Migrating in small- and medium-sized towns. Experiences, challenges, perspectives for participation.

Proceedings of the mid-term PISTE Conference, Thessaloniki, 13-14/03/2023

Edited by **Athanasia Andriopoulou**

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EXPERIENCES, CHALLENGES, PERSPECTIVES FOR PARTICIPATION

PROCEEDINGS OF THE MID-TERM PISTE CONFERENCE, THESSALONIKI, 13-14/03/2023

PISTE (Participation in Small- and Medium-Sized Towns: Experiences, Exchanges, Experiments)

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Introduction

Athanasia Andriopoulou (University of Urbino "Carlo Bo")

The primary goal set by the Scientific and Policy Conference "Migrating in small- and medium-sized towns: experiences challenges and perspectives for participation" (Thessaloniki, March 2023) was to collect ideas and knowledge of academic and non-academic experts on the topics covered by the AMIF PISTE project. Since its launching (February 2023), the PISTE project has put in the spotlight decisionmakers together with their local communities and migrants' associations with a twofold objective: to shed light on challenges and opportunities for closer collaboration in the decision-making processes at the local level, and co-create, experiment, and ultimately establish locally viable models and practices for migrants' civic and political participation. From that perspective, the Conference served as a hub for expanding research results through the knowledge gained from experienced models and practices of governance for integrating migrants in SMTs.

The Conference was met with vivid participation and reached a mixed array of attending audiences composed of scholars, local policymakers and administrators, and stakeholder representatives. Consistent with the PISTE project goals, the 'call for papers' of the Conference addressed the expressed need to discuss matters related to the dynamics of incorporation of migrants in SMTs from a legal-political, civic, cultural, and spatial point of view. At the same time, the Conference offered a space to share concerns and solutions related to socio-anthropological aspects involving the developing relationship between migrant groups and native populations in SMTs.

The aftermath of the Conference proved that the targeted goals were met while confirming the renewed scientific interest at

the local policy levels. Indeed, spatial patterns and social processes of migrants in cities have been studied widely across various disciplines and with various approaches, methodologies, and data sources. While academic-theoretical and philosophical-conceptual discussions on integration and social-civic-political participation have exponentially refined their analytical power, attention to multi-level governance and the local settings has only recently been raised (Sassen, 1991; Garcés-Mascareñas, Penninx 2016; Filomeno 2017; Richard, Victor, 2003; FitzGerald, 2015).

The local level represents a distinct policy strategy and a peculiar governance level. However, it is also where diversity is concretely experienced, and social identification occurs firsthand. Evidence-based research and academic literature agree that the increased presence of migrants in SMTs, prompted in recent years by the rise of inflows and mobility of migrants within the EU, implied a revived interest in integration policies at the local level, thus establishing various streams of scholarship on the so-called 'local turn' (Caponio 2014; Zapata-Barrero et all. 2017).

When the focus moves on empirical evidence from SMTs hosting migrants, we may ask how local economic, cultural, and social conditions impact SMTs' incorporation chances. In this respect, SMTs are also the space where inequalities, stereotypes, social conflicts and discrimination prima facie may be experienced and, from there, be (re-)produced and expanded (Borkert, Caponio, 2010)

With the concerns above, studies suggest that the traditional 'top-down' policymaking model appears increasingly ineffective in many EU countries. While the national framework may provide for some fundamental values and principles meant to orient local initiatives and actions, the spatial dimension is vital, as practical migrants' needs and related policy answers may differ significantly from those proposed at the national level. Different solutions need to be identified and implemented: strategies and solutions still framed at the national level may be disconnected from both the spatial patterns of

migrant presence and from the local socio-economic capacity. Consequently, the role of local authorities, policymakers and stakeholders in the governance of migrant integration policies has increased. (Entzinger, Scholten, 2014)

Against this background, the project PISTE started in February 2022, investigates and promotes civic and political participatory practices to be tested in four European SMTs (in Italy, Greece, Belgium, and Germany) as innovative (or renewed) paths that lead to better incorporation processes for migrants, and local integration as a whole. With a Consortium formed by academic and non-academic partners (thus including four Municipalities as partners and case studies), PISTE intends to connect research to local contexts to make an impact with applied research translated into tailored policy experiments.

