Processes of micro-segregation and refugee school education in small and medium-sized cities

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ABSTRACT

Cities are increasingly at the centre of the study of migration and the differentials associated with hosting refugees. However, they can differ significantly in their patterns of migration and the shaping of segregation, as well as in the way they respond to migration and its diversity. Education and residential marginalization in South European cities represent the most critical and controversial of urban conditions for the settlement and inclusion of migrants. The paper is an attempt to assess some empirical findings in small and medium-sized Greek cities, analysing the links between urban segregation processes based on the dismantling of refugee housing policies and school segregation. The recent reforms in Greek migration policy led to a new form of local governance where municipalities developed new regulatory powers. Broader socio-economic and political differentiations in local context, local micro-segregation processes and the effects of cuts in welfare provision, intensify pre-existence conditions of inequality (visible and invisible manifestations in urban infrastructure) which shape (and shaped by) contemporary urban regimes in the cities. The paper high-

lights that local actors are key players in shaping and mediating the (re)production of poverty landscapes, but at the same time, can play an important role in policies and innovative local actions towards egalitarian poverty reduction and inclusion of the most vulnerable.

Introduction

Cities and spatial inequalities are increasingly at the centre of migration and refugee studies, while migrants are also seen as place-makers within processes of capital accumulation by dispossession and displacement (Brenner 2019, Çağlar and Glick Schiller 2021). Cities can vary greatly in terms of their patterns of migration policies and segregation strategies, as well as their responses to migration and its diversity. In this concept, cities need to be analysed within broader politico-economic configurations that are shaped not only by national or regional networks, but also by supralocal politico-economic conditions, spatial divisions of labour, socio-economic flows and regulatory frameworks that create continuous transformations of urban landscapes through which urban governance unfolds (Brenner, 2019). Furthermore, recent studies of the patterns and trends of segregation in cities across various national context demonstrate that ethnic segregation is more evident in disadvantaged metropolitan regions with high levels of social vulnerability (Benassi et all, 2023). However, segregation in small and medium-sized cities is highly demonstrated in mechanisms of social reproduction and power relations, such as education and labour market, especially in areas of existing social deprivation and limited economic opportunities (Phillimore, 2020).

In this context, this paper is based on the Greek experience and the so-called refugee crises in Southern Europe, and it is an attempt to examine the links between urban segregation processes through the dispersal policies of refugee housing and school segregation in

small and medium cities. The focus will be on these changes and the impact of urban segregation on refugee education. We also focus on the interplay between different levels of interaction between local actors and public interventions in refugee housing and education, which may also shape spatial inequalities and segregation mechanisms.

Within this framework the research attempts to answer the following questions: how symbolic defamation of space (Wacquant 2007, 2008, Slater, 2021) of particular urban places is (re)produced and how it functions through the concept of stigma. Stigma is linked to the shame of living in a poorly educated place, which is attached to individual identity and can become permanent when interacting with outsiders. In the case of refugees, detention in the residential accommodation scheme- in "open prisons" as they are called by education experts (Open Letter of Protest, 2023) - creates enormous problems in the daily life and the mental health of refugees. We also focus on how urban dispersal policies and processes of micro-segregation, reinforce educational inequalities in urban settings. Micro-segregation refers to "micro-segregated urban milieus below the neighbourhood level, where individuals living in spatial proximity occupy unequal positions according to their socioeconomic status or ethno-racial" (Maloutas and Karadimitriou, 2022:1). In addition, even if social mix on a neighbourhood level is achieved, socio-spatial hierarchies are rebuilt at the micro-spatial level. In this context, we adapt the concept of micro-segregation to analyse how social hierarchies are constantly reconstructed in space, even within school catchment areas or school classes.

