

# Practicing Urban Citizenship in Contemporary Italy: Policies, Practices, and Spaces for Same-Sex Parent Families<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

Issues relating to citizenship and equality among citizens have been and continue to be of great sociological as well as political interest, since territorial contexts in which not all people are equal holders of rights and duties remain. Indeed, members of some social categories, while fulfilling the required duties related to participation in public life, do not enjoy the same rights as other citizens. Consequently, at the national level their citizenship can be considered partial since they experience a series of limitations in the public sphere.

A focus on gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals can make these considerations more concrete. The material content of the rights and protections that they enjoy today varies significantly around the world (e.g., Williams Institute, 2021), despite the fact that in the third millennium the global discourse on equality among people is based on overcoming stigma, intolerance, and heterosexism. In other words, the normalization of sexual differences has become one of the main ways to defend equality among all citizens of the world, at least in principle (e.g., UN, 2016).

This paper focuses in particular on same-sex parent families living in contemporary Italy. They represent a clear example of individuals who enjoy a partial form of national citizenship. In fact, despite their growing public visibility, they are not fully protected by the state (e.g., Baia-monte & Bastianoni, 2015; Gusmeroli & Trappolin, 2020; Monaco & Nothdurfter, 2022).

More specifically, in Italy, two same-sex partners cannot marry. Since 2016 they have been able to enter into a civil union (L. 76/2016). Therefore, not only are same-sex couples legally recognized through an *ad hoc* legal institution different from marriage, but their family rights are not guaranteed. In fact, if they become parents by resorting to medically assisted reproduction, the Italian state only recognizes the parental authority of the person who has a biological link with the child. To obtain parental authority, the “social parent” must address the juvenile court and proceed with a request for a so-called “adoption in special cases” (art. 44, L. 184/1983). This constitutes a special institution whereby a person who is not biologically related to their partner’s biological or adoptive children can adopt these children without terminating the first legal parent’s rights. This often happens in single-parent families or as a result of divorce, separation, or the death of one biological parent. After the “Civil Partnership Act” entered into force, the Court of Cassation (Italy’s Supreme Court) also ruled in favor of stepchild adoption for same-sex couples (verdict n. 12962 of 06/22/2016), ruling that such an adoption is beneficial to children with respect to their rights and emotional stability. However, it cannot be considered a full adoption since, although it recognizes the bond between children and their non-biological parents, it does not legally legitimize the relationship between children and their social parent’s family. In addition, the recognition of relational-affective ties cannot be taken for granted. In fact, it depends on the discretion of the judges and social services, which are called to assess on a case-by-case basis whether stepchild adoption is in the interest of the child: «The rationale is, as in the ordinary adoption, to protect the paramount best interest of the child to grow up within a family, thus ensuring her/him a healthy development and a plain equilibrium» (Pera, 2019, p. 4).

According to Butler (2004), the differentiation of parenting and kinship rights highlights the normalizing power exercised by the state, which creates hierarchies among relationships. In particular, the subordinate status given to same-sex relationships in many countries around the

1 Salvatore Monaco, Libera Università di Bolzano, salvatore.monaco@unibz.it. ORCID: 0000-0002-4218-6267

2 Received: 30/11/2021. Revised: 07/08/2022. Accepted: 20/09/2022.

Funding This article’s data originates from the ‘Constructions of Parenting on Insecure Grounds’ (CoPinG) project, funded by the Italian Ministry of University and Research (Grant number: 2017ZKSE5N).

world has been interpreted as evidence that the monogamic dyadic heterosexual family form is still seen as a point of reference for defining the standards and “normality” that govern the boundaries of belonging and exclusion (Richardson & Monro, 2012).

Depending on the level of pervasion of heterosexism in society, lesbian, gay, and bisexual people may see their right to live their intimate and private lives freely and without constraint compromised (Olesky, 2009; Plummer, 2005; Richardson, 2004). For example, they could question their willingness to openly engage in same-sex relationships, start a family, or pursue parenting (Gato *et al.*, 2017; Goldberg, 2010; Mezey, 2008; Monaco, 2022; Nothdurfter *et al.*, 2022).

Against this backdrop, it is safe to argue that in Italy the concept of egalitarian citizenship still appears highly sexualized, since it associates the granting of certain family rights with people’s sexual identity (e.g., Duggan, 2002; Plummer, 2003; Richardson, 2017). The difficulties of the inclusion of same-sex parents in the Italian public space can be considered evident symptoms of an opposition to non-mainstream family models, centered on a supposed ontological vision of a natural family, based on marriage between a man and a woman.