Within the broader spectrum of integration policies, trending in the academic realm, we found that the grounds of analysis on the 'political participation' of migrants (intended both as an endpoint where integration culminates and as a method leading to better incorporation) were barely explored in the examined PISTE case studies. The focus was set on a substantial variety of explorable settings: the local needs assessment and the responses mapped from the local stakeholders (public, non-public, civic society and networks, migrants), but also on the level of awareness and involvement of the local policymakers and the public administrators, on the existing policy and legal framework, on good practices performed, on the obstacles and the unmapped opportunities on site. When invited to come into the spotlight, the reaction of the local stakeholders is overall positive. PISTE confirmed that the local dimension, while affected by the asymmetric distribution of resources and often limited in specialised knowledge and human capital, is still the critical playground for expressing migrants' incorporation and participation stances, and it is also the level where policy experimentations and innovations can be accomplished. PISTE results reiterate the vital need for establishing active, intergenerational and intersectional local networks, the necessity for promoting and acknowledging self-organisation pat-

terns among migrants' communities and providing for methods that enable the emerging of bridging figures between institutional and non-institutional actors and spaces, such that can convey the variety of group-specific needs while building mutual trust (Schillebeeck et al. 2023; Schenkel 2023).

The Conference participants further contributed to knowledge on SMTs and integration processes by sharing more fascinating approaches to policymaking and research results, some of which are re-grouped and subdivided into thematic sections.

The first thematic area includes contributions about **'socio-economic dynamics and experiences' in SMTs**; the second area examines **'policy challenges' and related spatial issues emerging in SMTs**; last but not least, the third scrutinises the **experiences of SMTs policy actors, their perspectives and acquired knowledge**.

In detail, within the first area, Groen, Nijhoff, and Giesen's contribution (The Hague University of Applied Science, The Netherlands) discuss how SMTs and businesses deal with EU Mobile Citizens. With the EU labour market as the focus area, the authors conducted interviews with eleven SMTs in Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands, Ireland, Poland, and Spain, considering the challenges for employment for EU Mobile Citizens (mainly regarding low-skilled and low-paid jobs), housing, health care and working conditions. Municipalities are at the centre of the analysis due to the lack of consolidated registration procedures, which often hinder the actual numbers of workers in particular labour sectors (agriculture, transport, construction, meat industry and logistics). Also, spatial isolation SMTs often experience -- due to limited communication networks -- is an issue. The conclusions of this paper suggest further action research is needed, aimed at establishing collaborations to impact local policies, thus inviting local and regional authorities to play a role.

Krasteva (Policy and Citizens' Observatory: Migration, Digitalisation, Climate, Bulgaria) investigated the socio-economic dynamics

in a small town in the Bulgarian-Turkish-Greek borders. This spatial focus was prompted by the recent abrupt transition from a non-migration place into a migration destination. The case is examined thoroughly from three different standpoints: from the point of view of the temporality-migration nexus, from the perspective of the socio-political crises related to migration as a new socio-political factor, and from the point of view of the relations between migration and populist trends ('populist-securitarian crisis'). The contribution also analyses how the securitarian turn may determine new forms or 'acts of' (Isin) 'local citizenship.' It compares this approach with other models of 'local citizenship,' such as the 'performative' (Barbera) and the 'solidary' citizenship (or, as Krasteva defines it, 'contestatory'). The rise of actors and of 'acts of citizenship' appears consistent with the theories developed in 'place-practices' when confronted with certain practices occurring at the local level ('spiral of development', 'volunteering', 'innovative intercultural education'). Ultimately, the contribution identifies a model method for countering populist securitisation and politicisation of migration while involving different actors – locals and migrants – in practices for constructing the 'place' and re-creating the local identity.