However, without understanding the transformation of the state policies in relation to reception and accommodation of forced migration, within the broader regulatory framework, we can't understand refugee education policy. In addition, austerity measures intensified pre-existence conditions of inequality (visible and invisible manifestations in urban infrastructure) which shape (and shaped by) contemporary urban regimes in the cities. As Piketty (2022: 176) notes, the problem in educational justice is "the gap between official

statements regarding equality of opportunities and the reality of educational inequalities that the disadvantaged classes face". To this end, we argue that the assessment of refugee education is closely linked to the statecraft of migration mobility, in specific periods, and the analogous processes of settlement in each period. The different expressions of inequalities and their linkages are not only connected to the corresponding conditions of the reception and accommodation model but also to the mobility of refugees due to the constant movement between shelters and the lack of educational facilities (experienced staff, reception classes etc.). Furthermore, the different legal statuses associated with different access to rights, such as undocumented asylum seekers, recognized refugees, economic migrants, etc., create multiple exclusions and hierarchies (De Genova and Roy 2020). At the same time, local segregation processes and strategies of exclusion in specific neighbourhoods are mirrored in segregated schools and in micro-segregation strategies in school classes in marginalized areas, mirroring unequal socio-spatial distribution of disadvantaged groups in urban areas (Vergou, 2017, 2019).

Methods

The article draws upon the experiences of two small and medium-sized Greek Cities. I contacted in-depth interviews and focus-group conversations with refugees and local actors (municipality, NGOs, primary and secondary education departments), in two small and medium-sized cities in Central Greece. The two cities were selected as case studies based on their different sizes (medium and small cities, suburban and rural areas), the different ways in which refugees are accommodated (in refugee camps and in inner-city ESTIAs apartments), and the different ways in which the local authorities have taken an active and passive role in the management of ESTIAs and HELIOS accommodation programs. The resettlement and integration of refugees in the urban area, and consequently the

education of refugees, has been affected by the different policies of each municipality.

The discussions contributed to a more in depth understanding of the characteristics forms of social spatial diversity in cities and the ways that educational policies implemented by local actors (municipalities, local educational administrators, teachers etc.). Refugee pupils in the cities are enrolled in schools in their neighbourhoods or in the surrounding area (where reception classes exist - with at least 6 children according to the law) and based on the recommendations of the refugee education coordinators. Simultaneously, nine (9) interviews were conducted between March and July 2023, with actors of relevant institutions (municipality, NGOs, primary and secondary teachers and administrators) and three (3) interviews with refugees' parents. The term "refugee children" throughout this paper refers to children who are either asylum seekers or beneficiaries of international protection in Greece.

The case studies

The two medium-sized cities (Larisa, Volos) are neighbouring cities in the region of Thessaly. In 2022, the region had the second highest unemployment rate (39.8%) for young people aged 15-29, compared to 11.3% in the EU, and the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2020 was 27.4% above the national average, compared to 23.2% in the Attica region, where the country's capital is located (Eurostat, 2020). The two cities were chosen for several reasons. Both cities have common population characteristics (refugees and asylum seekers) but they differ in relation to the management of forced migration and the policies of inclusion.

Firstly, Larisa is the principal agricultural area of Greece and the administrative capital of the Thessaly region. According to the

2021 census, the total population of the Municipality of Larisa reaches the 164.381 inhabitants (immigrants 4.8%) and 900 refugees in a camp (Koutsohero) which is 18 km from the city. The town is characterized by the centralized management of refugee issues by the municipality. In 2018, under the supervision of the Municipality of Larissa and UNHCR, refugees were settled in apartments through the provisions of the ESTIA program. The Municipality's Public Services were the coordinators of the housing and integration programs for 430 refugees, both funded by the EU. Near the city (18 km) is Koutsohero, a refugee camp with 900 refugees (GCR, March 2022).

The second case study is the city of Volos, a former industrial city whose main activities today are the service sector and tourism, which has replaced industry. According to the 2021 census, the total population of the Municipality of Volos reaches 138,865 inhabitants (4% immigrants) and 150 refugees who recently arrived in the MOZA camp (7 km from the city centre). There is no housing project (ESTIA) for the refugees. Since the beginning of the refugee flows, the refugees have been accommodated in a camp on the outskirts of the city, outside the urban fabric. The model of governability of the city of Volos is one of "control" of the new arrivals and is characterized by the absence of any mechanism of cooperation and political interaction with other actors for the accommodation of refugees.

The politics of emergency and migration mobility

To understand contemporary Greek refugee policies, it is necessary to refer to state migration policies in relation to asylum and migration management, which are characterized by at least four features. First, an emergency logic, by establishing emergency infrastructures of identification and accommodation centres with strict

regulations and social control, as "technics of governability" (Wacquant, 2023) creating spaces of neo-ghetto (Clough Marinaro's, 2015, 2019) mainly in dilapidated areas outside the urban fabric.

