup>. To limit the extent of this paper, no specific local data are given here but they are available to interested parties<sup>8</sup>.

In this paper I explain the care needs status in Italy and contextualize the phenomenon of the “badanti” in the welfare system. After that, the features of the private care market in Italy and the instruments of local policies addressed to it are described. The paper ends with the account of the regulatory limits, given the legal and substantial impossibility to deal with the market of the undocumented “badanti” and the families which employ them. What I argue is that their “invisibility” dims the impact and the added value of the public action.

## **2. Care needs in the Italian welfare: familism, residualism and localism**

The issue of the “badanti” -or “family assistants”, as they start to be called- has entered the Italian public debate very slowly, along with the growing need of care connected with the aging of the population and the social risks involved. In the “re-calibrations” (Ferrera 2006) of the Italian social protection system, long term care needs continue to be systematically ignored as the focus has been concentrated on social security (pensions) and public health<sup>9</sup>. Policies related with care have constantly left care burden to the families in all its life cycle, thereby converting them in “implicit partners” of public policies. Be clear that though different from country to country and from one welfare system to another (Esping-Andersen 1999), problems of care in Europe are a “family problem”, as shown by many researches and studies (Oesterle 2001, Eurofamcare Consortium 2006). What is peculiar to Italy is the assumption that families “are always there”, that they can redistribute any kind of resources, care included (Saraceno 2002)<sup>10</sup>.

The gap between the scientific debate about how to face the long term care needs (accompanied by the risk of turning fragile the family support network<sup>11</sup>) and the set of actual policies put in force is evident. Care policies, in fact, cannot rely on constitutional

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<sup>6</sup> By regulation is here intended, according to Mitnick’s definition, the guiding, by public administrative policing, of a private activity according to a rule set in the public interest (1980).

<sup>7</sup> Official statistics about social activities of Italian local governments do not take into account the private market of caring, they just mention the sums paid in care allowances and vouchers, which makes an overall picture very difficult to draw.

<sup>8</sup> The local cases studied (town halls and provinces) are about 40. Contact [giuliana.costa@polimi.it](mailto:giuliana.costa@polimi.it) for further information.

<sup>9</sup> Consider how difficult is the setting agenda for the creation of a fund for long term care in Italy (Bosi, Guerra, Silvestri 2005; Ranci and Pavolini 2007).

<sup>10</sup> See how heavier are, as compared to other countries (Millar e Warman 1996), the responsibilities towards relatives stated in the Civil Italian Code (art. 433, alimonies and maintenance of relatives in need of assistance).

<sup>11</sup> There is already plenty of evidence that the Italian model of caring is fading and that it cannot be taken for granted that the families may face caring on their own (Cioni 1999, Sabbadini 2002, Istat 2001).

rights or on other legal force: care is a social “unfinished” right (Leira 1999), still entrapped in material and economic dilemmas. Care rights are ineligible; in a context of strong non regulated municipalism (Saraceno 2005), this means great dispersion of locally designed programs and lack of connection between policies. The lack of resources dedicated to frail persons, as well as the low coverage of home services can complete the panorama<sup>12</sup>. Instead of reviewing on the Italian traditional familistic care model, the gap between the existing public support systems and the perspective negative developments in the informal support schemes has promoted a debate about “new” instruments, such as care allowances and vouchers (seen as ways to support caregivers, to ensure freedom of choice to the elderly and to their family, as well as to enlarge the spectrum of services without major increase of public costs).

### 3. The presence of “badanti” in the Italian society

The rise of a private market of care is quite recent and certainly one of the most important changes in coping long term needs in Italy. The hiring of domestic aid in regime of co-residence is today an alternative to care supported only by relatives. The growth of this market is due to different factors: the availability of immigrated female labour<sup>13</sup>, the severe eligibility criteria to access for public social service, the traditional preference for caring at home and the inexistence of provision for long term care by the official networks, the increase of the female employment rate and finally, to higher income available to families in general and also to elderly people with higher pension schemes (Da Roit 2007, Rossi 2006, Spanò 2006).

The “badanti” have been not only less costly than other caregiving schemes<sup>14</sup>; they also showed more flexibility answering to the need of long term care, most of the time assisting people at home. The use of a “badante” has become in Italy a common practice, even by non affluent families. Offer has raised demand (Colombo 2005), the availability of labour has raised expectation that such solution is reliable and “ready to go”.