Tservenis (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece) shares results from his comparative research on the impact of different destinations on migrants' incorporation processes. His approach combines objective (general spatial indicators) and subjective (self-perception) elements of analysis. The contribution takes 'integration' as a composite phenomenon that responds to socio-economic terms and considers the 'place of living' in terms and characteristics related to urban and rural spatial typologies, as these emerge in two different countries (case studies were the islands of Crete and Sardinia). Based on survey data and interviews (2019-2020), this research shows that the interplay between the place of settlement and the well-being of migrants (objective terms) was not significantly different in the two areas. On the contrary, the perceptions of migrant incorporation (subjective elements) in rural areas were far from homogeneous in various domains such as employment, housing, financial

conditions, and the attitudes of the local society towards migration across the various rural typologies examined (intermediate, remote, coastal) presented important differentiations as well. Tservenis's contribution calls for better use of existing data in the view of future research on comparable and timely quantitative evidence at the municipality level that would allow for a more geographically precise and richer analysis of migrant integration in rural areas of the EU Member States. Tservenis suggests exploring the possible input of artificial intelligence software to generate meaningful matching between the structural features of the host rural settlements on the one hand and migrants' skills, capabilities, needs and aspirations on the other. Combining the two parameters would optimise the choices and opportunities upon initial settlements and places with long-term incorporation prospects.

Vergou (The University of Thessaly, Greece) investigates recent reforms in Greek migration policy, affecting patterns and "processes of micro-segregation and refugee school education" in SMTs in Greece. The paper proposes a reflection on the link between education and urban marginalisation in the Southern EU as one of the most critical and controversial urban conditions for incorporating migrants. Beyond the need for new forms of local governance, the effects of cuts in welfare provision and the new regulatory powers to municipalities in Greece are expected to produce broader socio-economic and political differentiations at the local level, intensifying the existing inequality conditions. The analysis calls for the local actors to shape policies that mediate the poverty landscapes and play a role in innovating actions towards including the migrants' vulnerabilities (i.e., especially those placed in reception centres) to boost equality. In-depth interviews and focus groups with refugees and local actors contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of social-spatial diversity and vulnerability in SMTs. The analysis includes educational policies' implementation challenges by local actors (municipalities, local educational administrators, teachers) combined with structural-geographical elements. To be able to examine social vulnerability and ethnic segregation patterns and their

links to SMTs in terms of socio-economic conditions, the paper concludes that cities need to be analysed beyond the national-regional governance frames and use the lenses of the supralocal political-economic conditions, as they impact the spatial divisions of labour, the socio-economic flows to the cities, as much as the adopted methods for school distribution.

The second section focuses on 'policy challenges'. Gilli (Università degli Studi di Torino, Italy), Lucchini (Università eCampus, Italy), and Membretti (University of the Free State, South Africa) present results from the MATILDE Project in the Italian Alps. Data collected through qualitative analysis and action research confirm that migrants' multifaceted interaction with local structures and places has a significant weight on the inclusion-exclusion processes and significantly impacts the definition of migrants' agency. Socio-economic and labour integration of migrants are not considered endpoints of the process and are insufficient to establish migrants' level of 'real participation in the social life of local communities'. The authors stress the need for new policy tools that consider the local community as a whole while focusing on public spaces and shared care practices for the territory. Suggestions regarding the migrants' diversified 'agency' in the integration process are intended as a temporally embedded social engagement technique. In this perspective, the municipality of Bussoleno (5,806 inhabitants at the end of Susa Valley, about 30 km from Turin), with a long history of welcoming international migrants, was the focal point of an experimental investigation, which involved first and second-generation migrants and employed the role of the public spaces in engaging local actors and residents in action-research participatory activities. The latter focused on self-perceptions and ways of living concerning the mountain territory and the connections to the metropolitan core. Results show that the 'space-making process' becomes a 'sense-making process': when involved, migrants desire and actively engage in the co-creation of shared use of public spaces, attributing to the 'place' a key role for social cohesion, belonging and recognition, especially in small, mountainous and rural areas.

Pettrachin's (Collegio Carlo Alberto, Italy) contribution focuses on policy challenges for SMTs, drawing from the WHOLE-COMM H2020 research project results. This project investigates asylum-seekers and refugees' incorporation in 36 SMTs and rural areas across 7 EU countries. Enquiring factors hindering or favouring good practices in SMTs' local integration policy, the Author focuses on three governance factors that prevent policy learning in small localities. The first factor identified is isolation. Second is institutional communication and networking regarding the need for more policy discussions between local governments on immigrant integration. Third, capacity and knowledge, in terms of sources of information local officials and policymakers can access. On the side of the 'enabling factors' contributing to policy learning, results point to competent local figures (officials or bureaucrats) formally assigned with a mandate on integration or to the self-responsibilisation of local policymakers. Interestingly, this paper also highlights how the low local salience attributed to immigration issues may facilitate policy implementation and may contrast the growing local political contestation on immigrant integration policies.