The remote infrastructures limit the visibility of marginalized urban populations, including also homeless centres (Arapoglou and Gounis, 2015) and Roma settlements (Vergou, 2011). Urban infrastructures are formulated as socio-technical processes, where the boundaries of citizenship are (re)negotiated. The emergency model of social crisis management (Arapoglou and Gounis, 2015) can be traced back in 2011 when specific policy changes were put in forced after the bailout package and the collaboration between the Greek government and the European Commission. This model, characterized mainly by short-term solutions, a preference for local management of the crisis and cooperation with non-governmental and charitable organizations, particularly in the field of social policy and a preference for aid in kind. This policy is generally characterized by the retrenchment of the welfare state and concerns the wider population on issues of poverty and social support (e.g. the emergency poverty infrastructures in communities, such as social pharmacies and food banks, which were set established in 2011 and continue to function until today).

Second, migration policies are characterized by an authoritarian management of forced migration (e.g. closed camps, "hot spots", pushbacks, closed boarders, etc.). As Kreichauf, (2023) notes, refugee dispersal in local regions can be seen as a neoliberal and racist migration technology. In this context, a neo-apartheid city emerges as an urban regime where infrastructures facilitate political and social control through socio-spatial division (Yacobi, and all. 2022). Using the lens of racial capitalism we identify common characteristics of this regime: the security complex system, that profits from bordering, detention, and deportation; the extreme inequality; racialized poverty; and militarized policing which, dehumanizes racialized others through border controls, refugee laws, detention, and deportation, at a range of geographic scales, from local urban setting to global (Besteman, 2020, Clarno, 2022). Moreover, we observed, that

the invisibility of refugee shelters as an attempt to minimize the sense of insecurity for the rest of the population, is another policy measure to counter the threat of "the different". In addition, their dependence on various services creates spaces of confinement and exclusion from the rest of the community. A visible example is in our two case studies, where refugee camps and shelters for unaccompanied minors are located on the outskirts of the cities.

A third characteristic of migration policies is the local shift, with reference to local municipalities to implement emergency migration policies. The shift towards the local state for managing migration leads to a different treatment of refugees each time, and is directly dependent on local institutions. Local policies depend on the nature of local welfare, socio-economic characteristics, as well as the characteristics of the political culture of the local society, which promote various aspects of social 'sustainability' and social inclusion practices. (Cavounidis 2002; Arbaci, 2019). Indicatively, according to our case studies, a city that has experienced high unemployment due to industrialization and the lack of a development perspective seems to be less resilient to the integration of refugees than a city that is relatively better off economically or a city that has developed social capital and linkages with European programs.

Finally the fourth characteristic of migration policies is the use of a multi-level governance, involving municipalities, local and international NGOs, international organizations, and private companies for security, as a result of the inability of the state to cope with the mass influx of population and the general effects of the retreat of the welfare state. At the same time, it seems that local institutions are best suited to understand the different levels of interaction and complex social relations at the local socio-spatial level. The relocation of refugees to open camps near cities has enabled municipalities to work with international agencies, NGOs and humanitarian organizations. At the simultaneously, the ESTIA housing program was managed by various social initiatives and municipal entrepreneurship and municipal development corporations.

Dispersal immigration policies and refugees' education

The issue of residential and school segregation is not simply a matter of social housing provision, but rather of broader socio-economic and political differentiations in local context where marginalized social groups are excluded from the society. According to the Greek law, all children, regardless of nationality, have the right to education. The existing legal framework has ensured the existence of reception and tutorial classes since the 1990s. After the signing of the agreement between the European Union and Turkey (March 2016) (European Council, 2016) and the long enforced 'detention' of refugees in Greece, the requirement for the reception and integration of refugees in public schools became imperative.