The “badanti” are mainly employed to care elderly people, according to a survey carried out by Iref on behalf of the ACLI<sup>15</sup> (2007): 29.5% of them take care of a lonely old person, 19.5% look after a couple of them, 7.5% work in a household where an old person live. The duties are heavy: 78.7% of those who work for a lonely old person perform several kind of activities (personal care, home care, bureaucratic duties, etc.). Many “badanti” live with their employers and person cared of<sup>16</sup>. Their weekly working time is much longer than the one of those who do not live with her or his employer (59 hours against 39).

According to IRS’s estimations 700,000 family assistants were employed in Italy in 2006, 620,000 of them foreigners. They cover much more care needs than formal home services, be they social services or health services. Consider that in Lombardy, northern

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<sup>12</sup> Only 11% of the elderly non self-sufficient population, those who cannot perform at least one activity of daily living, are protected by services of home assistance (Da Roit 2006 and 2007b).

<sup>13</sup> Most of the “badanti” actually working in Italy come from East Europe. They are middle aged women, highly educated and ready to live with the cared for in order to save money to return to their country (target saving migrants).

<sup>14</sup> The cost of a “badante” varies between 700 and 1200 euros per month, according to the most recent surveys (Costa 2007, Spanò 2006). The new national contract for domestic workers and family assistants (the “badanti”) means an 30% increase of such cost if the “badante” lives with the employer, which means that it is a less competitive solution as compared to other caregiving alternatives. See [www.qualificare.info](http://www.qualificare.info) for more details.

<sup>15</sup> Catholic Italian workers association, widespread on the Italian territory.

<sup>16</sup> This arrangements is still quite widespread.

Italian region rich of “badanti” and families that employ them, by end of 2006 between 44% and 74% of frail elderly people enjoyed a paid assistance. But the “badanti” are often complementary to public services, which are not organized to give care neither on a 24 hour nor in the long term basis. A survey carried out in Lombardy throughout public services users, showed that 56% of them also had private assistance (Costa 2007a). This shows how the “badanti” (the “women” as popularly called by the interviewed) are popular in Italy today.

#### 4. The private care market, a puzzle for the local welfare

The governance of the private care market, today focused by local authorities, is a real puzzle for the policy makers for many reasons:

- 1) because it lies at a scarcely integrated crossway of several policies (social, health, immigration, work, housing, taxes, family), activated at different levels (local, regional, national and supra national). To local authorities is left the burden of settling the resulting conflicts, with limited jurisdiction, tools and money<sup>17</sup>;
- 2) because it involves a great number of people (700,000 “badanti” and at least 700,00 families);
- 3) because it intercepts different logics and requires to settle clashes between not easily compatible interests: cost and efficiency, quality and justice, equity and privacy and so on;
- 4) because the caregiving market is very fragmented: offer and demand are represented by non organized individuals, for whom the object of the contract is not defined or is difficult to define (the work of the “badanti” is an experience good that involves duties that are peculiar, changes along the time and are not standardized), where the relationship is one-to-one;
- 5) because it meets frail actors: those that require help and assistance, a “badante”, often a migrant with difficult economic and personal situations of her own, and families, often in balance between different roles and requirements (Costa 2007c);
- 6) because transactions in this market are often irregular: on one side “badanti” are frequently undocumented and illegally staying in Italy<sup>18</sup>, on the other quite seldom the labour law is correctly applied. The Iref-Acli research (2007) shows that the 55% of the documented assistants claim irregularity in the payment of social charges (61.5% of these declare having agreed the issue with the employer, 24.1% at request of the employer and 14.4% at request of the assistant). The reasons of such irregularity are many, mainly of them economic (Costa 2001)<sup>19</sup>.

Most Italian policy makers and policy analysts, have concentrated their attention only on the economic aspects of the “badanti” (especially at regional level), assuming that their existence could be a “manna” for welfare provision. However, the list above shows that a larger look is demanded by the complexity of the problems involved. The newcomers, the “badanti”, not only bring a relief to public expenditure; they also introduce changes in the care market at large and in the logics of public institutions. Despite that, till now, their presence has not yet been able to cause a proper innovation in the local welfare systems. It is not surprising then that the lights are cast on the “badanti” just when strong signals of a decreasing availability of them are at sight: the above mentioned survey (Iref-

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<sup>17</sup> The weakness of the local level did not vary after the Act 328/2000 reforming the assistance system.