Similarly, also in the sociological field, the natural interpretation of the family has been repeatedly questioned (e.g., Cohen, 2018; Monaco & Nothdurfter, 2021; Naldini *et al.*, 2018; Saraceno, 2016), since dogmatic constructions that intend to crystallize the family are denied by the historical-social evolution that this institute has experienced and that continues in different cultures. In other words, the definition of the family as a natural entity, which is also contained in the Italian Constitution, does not promote a unique and immutable family model, but rather aims at underlining the social character of this institution that is constantly evolving, in line with the social and cultural transformations occurring in society.

Starting from these premises, this paper proposes to critically analyze the citizenship of same-sex parents and their families living in Italy, not from a legal perspective, but in terms of policies and practices that take shape in the urban space. Based on the results of empirical research and adopting a micro-sociological perspective, the work aims to identify four models of local citizenship distinguished by their peculiar participatory practices, constructions of a sense of belonging, and levels of access to rights and responsibilities that help in understanding the new so-called “social morphology of the city” (Martinotti, 1993).

The paper is structured as follows: The first part presents a reconstruction of the concept of citizenship in general; subsequently, the paper analyzes the active role of political actors in Italian cities and their ability to legitimize new models of urban citizenship. The work then presents an empirical project focused on parents in same-sex families; on the basis of the data collected, the analysis presents four models of urban citizenship experienced by these Italian rainbow families. The text concludes with some critical considerations and future recommendations.

## 1. Urban Citizenship

The concept of citizenship is widely used in the various disciplines that study society. From a regulatory point of view, citizenship is traditionally defined as the legal and social condition of the people belonging to a state, from which the recognition of rights and duties derives (e.g., Carens, 2000; Haeter, 2004; Pomarici, 2007).

In sociology, the concept of citizenship has a broader significance. In the classical tradition, authors such as Weber, Parsons, and Durkheim pointed out that “full citizenship” occurs when people are recognized as members of the collectivity to which they belong, enjoying a series of individual guarantees that qualify them as members of the communities in which they live.

The current sociological reflection on citizenship started after the Second World War with Marshall’s (1950) studies dedicated to class inequality and social integration. Marshall underlined that citizenship can be defined as a series of guarantees and rights (political, civil, and social) granted to people by the state in exchange for their compliance with national laws and social conventions.

The birth and expansion of welfare systems consolidated the link between citizens and states, expanding both the range of rights that people could enjoy and their duties.

Increasing globalization, migratory flows, and the pluralization of individual life paths have redefined the spaces, places, and borders of citizenship.

In the scientific field, this change has had at least two distinct interpretations. On the one hand, several authors (e.g., Hutchings & Dannreuter, 1999; Kymlicka & Norman, 2000; Linklater, 1998) have suggested detaching the concept of citizenship from belonging to a specific territory, proposing a more abstract idea of citizenship based on globally shared principles.

On the other hand, some scholars (e.g., Giband & Siino, 2013; Holston, 1999; Isin, 2000; Kazepov, 2010; Lister, 2003; Özdemir & Tasan-Kok, 2019) have highlighted that weakening the bonds of national affiliations has made local contexts more autonomous and more capable of opening advocacy and protective paths for their citizens, also thanks to the implementation of unprecedented daily practices taking place in the private sphere. In other words, this perspective has begun to emphasize the political role of private life in building models of citizenship and citizens' identities at the local level (e.g., Isin & Wood, 1999; Kymlicka, 1995; Plyushteva, 2009) since urban contexts favor new forms of sociality and interaction among different groups of people and the realization of local social and territorial policies (e.g., Browne *et al.*, 2007; Doan, 2010; Hubbard, 2011; Kazepov, 2005).

According to this perspective, citizenship can be defined as a complex concept that refers to an individual actor's belonging and capacity for action in the context of a specific political community (e.g., Baglioni, 2009; Elias, 1990; Kochenov, 2019). In addition to considering the legal status of persons and their responsibilities, the concept of citizenship also concerns individuals' political and civil participation and the protection of some dimensions of their identity in their everyday lives, such as their origin, socio-economic status, generation, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation (Richardson, 1998; Yuval-Davis, 1997).

Precisely within this analytical framework, some feminist and queer authors and scholars (Bell & Binnie, 2000; Fenster, 2005; Plummer, 1999; Tremblay *et al.*, 2011) have stressed the need to investigate issues related to so-called "sexual citizenship." Rejecting mainstream definitions of citizenship, they have underlined that true urban citizenship is achieved when well-being and inclusion are guaranteed to all social groups, thereby overcoming compulsory heterosexuality/heteronormativity as the key to social citizenship (Kaplan 1997; Plummer, 1995; Richardson, 2000).