Schenkel, Messerschmidt, Glöckner, Großmann (University of Applied Sciences, Erfurt, Germany), partners of the PISTE project, focused on the case of the small German town of Bebra, characterised by a long migration history. Their focus is on factors influencing migrant political engagement in SMTs. More specifically, institutional, socio-economic, and discursive dynamics in SMTs significantly contribute to shaping political participation, while social networks, migrant self-organisations, and local governance structures also play a role. SMTs face specific challenges, often related to limited resources, a high degree of political and administrative embeddedness, and limited strategic orientation. As the authors note, the effects associated with the local institutional framework depend partly on the level of proactivity of the local actors and partly on the representations of needs and structural conditions that trickle down in the design of migration policy. The case of Bebra is characterised by a critical urban transformation -- suburbanisation and social-spatial segre-

gation – that produces spatial disparities. Policies seem unable to affect this trend. Despite consolidated actions on migration (from social networks to migrant self-organisation and municipal services), barriers still exist. Marginalisation and multiple disadvantages (e.g., affecting women) may hinder participation and impede voice. In conclusion, SMTs like Bebra need arenas for conflict negotiation and management via innovative low-threshold measures to strengthen migrant political participation.

Wierzbicka (University of Zielona Góra, Institute of Architecture and Urban Planning, Poland) reviews the role of small cities in the spatial reception of Ukrainian refugees in Poland, introducing the application of GIS tools for mapping existing settlement patterns at different urban scales. This paper problematises the challenges SMTs face in the reception system. SMTs appear organisationally crucial in determining conditions influencing settlement patterns. In the specific case study of Karpacz, a mountainous small and touristic city of around 6000 inhabitants, Wierzbicka shows a stunning, networked local capacity to welcome refugees – higher than most other locales in relative terms. The research suggests that SMTs like Karpacz may function independently from the major cities' destinations and further develop their reception network based on neighbouring small towns in ways fitter to local characteristics.

Wyckaert, Leinfelder, and De Decker (P.PUL research group, KU Leuven) focus on the Flemish local migration governance and the implementation of integration policies in SMTs. Integration policy passes through specific policy areas (education, labour market, and housing) and through 'social participation' (social contacts and membership of associations); hence, participation should be considered as the result of interactions between individuals and institutions (and the host society as a whole). Therefore, increasing participation entails individual empowerment and improving the accessibility of services and facilities. Starting from the consideration that "the spatial dimension of the society and the actual functioning of newcomers in a spatial context, as part of their 'spatial capital' are

given little consideration in the design and implementation of integration policies", their research considers the circumstances regarding dispersed urban-rural sites and the differentiated experiences migrants have in their daily routines. The authors aim to explain why local policymakers struggle to meet the needs of such differentiated and dispersed settled migrants. As an outcome, spatially uneven distribution and asymmetric accessibility of services for newcomers translate into internal mobility to access opportunities that ultimately increase challenges for local policymakers. Spatial fragmentation also extends to the use of public space and the opportunities given for equal participation of newcomers at the local level in synergy with planning policies. In short, this research concludes that "integration policies must go hand in hand not only with other social policies but also spatial and housing policies".