During the period from 2000 to 2023, several stages can be observed in the policies in the shaping of the reception and accommodation system. As Mantanika and Arapoglou (2022: 201) notes the reception system is an "intermediary space" which engages diverse policy actors who "question the established understanding of the relationship between mobility and inclusion in distinct ways". This "intermediary space" is used as a term to cover up the protection of the basic rights of persons when they arrived in Greece, however there is a complex and ambivalent use of the term according to different periods of migration flows. In the first period, from early 2002 to 2015, transit migration was the result of specific EU regimes, with Greece as the main frontline area of the EU, the so-called European External Border or Border Regime, which emerged from the nexus between the Schengen Agreement and the Dublin system. In the next period, after 2015, the internal and external borders of Greece became the main corridor for migration to Europe, leading to a period of crisis of European borders (Mantanika and Arapoglou, 2022). During this period, the Greek reception system became a complex web of different accommodation schemes: Reception and Identi-

fication Centres (RIC) in Evros and on five Aegean islands, camps throughout the mainland, urban accommodation under the ESTIA program, which ended in December 2022, and hotels, which until recently operated under the FILOXENIA program. Finally, the period after 2022, when EU funding was significantly reduced, the Greek state decided to "close" the program of accommodation in apartments within the urban fabric (ESTIA II) and live no option but to return to camps throughout the mainland.

In our research, the stages of the dispersal policies and parallel the education of refugees follows the asylum policies which were based on "emergency policies" while many local communities were against the relocation of refugees in the cities. According to our research in the first city (Larisa), in 2018 refugees were settled in apartments through the provisions of the ESTIA program and under the supervision of the Municipality of Larisa and the cooperation with UNHCR. The Municipality's public services were the coordinators of the housing and integration programs for 430 refugees, both of which are funded by the EU. The municipal accommodation policies (ESTIA I and II) characterized by the primary role of the municipality in the placement and dispersal of refugees; local integration policies focus on housing and employment of refugees through the services of the municipality, without the involvement of other local actors/NGOs; local policies follow the central rules and policies of the state; municipal social services were the main actors of this process and the social agenda and policy formulation is set by the local state.

In this context, several factors influence the spatial distribution and differentiation of refugees in the urban fabric, such as: the availability of rental housing stock - a large part of which is located in the city centre; the availability of resources - especially after the recent change and transfer of the management of the ESTIA program to the Ministry of Migration Policy, where there has been a reduction in funding; the spatial policy of the municipality regarding the dispersal of refugees; the perception and readiness of society to receive the newly arrived refugees. At the same time, the management and organization

of the distribution of the refugee population in the city and the search for housing which meets the minimum rental criteria set by the UN-HCR are affected by the lack of a centralized institutional framework at national level for affordable housing. When the accommodation program (ESTIA II) ended, the refugees either left the country to Central and West Europe, due to change of status or were relocated to the camp near the city (Koutsohero) or elsewhere in Greece.

In contrast, close to the city is the Koutsohero refugee camp, established in 2016 and located near the city of Larissa (18 km). The camp was run by the Ministry of Immigration/Asylum in cooperation with the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and UNHCR. In 2021, the camp hosted 1367 refugees (480 children in the camp, 213 pupils enrolled in public schools). The children in the camp receive non-formal education locally and occasionally (e-learning), most of them Afghans, Syrians and Iraqis. Until recently, the 213 children from the camp received public education in a public school in Larissa and in two kindergartens in surrounding villages. However, following the massive flooding of nearby villages in the Thessaly region in September 2003, the refugees of Koutsohero camp, in Larisa, were again relocated to other sites in different parts of Greece, while the camp took in the local population who had lost their homes in the floods.

The second case study, the city of Volos, provides a different example. At the time of the arrival of refugees in the city in 2016, the municipality was against the accommodation of refugees in the city. (E-Thessalia, 2016). Refugees were accommodated in a refugee camp on the city's outskirts, near a landfill and the city's industrial zone. In addition, two shelters for unaccompanied minors were set up outside the city, run by a national NGO (ARSIS) and the Greek Red Cross. The local authorities and municipal institutions have created and enforced a 'unwelcoming' city paradigm, while no accommodation for refugees has been provided in apartments. Attempts to create a refugee centre in the northern part of the city, in a mixed neighbourhood, have been unsuccessful. Refugee children were initially provided with non-formal education in the camp.