This perspective looks at urban citizenship in general (and sexual citizenship in particular) as the result of both top-down processes and bottom-up practices that are based on the free expression of sexual identity.

These considerations are particularly relevant to the Italian case. In fact, to mitigate the partial recognition of families with same-sex parents at the national level, several cities have played a proactive role as guarantors of the exercise of citizenship on a local scale thanks to their statutory autonomy, obtained following the reform of Title V of the Constitution. This change, which took place at the beginning of the 2000s, granted local Italian authorities the ability to re-build and re-orient the legal system and to legislate and implement welfare policies in specific areas of social life, including family issues. More and more Italian cities, in order to guarantee effective equality among their citizens, have legitimized some of the requests of the LGBT+ community, producing various forms and degrees of urban citizenship (Bertone & Gusmano, 2013; Corbisiero & Monaco, 2017; Gusmano, 2017).

However, as will be illustrated in more detail, these phenomena have seen different outcomes.

## 2. Placing Policies and Practices

Since the 1970s, civil rights movements and LGBT+ associations in Italy have worked hard to ensure that issues relating to the recognition of equal LGBT+ rights become part of the national political agenda, pressing parties on both the left and the right (Corbisiero & Monaco, 2020; Garbagnoli & Prearo, 2018; Prearo, 2015; Rossi Barilli, 1999). They have exerted constant pressure on the Italian political class, resulting in Parliament beginning to address some issues relating to the rights of sexual and gender minorities. However, in the course of time, the Italian Parliament did not manage to pass a single law in favor of LGBT+ people. Finally in 2016 the Italian government approved a law to regulate same-sex civil unions. This provision governs the relationship between same-sex partners, but it does not legally protect their children. In fact, while the bill originally provided for the recognition of double parenthood in the event of the birth of children to same-sex couples, this possibility was removed shortly before the law's approval. Similarly, same-sex couples in Italy do not have access to marriage or adoption. These rights are only accessible to couples comprising opposite sex partners.

Faced with these impediments and the prohibition of resorting to medically assisted procreation as dictated by Italian law,<sup>3</sup> same-sex couples who intend to transition to parenthood must resort to foreign health facilities located in countries where such procedures are permitted (Bertocchi & Guizzardi, 2017; Franchi & Selmi, 2020).

However, policy and micro-policy actions to protect same-sex couples and their families have taken shape at the urban level. The main protagonists of this locally-enacted social justice have been gender-sensitive mayors (Corbisiero & Monaco, 2021; Lasio & Serri, 2019). By implementing multilevel governance, they have regulated the lives of their LGBT+ citizens through a range of policies, interventions, and services aimed at increasing these citizens' visibility and freedom at the local level. Some of their main actions include the promotion of equal opportunities for all, the fight against homo-bi-transphobia and, more generally, protection from discrimination based on sexual identity. Several virtuous municipal administrations—sometimes in collaboration with private or non-profit entities—have worked to guarantee social and legal support to LGBT+ people (through listening or discussion desks, toll-free numbers, workshops, events, and recreational initiatives).

When a child is born abroad, the parents must necessarily request the registration of the birth certificate at the registrar of their municipality of residence. In regard to families with same-sex parents, although most public officials have denied the registration of two mothers or two fathers, arguing that it is contrary to the principles of the Italian legal system,<sup>4</sup> several Italian mayors have chosen to transcribe foreign birth certificates indicating both same-sex partners as parents. The first of these cases occurred in the cities of Naples, Bologna, and Turin, which led the way toward change. Other administrations that refused to register such birth certificates were forced to do so by the courts (such as in Pistoia and Trento). However, in some cases the decisions of municipalities in favor of same-sex parent families have been challenged by the prosecutor's office. This happened a few years ago in Rome and in the small Veneto town of Mel, for example, following the intervention of the prosecutor of Belluno. Hybrid situations have also occurred. For example, in the city of Milan, the government chaired by Mayor Sala was well-disposed to recognize female couple as mothers, but it had a different attitude towards male couples, due to its opposition to surrogacy.

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3 In Italy, Law n. 40, enacted on February 19, 2004, states that only married couples with infertility or fertility problems may use medically assisted procreation techniques, excluding singles and same-sex couples. In addition, it bans surrogacy.

4 The Court of Cassation decided on this matter, affirming that the lack of laws protecting same-sex parenting in Italy does not constitute a valid reason for denying the registration of bi-parenthood in the civil status registers. Thus, on the basis of the international rules oriented toward the protection of the child, the Court of Cassation affirmed that it is possible to register the birth certificate of a child with two mothers or fathers at the municipal level.