The third section gives voice and collects the experiences of local policymakers. Ascquasciati and Priano (Municipality of Fontanigorda, Italy) focus on policymaking in two small towns in the north-western Italian Apennines (Municipalities of Fontanigorda and Rovegno, Liguria Region) and discuss policy innovations and socio-economic future perspectives. While the geographical and social context is quite challenging (isolation from other towns and critical services; depopulation and lack of opportunities), since 2015, the two municipalities launched new actions by getting involved in the National Strategy for Inner Areas and establishing a reception centre for asylum seekers and refugees (2018). As the authors refer, this political choice was not without consequences: it undoubtedly challenged the local community at first, matched with technical-practical implementation challenges: not only did the local community face newcomers with suspicion, but the local administration was understaffed, lacking in expertise and specialised knowledge while having to address issues related to the geographical remoteness. Despite these challenges, this choice turned instead into a great opportunity: synergies were initiated by experimenting with innovative practices and methods (e-learning and e-training), which led to re-discover, reconverting and re-use local facilities, launching creative enterpris-

es to solve longstanding problems, and ultimately attracting more funding to initiate new projects. The overall benefit was remarkable for the community in demographic terms and for gradually establishing services and providing new hope for the entire area. As the authors describe it, there has been a "role reversal: the beneficiary of the reception becomes the provider of services, for and with the local community".

Andriopoulou (University of Urbino, Italy) and Kalliaras (Advisor to the Mayor, Municipality of Trikala, Greece) conclude the proceedings with a contribution to the Greek context of the Trikala Municipality, known for its innovative approach to the reception and integration of migrants amidst the Greek refugee crisis. Indeed, the SMTs in central Greece implemented locally-based strategies, focusing on addressing needs beyond primary access to essential services, including integration policies. In the experience of the Municipality of Trikala, it has been primarily the initiative of the local authorities to have determined a shift in local migration policies: a tailored strategy that included the collaboration with liaison experts deployed by the ICMC (International Catholic Migration Commission) and coordinating with the UN Refugee Agency and the Greek government, played a significant role in putting in place locally relevant actions and measures that support integration. Policy objectives aligned to the various governance levels and the different reception spaces. Capacity-building went hand-in-hand with innovation and reconfiguration of the existing local systems to meet the specific needs of the recipients while launching networking with the national and supranational communities of practice, such as the Cities Network for Integration. The case of Trikala carries proof that reception, integration and participation of migrants is possible when the political will meets local-supralocal synergies.

In conclusion, the PISTE mid-term Conference worked as a 'policy hub' where aggregated results and experimented practices and models were distilled in 'practicable pills', renovating views and hopes for a better local governance of migration and integration.

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SECTION 1

MIGRATING IN SMALL- AND MEDIUM-SIZED TOWNS: SOCIO-ECONOMIC DYNAMICS AND EXPERIENCES

EU Mobile Citizens: Challenges and successes. How small to medium-sized towns and businesses deal with EU Mobile Citizens

Rosa S. Groen (The Hague University of Applied Science),
Karijn Nijhoff (The Hague University of Applied Science),
Gijs Giesen (The Hague University of Applied Science)[1]

ABSTRACT

For many EU citizens, working across the border is the only way to make a living in the EU. The battle for cheap labour has now become a well-oiled machine, in which almost all Western European countries participate. Nevertheless, the employment situation of EU Mobile Citizens, workers of low-skilled and -paid jobs, is often substandard. Challenges are housing, health care and working conditions. In addition, due to the lack of registration in municipalities, it is impossible to have an overview of the numbers and to offer effective help. This is a problem in small to medium-sized cities, where many workers live to work in agriculture, transport, construction, meat industry and logistics. For this study, 32 interviews were conducted in eleven small to medium-sized towns (SMSTs) in Sweden, Germany,

the Netherlands, Ireland, Poland, and Spain. The study uses three different perspectives: EU representatives of participating regions, municipalities, and employers. The outcomes show that most SMSTs deal with a shortage of housing, and a lack of grip on the registration process of EU citizens. Although there are some success stories, most SMSTs are not in touch with each other to share these. The paper concludes with proposals for further action-research and collaborations to impact local policies.

Introduction

The European Union, with free movement of people, has created a unique context for mobility and migration. An important part of the economies has benefitted from labour flows in the EU. Internal EU migrant populations are not equally distributed over the member states: some member states compete to attract labour migrants; in sending countries there is the desire to avoid losing part of their working age population. A social and healthy interregional EU-labour migration requires a balance between the interests of 'influx' and 'outflux' regions; regions that attract a lot of non-domestic EU labour force and regions that see a lot of their labour force leave. At the same time, it requires attention for the specific need of a volatile group of EU-citizens engaging in low- to medium-skilled labour.