After the nearby village refused to accept them in its school, they were enrolled near a Roma settlement in the working-class area of Nea Ionia, a former settlement of Greek refugees from Asia Minor (Vergou, 2019). As a result, the municipal intervention reinforced the processes of segregation in the city and the refugees were excluded from the city. The operation of the camp has been interrupted several times in recent years. At the time of our research, the Ministry of Migration decided to close the specific camp for a short period between July 2023 and September 2023. Today, the camp is used to accommodate refugees from the Koutsohero camp in Larisa when they are relocated. This was due to floods in the Thessaly region, which destroyed houses in neighbouring villages and made it necessary to relocate people.

As we have observed, since the beginning of the influx of refugees in 2015, different policies and measures have shaped this 'intermediate space' of housing in the two cities, and different governmentalities have been activated within them. In this context, reception as a term means varied practices around migrant mobility that apply once migrants have crossed the border and different spatial practices in the receiving cities (re)produce various forms of socio-spatial segregation.

Interrupted living and accessibility

The barriers to refugee education stemming from problems in the implementation of the dedicated framework activated by Greece in 2016. During the first "pre-accession" period (2016-2017) of the educational operation of the **Reception Facilities for Refugee Education** (DYEP), the results were not particularly effective. The volatile and uncertain situation of refuges and their country of final settlement, as well as their continued mobility, have acted as a barrier and contributed to the lack of regular attendance at school and the

significant drop-out rates during the school year. There was a wide-spread perception among a proportion of refugee pupils that they have no reason to participate in education or to learn the language, if the Greece is not the destination country. However, the most serious obstacle preventing the integration of children in schools and in Greek society has been the resistance of local communities. In some cases, Greek parents and school authorities prevent the enrolment of refugee children in local schools (Vergou, 2019). Nevertheless, the active involvement of local community associations, teachers and activists helps to counteract these reactions. Further problems related to the competence of educational staff, such as the recruitment of teachers, the teaching of Greek as a foreign language, access to counselling services or training in dealing with diversity in the classroom, but also the absence of any provision and plan for the involvement of their parents in the educational process.

Until 2020, when the ESTIA housing program, funded by the EU and implemented by the UN, ends, refugees' access to education will be determined by the relevant conditions of a dual housing model (Kandylis and Maloutas, 2020) (apartments in cities and accommodation and detention centers in the form of camps). This dual housing system is reflected in refugees' education. In addition to formal public education for children who live in apartments in the urban fabric of the cities, an organized but informal education process has been created in the camps with specialized staff, while the operation of kindergartens in the camps will start in August 2017. In this context, informal education includes education that does not follow a program and is provided by NGO volunteers, parents, and others. Problems such as the small number of places in public schools, children with health problems, lack of documents for enrolment, differences in learning levels, different language backgrounds added to the existing barriers to refugee education. The covid-19 pandemic, the prolonged confinement of refugees in accommodation sites and the lack of basic infrastructure to monitor distance learning once again halted the participation of refugee children in public education.

In the mid-August 2022 the Greek government decided to close all temporary accommodation facilities (hotels and apart- ments) for refugees in urban areas on the mainland by the end of 2022. Around 10,000 asylum seekers and refugees after being granted asylum, evicted from homes (The Press Project, 2022). In the new post-ESTIA era, most children have been moved from urban dwellings to camps, mainly in marginalized areas on the outskirts of cities, marginalized in "open prisons" isolated from the urban fabric. Furthermore, transfers from one type of reception to another exac- erbate existing difficulties in accessing accommodation by delaying or disrupting school attendance, contrary to the best interests of the child. Many delays also, in asylum services and asylum granting magnify the existing desperation.

According to statistics indicate that access to formal educa- tion varies by type of accommodation. The lowest enrolment rates are detected among refugee children on the islands, where "only a handful attend public schools" (RSA-Report, 2021). Conversely, the percentage of school-age children enrolled in schools was 74% for mainland camps and 76% for ESTIA at the end of 2020. In April 2021, the access to public school(s) reached 85.4% (from 5906 out of 6916 children enrolled in Public School). However, enrolment does not necessarily mean participation. According to the Ministry of Edu- cation, 7,769 (90%) of the 8,637 children enrolled as of March 2021 attend primary and secondary education classes in person. Howev- er, the actual school attendance is low (RSA-Report 2021, UNICEF 2020, European Commission 2020). In response to our interviews, which took place before the subsequent relocation from Koutsohero camp (Larisa), refugee parents talk about their expectations for their children's education:

> There is no future for the children here. The asylum service is in a very bad state because of the waiting lists. I'm here for children's sake. I left everything to give my children a better future. I had a good salary at home, but there was a risk. In Greece, the labor market is exploitative, with long hours and bad attitudes (asylum seeker, men, 37 years old).