<sup>18</sup> See later in the text.

<sup>19</sup> This issue would require a wider discussion incompatible with the aim of this paper. See related literature (Chiuri, Coniglio, Ferro 2007; Ranci 2001; Gori 2002).

Acli 2007) shows that only a quarter of the foreign “badanti” intend to stay in Italy while the rest is determined to return to their country or to move elsewhere. Another indicator of this tendency is the decreasing availability to cohabit with their employer, highlighted by the same survey as well as by other researches (Irs 2006), and by the information collected in most of the analyzed “badanti’s” registers.

In other words, the “badanti”, today abundant and “available”, may not be such in the near future, either because of their “institutionalization” or because of radical changes in their way of life. The risk is today to give for granted what it is not such (Costa 2004) or to forget that countries of the former soviet block, such as Ucraina and Moldova, may not be in the future source of cheap labour (Mazzacurati 2005), useful to fill the gap of the Italian welfare.

## 5. The (many) demands of regulation and the tools so far created

The programs regulating the private care market, both regional<sup>20</sup> and sub-regional, rise many sorts of expectations. They can be summarized as follows:

- to identify and rationalize the meeting point between offer and demand by helping families to find and hire reliable and competent personnel;
- to protect families, people requesting assistance and “badanti”;
- to assist families and “badanti” in complying the necessary bureaucratic steps;
- to qualify caregiving work in order to better ensure its social and economic acknowledgment;
- to avoid any social dumping and to ensure the soundness of the existing social protection schemes;
- to regularize working relations and to avoid collusion in the arrangements;
- to make caregiving work attractive;
- to increase the covering rate of public and private services and to incorporate the private services into the public network;
- to pool public and private funds.

The current attempts to cope with these demands, both on the families side and on the “badanti”’s one, vary according to the particular public program they are inserted in but they share the following policy instruments:

- the creation of special “counters” where families can find the right “badante”, sometimes supported by the employment agencies;
- the creation of a public register of “badanti” with certified professional or/and personal standard as assistants;•the improving of service standards through training courses;
- the provision of care allowances;
- the leading of promotional campaigns in favour of regular employment;
- the promotion of networks among the different actors of the care market.

Let us a quick look on these points (for further details see the abundant literature on this matter<sup>21</sup>). The **counters** supposed to favour the encounter between offer and demand,

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<sup>20</sup> For details about regional actions see Pavolini (2006).

<sup>21</sup> Such as i.e. the special issue of *Prospettive Sociali e Sanitarie* dedicated to the private care market in 2007 and also the monographic issue by Polis (2004) about the history of domestic work in Italy.

until some years ago in the hands of trade unions and catholic organizations<sup>22</sup>, are now becoming part of the local authority set of tools, often the result of local trials and later consolidated thanks to institutional economic aid. They are directed to families in search of family assistance and to “badanti” in search of employment, by trying to capitalize the strategy of families when looking for help, which are based on personal relationships. The counters differ according to the number of people working in it, to their position within the local service network, and to the kind of service offered. There are counters open twice a week for some hours and counters fulltime open every day; some have fulltime staff, others share its staff with other bureaus. Most of the local counters are lodged at the social services department, seldom at the employment policies one. The counters also differ in the services they supply, going from just collecting data and investigating the best way to match both offer and demand in order to supply contractual assistance, up to monitoring the introduction of the assistant in the household and the subsequent state of relationships

The **registers** are a certified list of “badanti” which professional background and qualification have been recognized by the public authority. In lack of national standards for this profession, local governments try, by this means, to assess and ensure job’s quality. Application is strictly personal. The certificate consists of a test to assess experience and skill of the candidate. The evaluation criteria are set by a special technical committee made by representatives of local civil servants, private and institutional social operators and trade unions. Sometimes the inscription in the register is attached to the participation to a training course for “badanti”, but more often the registers also accept candidates ready to undergo a test of professional skills. The registers are generally open to the “badanti” already hired. Such registers may be consulted by families in search of assistance. Most of the times it is the civil servant affected to the counter who recommends the most suitable candidate after assessing the family conditions and requests. Applications to and consulting the registers are free of charge.