Local and regional authorities play a role in preventing issues that arise from the EU's free movement of labour for citizens and in fellow regions. A better mutual understanding and use of policy instruments can help regions in offering a just, social, and economically viable practice of free movement of labour to 'mobile' citizens as well as their 'domestic' citizens. EU citizens (as migrant workers) are not always treated equally; and often they are unaware of their (labour) rights. One example arose from the COVID-crisis where issues of problematic access to healthcare for intra-EU labour mi-

grants were enlarged. 'Vital profession' workers in for example the food industry did not get vaccinated due to lack of knowledge, lack of access, and misinformation about vaccinations. Another example stems from housing and employment of temporary migrants. When labour migrants change jobs or become unemployed, they can end up on the street as housing and employment is often linked. *Some of the issues for regional authorities associated with low- to medium-skilled EU mobile citizens are* a) In 'outflux' regions: lack of official (legal) information in the right languages, depopulation, shortage of labour, brain drain, re-immigration. And b) In 'influx' regions: lack of official (legal) information in the right languages, housing, access to healthcare, access to labour rights, socio-political integration/representation in the community, re-migration.

In small to medium-sized towns where much of the vital workplaces of internal EU labour migrants are situated, such as transport, logistics, agriculture, the meat industry, and repositories, these issues are even more pressing. In rural areas the capacity to receive new inhabitants is limited. The pressure on the community and resources is larger than in bigger cities. Additionally, local resistance for newcomers is more present and populations are less diverse than in cities. Intra-EU migrants, as citizens of the European Union, can move and migrate within the borders of the EU without many restrictions. Mobility is only facilitated by the EU through opening borders and eliminating restrictions. There is little active support from EU institutions for intra-EU migrants. After they move, they are not entitled to extra support or information in the countries of destination. They are not part of integration policies of receiving societies, and they do not receive support from other institutions upon arrival. On the contrary, their arrival may not even be noticed as they do not need to apply for work permits or visas.

Municipalities are bearing direct responsibility for issues such as registration, housing, and social inclusion, whereas the employer is responsible for healthcare and employment conditions (City of Amsterdam 2016). Problematically, it is still unclear what bottlenecks

small to medium-sized cities and employers experience when it comes to EU regulation for EU Mobile Citizens. Due to the pandemic, employment conditions of workers in agriculture, logistics and food industries have peeked above the radar (Kremer 2020). The protection of EU Mobile citizens has become top on the list of several taskforces. These sectors are 'vital' and must become more 'Covid-proof', for example by introducing a 'better work' strategy (Kremer 2020, EU2020 2020). At a local level, this means that, for instance, the Polish construction workers, Romanian potato planters, and Latvian fruit pickers do not have a stable position. Their problems are legion, e.g., housing, working conditions, or health care. There are different challenges in each field. This paper is about housing and registration of EU Mobile Citizens in small to medium-sized cities (SMSTs).

In January 2023, about 250 students of the European Studies programme at The Hague University of Applied Sciences and the research team have conducted a study about the local situation in eleven towns across Europe. The towns are all SMSTs and located in Ireland, Sweden, the Netherlands, Germany, and Spain. Later, the research team conducted interviews in Poland.[2] The students interviewed three partners in each town: a local policymaker, a business working with EU Mobile Citizens, and the representative of the region in Brussels (only the first two in Poland). The specifics of the questions were about housing and registration.

Theoretical perspectives

With the Urban Agenda for the EU, an initiative that started during the Dutch European Union Presidency in 2016, the cities'

2   The participating towns are in Spain - Murcia (Murcia), Guissona (Catalunya), La Palma de Condado (Andalucia) - Sindelfingen (Region Stuttgart, Germany), Varberg (Halland, Sweden), Cork (being a bit bigger than a SMST) (Munster, Ireland), Kielce (Poland), and municipalities in the Netherlands: Westland (South-Holland), Waalwijk and Moerdijk (Noord-Brabant), Peel en Maas (Limburg), Hollands Kroon (North-Holland).

participation had started at the European level. In the field of city diplomacy, where cities lobby to make changes in European public policies, the role of the small to medium-sized city is often neglected. Especially cities or towns that are not represented in Brussels often do not have a voice in the shaping of EU policies (Demirtas 2023). Local governments that design policies concerning underrepresented groups are often even further removed from the EU level, for two main reason. Firstly, there are less resources in smaller towns in rural areas. Secondly, the problems with underrepresented groups such as mobile EU citizens are very local. Although one could argue that this is a transnational and European problem, the housing, care, registration, and working conditions of workers takes place at distribution centres, big companies, in horticulture stations, and other places.