Inadequate schooling also plays a major role in their stories:

> I would only stay for the children's future. The children are lost between Arabic, English and Greek. The oldest son is in high school - he doesn't learn anything. I am afraid because the school is far from home and so is primary school. The children at school want pocket money to eat breakfast, but there is no way to find money. In Germany, the state pays for everything. I would like to go to Finland for my children's education. We don't want their lives to be boring. There is no proper education for children here. (asylum seeker, men, 40 years old).

Micro-segregation processes and educational inequalities: an old story in a new context

School segregation refers to the unequal distribution of students among schools based on inequalities and in relation to socioeconomic, ethnic or other characteristics (Ball, 2003; Boterman et al., 2019). Differences in education systems and school choice mechanisms create diverse systems for reproducing inequalities. In this context, the presence of ethnic groups and lower socio-economic strata has implications, particularly for parental school choice (Vergou, 2017). In these processes, competition between schools and middle-class intervention strategies play an important role in school segregation, especially where the presence of different socio-ethnic groups (migrants, refugees, Roma) is more visible. In the case of schools located near Roma settlements and, more recently, refugee settlements, the tendency towards micro-segregation processes is more pronounced while interventions are implemented, especially in schools located on the periphery of school districts (Vergou, 2011, 2019).

In Greek cities, because of school districts based on area of residence and proximity, children from a given area are enrolled in

the school closest to where they live. Enrolment is linked to the school district, which essentially reflects the local environment and neighbourhood (ethnic and socio-economic composition). In the Greek context, and especially in small and medium cities, the placement of refugees in large, camp-like structures with low housing standards, mainly in areas outside cities, provides ground not only for social exclusion but also for de facto school segregation (Vergou, 2019).

Housing plays a key role as a prerequisite for participation in society, as a resource for well-being, for the establishment of social relationships and a strong sense of belonging, particularly for asylum seekers without full access to the labour market, for family members without work permits, and for those entitled to state social benefits. The housing system for refugees, especially after the end of ESTA II, led to the displacement of refugees from the cities centre and the concentration of the population in accommodation centres (camps), mainly outside the urban fabric. This had a further impact on their educational segregation, as specific schools were selected in the periphery of the cities, mainly in working-class areas, reinforcing the existing socio-spatial segregation of disadvantaged groups excluded from the urban fabric. Refugees residential and school segregation influenced by both the specific design of the education system (reception classes and separate classes in specific schools, mainly in working class areas of the cities) and the structure of housing provision (refugee camps).

In this context, we found that in the case of refugee education, pre-existing educational inequalities and divisions are reproduced. More specifically, the main sites of refugee education are again schools that have received Roma and working-class pupils. These areas are mainly working-class neighbourhoods where special reception classes have been set up in schools for newly arrived refugees. In the case of the two cities, we've observed that refugee pupils from the camps attend schools located on the periphery of the cities, while after the end of the ESTIA reception program in December of 2022, the few refugees who lived in apartments and attend-

ed schools located in the centre of the cities, in mixed neighbour-hoods, were forced to move to the camps and therefore enrolled in peripheral schools with more homogeneous population. In this case, the socio-spatial divisions in urban areas are reproduced through a system of academic selectivity, a system that de facto excludes refugees from schools located in mixed neighbourhoods and in the city centre, where the middle classes reside. The system of academic selectivity reflects the socio-spatial division of school education in urban areas, especially in neighbourhoods where the presence of different socio-ethnic groups (migrants, refugees, Roma) is more visible (Vergou 2011).