**Training courses** are among the first initiatives in favour of the “badanti” organized by town councils. Such courses, at the beginning limited to rather basic subjects such as Italian language and Italian cooking, include now medical and social knowledge (for instance to care patients affected by dementia and similar). They differ in the general organization, in the amount of total hours of lesson, in contents and in the degree to which they can open to the possibility to obtain training credits for other professions. They are always free of charge. Many courses have been held in this last two years. Again, each territory do-by-it self because there is no shared standards and common definitions at national level of what is a “badante”. Some regions (like Tuscany, Campania, Emilia-Romagna and Liguria) have precisely defined the contents and the all training pattern for the “badanti”; elsewhere the provinces had been more active in this sense (for example, the Province of Milan or the Province of Trento (Rusmini 2007)). One of the main “containers” of training courses and other attempts to structure the private care market took place had been the European Program EQUAL II, a good opportunity to innovate in this field thanks to its generous funds but risky in terms of further institutionalization of the initiatives and experimented projects<sup>2324</sup>.

The **care allowances** and vouchers have been introduced in Italy in the nineties, along with the arising of a “domicile culture” in public services and with the clenching of

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<sup>22</sup> For further information about catholic organizations in this particular sector of Italian work market see Andall (2004) and Zanetti Polzi’s analysis on Caritas’ role (2004).

<sup>23</sup> See at [www.qualificare.info](http://www.qualificare.info) news about EQUAL II projects in Italy which have embodied, among their programs, specific actions for “badanti”, families likely to hire “badanti” and public and private agencies.

<sup>24</sup> The training courses for “badanti” are under suspicion of favouring a high risk of occupational segregation and of arising expectations of an impossible quick social upgrading. The issue is more delicate than it looks at first sight.

public budgets (Ranci 2001)<sup>25</sup>. Shear experiments at first, such instruments has taken the place of previous kinds of economic help, this time directly in favour of family members in charge of caregiving or to paid personnel, mostly “badanti”. They are therefore new forms of social and health support as they take the place of direct services according to a guideline already popular in the Italian administration to ensure a certain freedom of choice by citizens about how to give an answer to their own need. On this subjects too the literature is abundant (see Pasquinelli 2007b, Cerea 2007, Ranci 2001). Also in this case local administrations have -as usual- followed their own policies in the assistance field. Some of them have privileged the support to families assuming that they are the responsible of care, some others decided, on the contrary, to support only the use of private paid care, including this condition in eligibility criteria. While the care allowances (called everywhere “buono” or “assegno”) do not bind the receiver to any special use, the vouchers are strictly to pay services to be hired from credited public or private agents. Checks are much more widespread than vouchers. Recently some Regions have activated and funded them (i.e. Emilia Romagna and Veneto) in order to keep the elderly at home as long as possible so as to delay their admission to long term care residences (Da Roit 2007a). Local authorities have mostly followed the same line, setting modest means tested care allowances (Costa 2007b). Their goal is to help with money those who need permanent care (the elderly or his family with modest income whose application has passed a strict selection) and at the same time regularize the “badanti”’s private care work. The purpose of such line of action, by helping to pay a “badante”, is to encourage families to hire her with a regular work contract, more costly than informal arrangements because of social charges included in it.

As have been stated at the beginning of this article, “badanti”’s policies are fashionable in Italy. Many local authorities are currently engaged to design suitable combinations of the described instruments but most of them are just experimenting one or two of them, not always connected. The best systems are studied and copied by other administrations. After this brief description of what is in progress, I will present and discuss some of it’s critical aspects, presenting the opportunities arising from the end of public indifference towards the private care market.