This paper focuses on three different conceptual angles: the European frame, the local regional policy frame towards EU Mobile Citizens, and the business or (temporary) employers' frame. These three conceptual frames have contrasting viewpoints and focus on different aspects of the treatment of EU Mobile Citizens. The first frame, the European frame, highlights literature and policy documents on how the EU Mobile Citizens should be treated according to EU rights and the European Pillar of Social Rights. The European Commission has started the European Works Councils Directive, derived from the European Pillar of Social Rights. That EU citizenship and mobility is a difficult combination is evident (Siklodi 2020). This highlights the importance of social dialogue and the involvement of workers. The second frame, the local economic development frame, looks at how policymakers deal with EU Mobile Citizens 'on the ground'. What are the local policies to improve their situation, and what challenges are still evidently present? The third frame focuses on the business level. Businesses are often dependent on EU Mobile Citizens and for temporary employment agencies, these workers are paramount. How they are treated, housed, and cared for, however, is often not their top priority.

Methodology

In January 2023, ten classes of first-year students at the European Studies programme of The Hague University of Applied Sciences conducted semi-structured interviews in ten different towns in Europe. As mentioned, the classes were divided into three groups, focusing on three different interviewees: a European representative in Brussels of their region, a local policymaker, and a temporary working agency or business in the town. The students were trained to do an online interview and reported back to the research team with strict guidelines, informing the team about the town, the number of EU Mobile Citizens the policies in place, and the challenges and successes the interviewee dealt with when dealing with EU Mobile Citizens. Before the students started their study, many different actors were interviewed and invited to lecture in front of the students. Organizations that collaborated on this were the NGO Fairwork, the Polish interest group Barka, Tilburg University (in tandem with *Kenniscentrum Arbeidsmigranten*), the Association of Dutch Municipalities (VNG), VNG Europe (the Brussels department of that Association), the temporary employment agency *Combivliet*, and two young European Union Mobile Citizens from Spain and Poland. Also, the cities of Amsterdam, The Hague, and Rotterdam were consulted, as well as the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. The 32 respondents in the towns and in Brussels were consulted as well, so they were ready for the student interviews.

The questionnaire was divided into six parts, where students needed to ask general information about the interview and the interviewee, about EU Mobile Citizens, the registration, housing, challenges, and successes. For the businesses and temporary working agencies, there was an extra section about the interaction with the municipality.

In their reports, the students needed to discuss the interview, and report on their desk research. First, the local situation needed to be described, as well as the professional profile of their respondent.

Afterwards, the number ad field of work of the EU Mobile Citizens was important, as well as the main challenges and successes of the local government and employer. For the Brussels regional representative, the relation between the town and European policies was more important. They needed to describe how the challenges of the local governments came to the fore, in the multi-level interest representation of the small to medium-sized towns (SMSTs). The interview data in excel formats and the student reports were used in this paper as material to make an overview of the ten towns and their struggles with EU Mobile Citizens. After their project, the research team conducted two additional interviews with the town of Kielce in Poland and the temporary working agency Randstad in Warsaw.

In total, 32 in-dept and semi-structured were conducted. These interviews were coded and analysed inductively. This means that all the gathered data was taken together, and then coded accordingly, with first open coding, then axial coding, and finally with a final code. This way, the material was used as a basis for the qualitative data analysis. The interview data was used in combination with document analysis of policy documents, websites, research reports, government reports, and requested insights into policymaking documents.