Until now, the prevailing orientation of judges who have deliberated on similar cases has been to recognize two mothers or two fathers as parents in the interest of the child, despite the fact that the national laws do not allow surrogacy or, for couples comprising two women, access to heterologous fertilization.

One final aspect capable of significantly affecting the sexual citizenship of same-sex parent families concerns the intervention of civil society in this domain. The initiatives within this framework concern different aspects of life and aim at creating social cohesion. They have a micro and fragmented character and often depend on the willingness and commitment of the individual social actors who interface with these families (including, for example, professionals, neighbors, social services, and families of origin).

### 3. Research

Adopting a territorialist and micro-sociological perspective, which considers policies, services, and the practices of daily life to be intimately linked to local contexts, this paper intends to analyze the different types of urban citizenship experienced by Italian same-sex parent families.

More specifically, the work integrates an analysis of the policies and interventions implemented by local administrations with an analysis of the data collected as part of the project of national interest (PRIN) "CoPInG (Construction of Parenting on Insecure Grounds)" with the aim of considering the relationship between same-sex parents and the spaces they inhabit within their cities, and consequently the reciprocal relationship between sociality and material and symbolic spaces.

The general purpose of the CoPInG project is to study the experience and opinions of Italian parents living in conditions of uncertainty, such as same-sex parents.<sup>5</sup> The study aims to understand how they manage the challenges they face in their daily lives, the resources they have developed in coping with these difficulties, and what they feel supports or hinders their parenting role.

The final objective of the project is to contribute to the construction of social interventions and policies that support parenting, starting from the visions, needs, and requirements of parents.

The research is characterized by a qualitative participatory approach. In particular, the data were collected through a series of in-depth individual interviews, focusing on five thematic dimensions:

1. Socio-demographic characteristics and description of families: In the first section of the interview, the interviewees had the opportunity to describe themselves as persons and as parents, focusing in particular on their relationship with their children.
2. Parenthood and challenges: The second part of the interview aimed at understanding the path taken by the interviewees to become parents, the difficulties they encountered along this path and continue to experience in everyday life due to their sexual identity, and the strategies implemented to cope with difficulties.
3. Social networks and resources: The objective of the third section of the interview was to construct the interviewees' network of relationships. Through a series of specific questions, particular attention was paid to their relationship with their family of origin, with other parents, with the world of associations, and to the quantity and quality of the informal relationships they maintain in their neighborhoods and cities, in an attempt to detect the level of social cohesion perceived by the interviewees in different areas of their daily life.

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<sup>5</sup> The project has also focused on parents in high-conflict situations; poor parents; parents who have experienced forced migration; and parents belonging to other sexual or gender minorities, such as transgender parents (Fargion, 2022).

4. Relationships with institutions and professionals: Through the questions presented in the fourth part of the interview, the study turned its gaze on the nature and characteristics of formal relationships, focusing in particular on interviewees' experiences with institutions (such as schools, health and social services, and public administration) and with professionals who work in these environments (such as teachers, social workers, medical staff, and bureaucrats).
5. Needs and recommendations: The interview concluded with a series of questions aimed at identifying the needs and requirements of parents in their daily citizenship practices.

The interviews were carried out in 2020 and 2021. Given the qualitative nature of the research, the researchers did not attempt to identify a representative sample, but instead chose to focus attention on particular profiles of people to be interviewed, within a theoretical sampling.

The group of same-sex parents who took part in the study comprised 40 mothers and fathers equally distributed among the four Italian macro-areas (Southern Italy, Central Italy, Northeast Italy, and Northwest Italy) who had children as a couple (through medically assisted procreation techniques, self-insemination, or co-parenting practices). Their average age was 44, although they ranged in age from 28 to 70 years old. They were mainly workers (82%) with a medium-high level of education (all respondents had at least a high school diploma).

## 4. Findings

As the literature on the subject suggests (e.g., Bosniak, 2002; Chauvin & Garcés-Mascreñas, 2012; Joppke, 2007; Versanyi, 2006), urban citizenship can be studied by considering three separate but closely interconnected dimensions: a sense of belonging to the community, the legal and political framework, and the expression of identity. In the context of this work, four models of urban citizenship that same-sex parent families experience in Italy were constructed by considering the different possible combinations that exist among (a) parents and their families' practices of participation in social and community life, (b) locally-implemented regulatory framework and policy initiatives, and (c) the recognition of all family members as a group by major institutions and professionals.