Furthermore, neighbourhoods and schools become the problem rather than the expression of structural and institutional causes of urban inequality and marginality. In such spatial contexts, the state, at national and local level, fails "to equalize life conditions and strategies across places" and spatial processes appear self-generated or self-evident (Waquant, 2008: 284). In our case studies, we found that specific educational decisions regarding the location of reception classes, lack of funding and regular teaching staff, etc.- as well as the reproduction of socio-spatial divisions in cities and processes of micro-segregation, are issues that need to be addressed. Given the role of the housing system in social reproduction and social mobility, it is necessary to rethink the way in which the social-spatial processes of segregation are reproduced in the Greek cities. Since education is the main factor in social mobility and the reproduction of upper and middle class privileges, schools are the main terrain of urban conflicts. Specific decisions in local education policies can therefore easily come into conflict with local integration and diversity policies. However, social mixing is not an alternative to segregation, because even when social mixing is achieved at the neighbourhood level, socio-spatial hierarchies are reconstituted at the micro-spatial level. Schools are the arena of these conflicts. Socio-spatial proximity does not guarantee the creation of a supportive community (Blockland and van Eijk, 2010; Andreotti *et al.*, 2013). The integration of different social groups in mixed neighbourhoods does

not necessarily imply social networking and social inclusion. School segregation strategies of higher and middle classes reinforce social differences, such as the avoidance of local public schools (Van Zanten, 2001), the controlling of student's compositions in classes and school catchment areas (Vergou, 2011) or choosing private schools in affluent neighbourhoods (Maloutas, 2007).

Analysing the mechanism of school selectivity (Figure 1), in the centre of the system there is a high proportion of pupils from disadvantaged groups which leads some pupils, usually privileged, to avoid the local school. The presence in the schools of a correspondingly high number of underprivileged pupils (working class; Roma; asylum seekers; immigrants) reinforces the avoidance of local schools. The frequency of avoidance practices also interacts with the local heterogeneity of the area. On the one hand, avoidance of the local school spreads a certain negative image of the area, and on the other hand it increases social heterogeneity and competition between schools. The preference of middle-class parents for the 'good' school also suggests a kind of 'domination' of the school and, indirectly, interference in its functioning. The degree of segregation increases when avoidance is directed not towards another public school but towards a private one (Vergou, 2015). Nevertheless, according to Francois (2002 :325), academic selectivity cannot be explained only as a result of local diversity and school supply, but as a possible process of urban mentality created in urban areas. Moreover, it is a characteristic of the middle classes in their attempt to maintain their social position through social contact with 'peers'. It is not surprising, however, that the working classes adopt the same educational strategies in order to achieve social mobility and to move up the social hierarchy.

Figure 1: Processes of school selectivity and avoidance
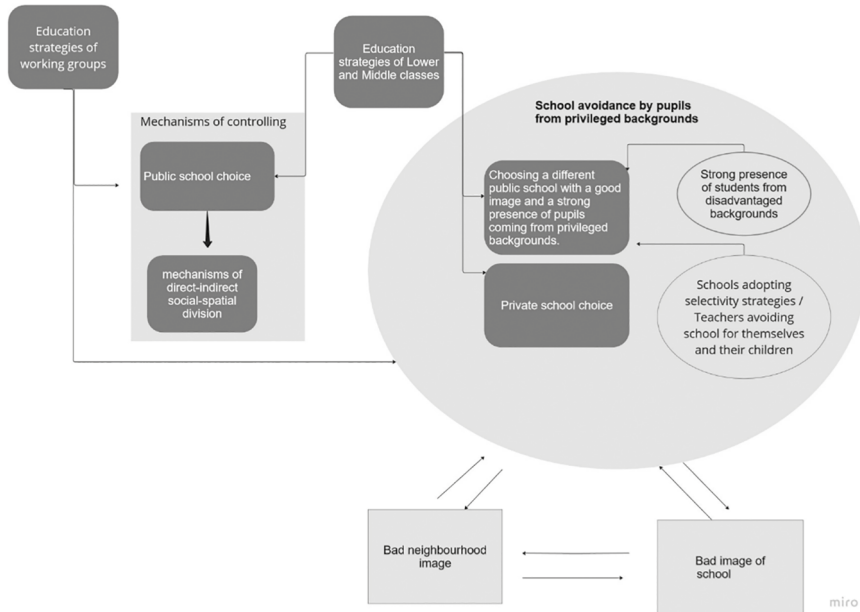
Source: Compiled by the author, adapted from Francois (2002:20)