## **6. The “invisibility”<sup>26</sup> of undocumented/ illegal “badanti” as a kind of “institutional cynicism” of the policies**

The previous look to what local, provincial and regional authorities are dealing with the private care market shows how the issue is in the agenda. Even if it’s not possible to define the total expenditure for the regulation of this market in Italy, the case- studies here discussed shows that sums are relatively modest in absolute value, but relevant in relative terms, as compared to the budget supporting the whole of social services. However, a spontaneous question arises to all of them doing research on this issues: how is it possible that despite the great efforts by administrations a widespread sensation of un-protection and loneliness is detectable (Costa 2007a) among families affected by severe care problems, and why the amount of people intercepted by public regulation is so scarce? (about 5% of all those that are hiring “badanti”, as estimated).The possible answers to this questions are many but here just one will be deeply analyzed. It is my opinion that the

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<sup>25</sup> The above mentioned 328/2000 Act defines care allowances as “a form of support to families duties” (art.16). Vouchers are defined as “titles to buy social services” (art.17).

<sup>26</sup> In the Italian literature the idea of “invisibility” has been for long associated to home work performed by immigrant women. Vicarelli (1994) speaks of “invisible hands”, Ambrosini (2006 and 2007) of “invisible welfare”, an EQUAL II project in Abruzzo, of “invisible professions”, and Gori (2002) of “hidden welfare”.

most important limits to the policies enforced in this particular field of local welfare are due to the substantial “invisibility” of the undocumented migrants “badanti” and of the families that employ them, even if such policies may be considered still too young and therefore not yet sufficiently tested. Regulations only deal with Italian or foreign documented “badanti” while the undocumented are ignored as they are not eligible for any kind of social public activity. According to IRS (2006) 40 % of the assistants working in Italian households are in this situation, which means that almost a half of the market is out of law<sup>27</sup>. This is a clear form of “institutional cynicism” meant to remove the problem. Only a portion of the market is “treated” while the other is therefore delegated to non profit associations, mostly catholic, engaged in providing services to immigrants, without a public direction.

Such repression of the problem is caused by the immigration present legislation (Ambrosini 2006, Mazzacurati 2007) which does not permit a hiring of a foreigner with regular contract unless he or she is already officially resident in the country. Once the person is in Italy as a tourist or illegally, therefore lacking any entry document, he or she must return to his/her country and await a call from his employer, in order to stay in Italy and apply for a permanent residence and work permit. Such possibility have to be fitted in the formal immigration fluxes, defined every year (but on a three based years mechanism) at national level by a decree with the help of local institutions, according to the work market needs. The only way to have a regular residence permit is therefore rather complicated and it is far from ensuring success. Data of recent years show the a high number of application had no answer: the 2002 and 2003 decrees about inbound fluxes made no provision for assistants and at the same time set a minimum yearly income by the employer ready to hire a “badante” of 47,000 euros. The 2005 decree, though including quotas for domestic and health workers has ignored two thirds of applications (Mazzacurati 2007). The 2006 decree set a number of 45,000 entries for domestic labour, out of a total of 78,500 permanent entries for dependent labour; a high number of such labour comes now from new countries belonging the European Community, such as Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, Slovenia thanks to ad additional quota of 170,000 entries (Barbera, Alessi, Bertocchi 2007).

The legal way is little followed since a long period of absence is required by the assistant, which is seldom compatible with the caregiving requirements (the most common comment by relatives is: “I found now my badante and I shall not let her go”). Furthermore, The present immigration law (the so called “Bossi-Fini” law) has abolished a fundamental actor in the care scenario, the sponsor. It was possible then to an organization or to a single person to personally answer for a foreigner entry, out of the quotas set by the yearly decrees. The requirements to hold a work contract before setting foot on the country strongly limits the possibilities to hire regularly a person that needs to be know and tested before. Families and “badanti” needs previous acquaintance before setting the terms of the contract (Barbera, Alessi, Bertocchi 2007; Mesini 2006).

The only escape way so far taken till now by Italian families was to await an immigration amnesty law<sup>28</sup> meant to regularize the situation of a great number of immigrants, thereby supporting a sort of “abuse by necessity” (Ambrosini 2007) and inspiring the families to break the law. Figures are impressive: according to the above mentioned Iref-Acli survey on 1000 family assistants, one out of four works illegally in Italy. This percentage go up to 41% of those who entered the country after the last amnesty in 2002, an opportunity to regularize the position of 190,000 domestic workers and 140,000 “badanti”, already employed by Italian families. According to ISMU (Blangiardo 2007), in

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<sup>27</sup> According to the Italian law to be undocumented is not an offence. It is to disobey an order of expulsion.