This complex and diversified situation makes it possible to understand clearly how the urban citizenship of same-sex family parents and their families who currently live in Italy is not only territorially localized but can also take on different features and specificities. Some of the participants in the study shared an awareness of this reality. In fact, as one mother argued:

Today we live in a situation where you must be lucky to live in one city and not in another. I believe that this is discrimination on top of discrimination: Not only do we have to take a plane, invest economic and psychological resources to go to a country that gives us the opportunity to become a parent, but in addition we must continue to invest money and energy to be recognized as a parent... as a parent of a child that is already ours. We must be lucky enough to live in a city where this can be done. In some cities same-sex parents can transcribe birth certificates, but there are also mayors who don't even consider the fact that their cities have children from rainbow families. (Int. 16, lesbian mother, 50 years old, Central Italy).

The first and most open form of urban citizenship that emerged through data analysis can be defined based its characteristics as "fully inclusive." It takes place in those contexts that appear open to diversity both from a normative point of view and from a social perspective. This form of citizenship occurs most often (but not exclusively) in large Italian cities whose mayors have personally assumed responsibility for implementing policies and initiatives that favor LGBT+ people in general and same-sex parent families in particular, counter to the current Italian national law. In these contexts (such as Naples, Milan, Bologna, and Turin), LGBT+



associations are visibly present and active and often work synergistically with local authorities. Precisely because of these characteristics, such cities—in which institutional policies and social movements often take an active role in ensuring social inclusion—can be defined as “rainbow cities” (Corbisiero & Monaco, 2017).

Openness towards sexual and gender minorities and same-sex parenting leads to a general climate of openness towards diversity and social acceptance, which has the direct effect of stimulating participation in community life:

We are lucky because our city is very advanced, thanks to the presence of the mayor. Contrary to national guidelines, he decided to take responsibility and recognize our daughter’s American documents and to validate them in our city as well [...]. In America Bruna was registered with her double surname [...] and she had her American passport with her double surname without problems. Back in Italy, Bruna had her identity card signed by our mayor with this information. (Int. 13, gay father, 45 years old, Southern Italy)

Our city has changed considerably in these 8 years. Even if I don’t agree with some of the choices our mayor made, he made this city truly welcoming [...]. This evolution was also evident with regards to the acceptance of rainbow families [...]. Our daily life here is much more varied than that of some other cities thanks to this path. Thus, we are well integrated as a family too [...]. This serenity means that when we go to the supermarket or pharmacy or to do the shopping, people who see Beatrice with me and my partner don’t consider our family as an abnormal situation... they do not see it as something wrong. (Int. 14, gay father, 56 years old, Southern Italy)

I live my family life with tranquility because I live in the most modern city in Italy. (Int. 15, bisexual mother, 51 years old, Northwest Italy)

In Italy the recognition of double parenthood is not automatic, but there are some courageous municipalities and some courageous mayors who recognize the transcription of a foreign birth certificate where both parents appear. Gerardo and I found a municipality and above all a spectacular mayor who in the past had transcribed and recognized the double parenting of a lesbian couple. In our case as well, he recognized our birth certificate... we truly felt lucky in this respect. Our son is an Italian citizen with two same-sex parents. (Int. 21, gay father, 52 years old, Southern Italy).

The parents interviewed who have experienced this form of fully inclusive citizenship reported having had positive experiences with services and professionals, and they stated that they did not suffer a lack of legal recognition of one of the two parents at the national level, thanks to locally recognized safeguards:

Luna, on Mother’s Day, wrote a letter to both mothers, where one was called “mom” and the other “spare mom,” and her teachers had no objections to it. We are interchangeable at school, as well as at the pediatrician, who is now our friend. He doesn’t care if I contact him or if Marzia does it. (Int. 15, lesbian mother, 51 years old, Northwest Italy)

We were able to recognize our daughter before the childbirth thanks to the help of a councilor of our city... during the ceremony we felt as if we were getting married again... I was moved reading the sheet that contained the explanation of our joint desire to have a family [...]. We went with this certificate to a hospital where they were all really very kind, we did not encounter any difficulties. In fact, I was present in all circumstances, I attended all ultrasounds, I was also in the delivery room from the first to the last moment. (Int. 19, lesbian mother, 50 years old, Northwest Italy)

In our city people have never ever made me perceive any form of discrimination or difference... from school to kindergarten... at baptism I had six priests who wanted to baptize my children! I've never had anything [...]. At school everyone knows that my girls have two dads and they don't have a mother. (Int. 32, bisexual father, 46 years old, Northwest Italy).

The levels of openness experienced within these urban contexts on multiple levels (regulatory, institutional, and informal) allow for the dynamic social participation of same-sex parents that is aimed both inside and outside the neighborhood in which they live. Sometimes they become involved in social, political, and cultural activities to help maintain this *status quo*. In fact, two parents who took part in the research declared that they were city councilors, and four others mentioned that they were presidents of associations for the promotion of LGBT+ rights.