In the case of refugee children, their school choice was an outcome of institutional decisions of the local authorities in relation to their accommodation. Furthermore, the establishment of the reception classes was a prosses where local educational directors of schools and the Departments of Education of the region, agreed for the establishment of the reception classes in certain schools, and then they proposed it to the Ministry of Education. In many cases, especially in academic years of 2016 until 2019, there were many objections by the teachers and local authorities to accept refugees in schools, bringing certain administrative obstacle, such as: lack of legal documents; overcrowded classes; lack of extra buildings in order to avoid enrol refugee and lead them to neighbouring schools (Stergiou & Simopoulos 2019).

According to our research, in the first city (Larisa), the refugee pupils from the Koutsohero camp who were enrolled in a school in the city are concentrated in the western part of the city, in a lower working class neighbourhood. The choice of the specific school was a decision of the local education authorities. They used criteria such as: bus accessibility; proximity to the Koutsohero camp; and security issues, to impose specific constraints that prevent their enrolment in schools in the city centre. The selection of these schools is a 'technical' intervention and policy on the part of local authorities and schools. In fact, it was often found that these special school selections may be due to the refusal of neighbouring communities or schools to accept pupils from the camp. For example, in the case of the second case study, the city of Volos, at the beginning of the refugee flows (2016), there was a refusal of the neighbouring communities to accept children from the camp (Vergou, 2019). The evacuation of the Koutsohero camp in Larisa in September 2023, to accommodate people whose houses were destroyed by the major floods in the region of Thessaly, once again led to the evacuation and relocation of refugees to other camps, one of which was the Volos camp (efsyn.gr, 2023). The refugee children were again forced to leave their schools and move to other towns and some to Volos (the camp was reopened after a short period of closure). In the city of Volos, the children were enrolled in a public school on the outskirts of the city, in a working-class area where Roma pupils were also enrolled.

Conclusions

Understanding the link between residential segregation and school segregation is essential for further understanding the mechanisms that generate socio-spatial inequalities, and the role of education in their reproduction. School segregation is linked to the spatial distribution of ethnic minorities and socio-economic groups in the urban fabric (Boterman, 2018; Burgess et al., 2005).

Refugees in the interviews claimed to make connections through their children (at school or in sports). Micro-publics seem to enhance people's ability to negotiate diversity and interact with each other on an equal basis (Amin, 2002; Hanhörster and WecK, 2020). From the above, we can see the important role of schooling in social inclusion and networking within the city, and thus residence within the city.

Considering Thomas Piketty's words (2022: 9) that 'inequality is first and foremost a social, historical and political construction', and paraphrasing his words somewhat, we could say that local state actors are key actors in shaping and mediating the (re)production of poverty landscapes. At the same time, to understand spatial inequality, we need to consider how the symbolic discrediting of space is (re)produced and how it operates through the concept of stigma.

Loic Wacquant (2008) speaks for places perceived as 'urban purgatories' and the shame of living in a 'bad place', which is attached to individual identity and can become a permanent feature between contacts with outsiders. Some parts of the cities suffer from a negative reputation. These urban manifestations are often working-class areas, with the presence of other vulnerable groups (e.g. Roma, refugees, migrants), strong presence of the welfare state (workers' housing, church charities), association with deviant behaviour (e.g. drugs, theft) and also high levels of unemployment and invisible poverty. The contradiction between integration policies, which tend to focus on accommodation and ignore other social inclusion needs, and the fragmentation of social inclusion policies may lead to various inequalities and exclusions, especially after the gradual forced withdrawal of refugees from the ESTIAS II program, reinforcing phenomena of stigmatization and marginalization.

Finally, we believe that social inclusion is not only about newcomers, but also about the host society itself. The two-dimensional integration model (Phillimore, 2020, Phillimore et. all. 2021) allows better understanding of host society opportunity structures and the way central state policies influence local arrangements. At the same

time, municipalities can play an important role in policies, using the experience of refugee housing programs and innovative local actions (Arapoglou and Gounis, 2017; Arapoglou et al. 2019; Maloutas et all. 2020) as a basis for designing a broader social housing program.

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