<sup>28</sup> Since 1986, five amnesty laws have been approved (1986, 1990, 1995, 1998 e 2002).



Lombardy the rate of undocumented “badanti” doubles the rate of undocumented labour in general, an evidence of how the private care market “suffers” more than others the consequences of the present immigration law. It is widespread opinion that this law encourages illegality and a “bite and run” immigration (Chiuri, Coniglio, Ferri 2007; Mazzacurati 2007; Pasquinelli 2007).

All the regulatory instruments analyzed before do not take into account undocumented people, leaving therefore aside this important share of the private Italian care market<sup>29</sup>. They are grasped in a form of “new localism” (Lovering, cited in Le Galès 2002), that is the trend to reduce problems at the scale which they can be treated, avoiding important questions that can not be answered by policies or that are at a different level of action. The existing bonds deriving from other policy fields (in this case migration policies) are not discussed and turned into a public and shared problem by local social policy makers and executives (Costa 2006). In this behaviour lies the core of what I called “institutional cynicism”.

Important projects meant to favour a better social reproduction are thereby born, but none of them deals with the most vulnerable sector of the market, the undocumented “badanti” and the families ready to hire them to obtain a sort of care that the legal welfare system does not ensure. In my research activity, I had the opportunity to interview many people involved in designing regulation instruments at local level and to study the drafts of the projects than actuated. In none of them there is a clear discussion about the situation of the undocumented “badanti” though acknowledging their existence. Their standard answer sounds as follows: “we cannot support illegality, we are between the devil and the dead blue sea”.

A question arises: do administrations show tolerance for the informal caregiving market because the damage caused to public finance by the loss of social charges and taxes is balanced with the acknowledgment that such market is after all a suitable solution to one of the most delicate social problem? Perhaps closing of an eye by administrations means solving problems otherwise driving to a deadlock, even if it means giving up to governing the whole system of private care. But some consequences of this non-decision are not so evident and not turned into a problem: think at the impact illegality means to immigrants and to the possibility of getting back the best of them in terms of employment. The costs of illegality for both parties are badly paid jobs, skill waste effects, high risk of over exploitation, low consumption standards, no incentives for training courses, and the promotion of black or grey labour markets (Chiuri, Coniglio e Ferri 2007).

The lack of public action towards undocumented “badanti” goes along with the difficulty to intercept Italian middle class care arrangements, traditionally non users of social services. It is an important obstacle in a welfare system –such the Italian one– addressing just the needs of the most deprived people in society (Costa 2007b). In this context, is very uneventful that a medium class person asks help to social services staff because it is seen as a resource accessible only by poor and excluded people, not by “normal people with normal care needs”, as often declared. Even most of the instruments are promotional in their approach and structure, they don’t capture the attentions of those who don’t use other social services. In all the cases studies the number of families that contacted the registers or the counters, is much less than the number of persons trying to be recognized as a “badante”. Moreover, most of families can’t access other social services because they are strongly means tested (vouchers and care allowances for instance). This limitation generates great disappointments in the population as pointed out by the most recent research (Ranci 2001, Cerea 2007).

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<sup>29</sup> There are some exceptions as the project “Occupazione e servizi alla persona” of Veneto Region, see Castegnaro 2006.

## 7. Much Ado About Something....

Italian local authorities are moving away from their decennial stagnation by mobilizing a suitable set of tools to govern the private care market. This article attempted to describe them (counters, registers, training courses and financial help to families), trying, at the same time, to highlight their greatest limit, the leaving aside of the most vulnerable part of the market, composed the undocumented “badanti” and the families that hire them. In doing that I did not mean to deny the exploratory aspects of these practices (Lanzara 1993), but to point out how they are not properly tackling its externalities and its “grossness” (Donolo 2006). In an era of “permanent austerity” (Pierson 2001), it’s necessary that all projects be “sense driven” at the beginning. I think that designing the regulative frame of the private care market can be an excellent occasion to reform the existing service network, enlarging the available resources for long term care (be they public or private), increasing the needs coverage, and growing public capabilities. To do so, it is necessary that public actors start to influence the “informal adjustments practiced by Italian families” (Ambrosini 2006) and challenge the national level decisions about migration policies, in order to act guided by sustainability criteria, with a long term perspective (Donolo 2006).

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