Continuing the analysis, the other urban citizenship practices identified by the study take place in cities where the local regulatory and institutional frameworks give little or no consideration to the rights of families with same-sex parents.

As will be explained, the lack of protections and guarantees toward sexual and gender minorities produces differentiated effects at the level of experienced citizenship.

More specifically, a form of urban citizenship that can be defined as citizenship "on a limited scale" takes shape on a more limited territorial level. It takes place in urban contexts where some practices of daily life make it possible to cope with obstacles imposed by the power exercised at the administrative level. In other words, regardless of the local political framework, certain social, material, and symbolic practices are capable of producing a relational space in which a form of citizenship recognition takes place. From a territorial point of view, this sense of belonging and the exercise of citizenship on a limited scale are mainly realized within neighborhoods and residential areas. Indeed, it is within these spaces that family life takes shape and manifests itself. This type of citizenship sometimes influences housing and schooling decisions for children and, more generally, affects a part of parents' social life:

If you live in a municipality where the mayor transcribes birth certificates, children are usually safe. But this was not our case. We fought a monstrous battle against our municipality; we launched a signature campaign to prompt the mayor to transcribe our foreign documents, and we collected more than 8,000 signatures in 48 hours both through social networks and by setting up local tables. There was great solidarity on the part of many local people... our family story is very long and stressful, but it is also beautiful because we saw our entire city engaged in a mobilization to protect our civil rights. (Int. 26, bisexual father, 49 years old, Southern Italy)

We turned to the various mayors who succeeded one another in our city for the recognition of our dual parenting, but no one helped us. They made promises to us, but in the end, we got nothing [...]. However, I must say that we live in a place where we feel good: We are known and we have not been obstructed by anyone. For example, the pediatrician knows both of us and I easily go to her without my wife; I accompanied our child to get the vaccine, even if he is not legally my son [...]. Last year we began to interact with the school... Tiziano had to start the first year of kindergarten, and we had no problems even with the teachers or the school principal. (Int. 28, lesbian mother, 35 years old, Southern Italy)

I don't know if we are particularly lucky or we have always met well-disposed people... I had an emergency caesarean for gestosis, and my gynecologist used to rely on a Catholic university hospital... but the professionals there always treated us very well. They let my partner into the delivery room when it was time for the surgery, so she could participate as much as possible up to that moment [...]. We have changed pediatricians more than once to find the right doctor... not for homophobia, but for other problems... so we have had three or four



pediatricians... our current pediatrician has always been very helpful with us... the pediatrician has never treated me and my partner differently. The same occurred in school, where it made no difference to the teachers whether they talked to me or to her. (Int. 29, lesbian mother, 40 years old, Central Italy)

We only had bureaucratic problems with the municipality. However, in our everyday life we have not had any problems because we live in a fairly quiet neighborhood, where we get along well with the neighbors, friends, and parents of our child's schoolmates. (Int. 36, gay father, 49 years old, Northwest Italy).

One of the main strategies that these parents claimed to have implemented in order to enjoy local citizenship on a limited scale was to exhibit their everyday life and tell their story outside the home by making their ties and family practices visible. This means that many parents build social relationships with the aim of obtaining social recognition, beyond legal and blood ties:

When we sent Giorgio to school, we presented ourselves as his two mothers and we had no problems. They were calm, they dealt with us in a very normal way, as with any other parent couple. (Int. 5, lesbian mother, 36 years old, Central Italy)

At school I'm working as a class representative because doing so I obviously have a little more relationship with the school, with the other mothers, and with the teachers. I always try to be present. (Int. 6, lesbian mother, 36, Southern Italy)

I believe that not being natural is not convenient... in my opinion it is not even worthwhile to hide or try to omit something to others... on the contrary, I think that in a social relationship, the sooner we show ourselves the better, because in this way we dismantle any idealization. (Int. 31, lesbian mother, 35 years old, Southern Italy)

Alberto and I live our family life in society without hiding anything. We relate to other people in a peaceful way [...] we act as any couple do. (Int. 33, gay father, 52 years old, Northwest Italy)

The steps for rainbow families are always the same: talk to the school official before enrollment, explain how our family is made up, explain what our needs and bureaucratic problems are, and then proceed with the subscription [...] Even in the hospital, when we had to go to the emergency room, our little girl asked me to accompany her. I went with her, but I immediately said we were two mothers. (Int. 37, lesbian mother, 37 years old, Northwest Italy).

To conclude, it is safe to argue that urban citizenship on a limited scale is based on the ability of parents to build weak bonds within the territorial context in which they live. Critically, citizenship on a limited scale guarantees a considerable adaptive capacity, but at the same time provides networks of solidarity that are unable to provide effective support.

The third model of urban citizenship that emerged from the data analysis can be defined as "micro-participatory." It occurs when same-sex parent families face the regulatory and institutional void by seeking alternative spaces for social inclusion. The realization of this specific model of citizenship takes place particularly in those cities where parents' associations are very active, within which strong ties and a strong sense of belonging develop:

For me, the association of same-sex parents is a sort of small state, in the absence of a real state. We have our own statute, our own constitution; we have our own rules [...]. Even from a regulatory and legal point of view, we have a group of lawyers who support us when we need

it... since the state does not exist, then we must create it in a surrogate form. (Int. 7, lesbian mother, 40 years old, Southern Italy)

Thanks to the Famiglie Arcobaleno association I had the opportunity to get to know the realities of families comprising lesbian couples and gay couples. In a country where it is difficult for us to become parents, knowing people who faced this path is something that upsets your life, that opens up horizons, that also faces us with questions, doubts, and perplexities. There you have people who have already been down this path and who can help you... I don't mean to answer all doubts, but at least to tell their stories and experiences. (Int. 16, lesbian mother, 50 years old, Central Italy)

In the association we have several annual meetings at the national level, and once a month we have a regional meeting. Contact with other parents is so important for me because for any doubts we have we can interact with people who have already passed through that phase. It is also important for our children because they see that there are other families like theirs. (Int. 24, gay father, 41 years old, Southern Italy).

Within this model of citizenship, parenting and childcare are the main elements of self-recognition that allow for the creation of a sort of microcosm. Micro-participatory citizenship presupposes a very intense involvement which, however, is limited to activities within the association. The association is considered a familiar and welcoming space because of the intense participation of its members. The element of community that is created within this group ensures that the parents who are part of it enjoy a strong inter-group solidarity capable of compensating for the lack or inaccessibility of institutional supports. The result is a sort of micro-citizenship entirely directed towards the associative practices of the group, which, while revolving around the presence of children, is not limited to issues related to the care and protection of children. In fact, several interviewees have highlighted that their associations allow them to go beyond these areas of sharing, helping them to face other challenges linked to the condition of uncertainty they experience due to their sexual identities. For example, associations were described as support agencies for overcoming other barriers, as in the case of care-related support and in the fulfillment of duties—helping, for example, to carry out bureaucratic procedures. These forms of support make membership in the group particularly important for some categories of people.

From this critical angle, micro-participatory citizenship can be defined as an autochthonous response to the state's political inability to take charge of a part of its citizens. The result is the creation of a private environment that is outside the home. Such citizenship strongly nourishes the development of a sense of community and belonging, but it could have the adverse effect of self-exclusion from the wider community. Therefore, the strength of this model of citizenship is its ability to create strong bonds and encourage practices of solidarity. However, it can also indirectly produce situations of exclusion.

Finally, the research also suggests the existence of an urban citizenship that can be defined as "self-excluding," although this phenomenon appears to affect a limited number of parents. This kind of citizenship is characterized by both a lack of institutional and regulatory support at the local level and a poor sense of parental participation in the community. Although involvement in social, cultural, and political activities is low (and in some cases non-existent), parents in this category declared that they possess material and cultural resources that do not lead to isolation, but rather produce a minimal sense of belonging to the city. More specifically, this situation affects those who suffer more than others from the lack of national and local legal protections and whose daily lives are consequently deeply conditioned by this aspect as well. In fact, an analysis of the data suggests that low social participation is motivated by a fear of not being understood or of being judged negatively by other citizens. This feeling stems from both direct negative experiences and personal concerns. In this form of citizenship, the use of public spaces is linked

to individual or family activities and does not manifest itself in any form of association, either formal or informal. In general, relations with other citizens -even close acquaintances and those considered friends- and with institutions and professionals, are limited. Those who experience this form of citizenship lead lives marked by the maintenance of civil and impersonal relationships and are oriented towards quiet living:

I don't hang out with many people in the city. Undoubtedly there are some types of people in the city who believe that I am not a good mother just for having a relationship with a woman [...]. I think the school staff don't know about my sexual orientation. Personally, I would not talk about it-for example, the teachers are a bit old fashioned... (Int. 2, bisexual mother, 32 years old, Central Italy)

We don't have a support network. Giovanna was registered as the daughter of a single parent, so only I appear on her birth documents as her mother. We have never done anything to recognize the other mother because we do not feel safe [...]. We know that some couples have asked to register their parenthood by forcing the law through their municipalities, but we have also seen that many powers of attorney have challenged these acts... since we live in a very serene family situation and we have a very serene child, we did not want and do not want to run into unpleasant situations that could upset Giovanna. (Int. 27, lesbian mother, 36 years old, Northwest Italy)

We don't rely on anyone [...]. We are two people who have always been autonomous and independent. If we had any problem, in that moment we would be able to do it alone. (Int. 53, lesbian mother, 38 years old, Northeast Italy).

Evidently, self-excluding citizenship guarantees low levels of exposure and visibility and is aimed at avoiding conflict and achieving relative livability in the residential context. However, this form of citizenship has the adverse effect of failing to provide effective support networks which can be relied upon in times of need. It can also result in the limitation and weakening of people's ability to access the services and support networks available within civil society.

## Conclusion

In post-modern society, family is much more complex than in the past. This institution is no longer based exclusively on a genetic-biological link but has found an alternative possibility of realization based on affective choices. In this world, families far from the nuclear model, such as same-sex parent families, are not always recognized and protected.

The partial granting of marital and family rights to these families constitutes a case of homophobia acted out at the institutional level (e.g., Blumenfeld, 1992; Goldberg & Allen, 2020). This legislative shortcoming undermines the enjoyment of traditionally understood citizenship rights, effectively creating at the national level a clear division between legally recognized and non-recognized families.

The research results presented in the previous pages allow—through the lens of urban citizenship—an analysis of how Italian cities are working to promote the inclusion of same-sex parents and their children at least on a local scale. The urban citizenship perspective makes it possible to detect the potential of cities not only to contribute to the inclusion of these families in the social context, but also to become places of belonging, rights, and sociality through the combined actions of decision-makers, politicians, associations, professionals, and other social actors.

The research results show that individuals adopt various solutions nowadays and, consequently, different models of urban citizenship exist for same-sex parent families. In fact, the four mod-

els of citizenship presented here are characterized by differentiated participatory practices that produce different constructions of the sense of belonging and different levels of accessibility to rights and duties.

In general, it can be argued that the citizenship models emerging from the analysis are influenced and conditioned by the policy context in which they are situated. It is safe to argue that the presence or absence of supportive policies significantly influences the participatory practices of and models followed by same-sex parents. In contexts where policies and regulatory frameworks exist and protect gender minorities and their families, parents appear to be more involved in community life, exercising proactive citizenship at the local level. Otherwise, the lack or ineffectiveness of policy actions produces forms of partial citizenship which, depending on the specificities, can have both positive and negative outcomes.

For example, LGBT+ associations take on a proactive, collaborative, and supportive role in territories where sexual citizenship is at the center of the political agenda, but they end up replacing public actors in contexts that lack institutional responses to specific needs. The work implemented by the associations in the latter settings positively influences participatory practices and models of citizenship, but at the same time it risks generating adverse effects. This is the case with so-called "micro-participatory" urban citizenship, in which same-sex parent families are inserted into spaces of social inclusion which are not complementary to the traditional ones, but in opposition to them.

On the one hand, the analysis clearly shows that in the current Italian context, the main weak point of the initiatives implemented for same-sex parent families on an urban scale is the absence of coordinated and coherent actions and general guidelines that can guide public action and civil society in an effective and efficient way. On the other hand, adopting an integrated perspective and a common policy line would be necessary to protect and support same-parent families, who otherwise risk finding themselves in conditions of marginalization, vulnerability, and social exclusion. For example, type of citizenship defined here as "self-excluding" clearly shows that a lack of public support and involvement by other social actors leads to the inability of individuals to fully experience the physical and relational spaces of the city.

In this sense, the "fully inclusive" forms of urban citizenship based on multilevel collaboration, which are already being tested in some Italian cities, can represent best practices for promoting the inclusion and social integration of same-sex parent families in other territorial contexts that intend to experiment with virtuous forms of protection and enhancement of urban diversity.

## Limitations and Future Research

A number of limitations to the study should be recognized. First, the qualitative approach is limited in terms of generalizability. Second, participant accounts are necessarily retrospective, and this can limit their authenticity (Forrester *et al.*, 2008). Finally, other family members, such as children, were not involved in the research. They certainly could have made a valuable contribution, further enriching the analysis. However, their participation was not foreseen in the project.

Looking ahead, capturing the voices of children growing up within same-sex parent families and of other key actors in their everyday lives could represent a future field of research; this could be useful in planning other studies.

Despite the limitations, a case study of this nature appears particularly useful as the perspective of same-sex parents living in Italy offers a snapshot of the current cultural and institutional situation in the country with a specific focus on territorial differences that affect these parents' urban citizenship practices.

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