The cases in Western Europe were selected as follows. The first criterium was that the towns were small to medium-sized (5,000-500,000 inhabitants) (Campbell 2000). The second criterion was that the towns were familiar with the term and the group of EU mobile citizens. In collaboration with Eurotowns, the umbrella organisation for small to medium-sized towns in Europe, the three towns of Cork (Ireland), Varberg (Sweden), and Sindelfingen (Germany) were selected. Afterwards, the towns in Spain were selected after a visit at the Representation of Catalunya in Brussels. Finally, in consultation with the Association of Dutch Municipalities (VNG) four small to medium-sized towns were selected in the Netherlands. They were already working on improving the situation of EUMCs, so these were appropriate towns.

Results

The selected towns were very different in size and experience with EU Mobile Citizens. The following figure shows the localities and the number of EUMCs detected in the towns.

Figure 1. Selected cases and the number of EU Mobile Citizens (EUMCs) in Western Europe.
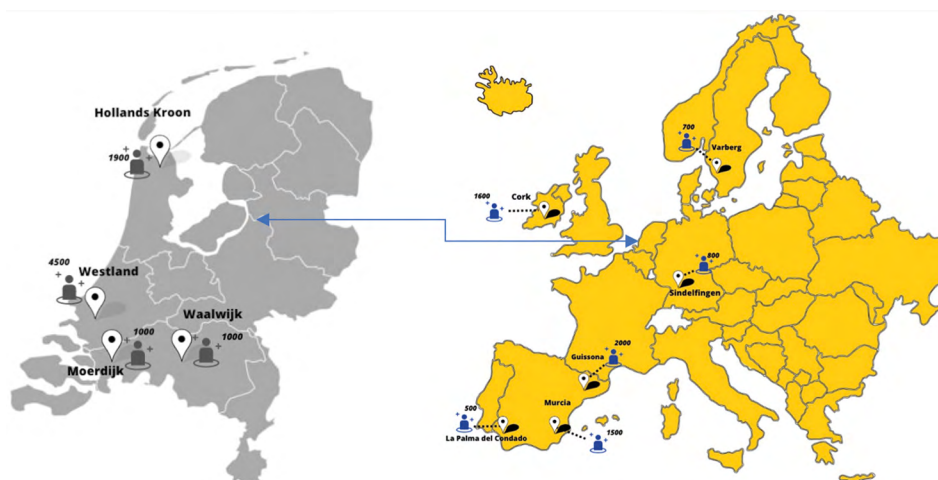
Source: Own calculations from qualitative data

The European perspective

Of the five policy objectives of the European Union (a smarter Europe, a greener Europe, a more social Europe, a more connected Europe, and a Europe closer to Citizens), this study fits most into the 'more social Europe' pillar. Within that pillar, the research team has focused on the effectiveness and inclusiveness of labour market, access to quality employment, and social economy. Within this policy objective, many European programmes have been designed, such

as 'Rights at work', 'Moving & working in Europe', 'Social protection & social inclusion', and 'Skills and qualifications'. The last part even resulted in the European Year of Skills 2023. This means that many funding programmes focus on the enhancements of skills needed for the Green Deal, the Digital transition and, in general, the improvement of people's aspirations and skills sets with opportunities on the job market (European Commission 2023).

The data from the interviews shows that the EU representatives in Brussels of the selected municipalities were often not aware of the problems of EU Mobile Citizens in their regions. The most pressing problems they did mention, were the availability of affordable and decent housing, and the significantly lower number of new workers and illegal renting (Hollands Kroon). Registration at a local level was also mentioned as an important issue in Cork City (Power 2022, Białek 2023). In Sindelfingen, Germany, the city had commissioned the Institute for Migration Research and Intercultural Studies at the University of Osnabrück (IMIS) to further develop its integration work. In North Brabant, the European representative mentioned the need of three measures. Firstly, at least 75.000 homes to be added annually in the Netherlands. Secondly, there needs to be a better division of affordable rental properties. Thirdly, the Dutch government needs to preserve affordable renting properties by maximizing property value (Van Unnik 2019). According to the Brussels representative of the Association of Dutch Municipalities (Vereniging Nederlandse Gemeenten, VNG), Labour Inspection should have a bigger role in blacklisting the temporary working agencies that are exploiting migrant workers. Also, the European Labour Authority (ELA) urged since 2021 for the awareness-raising campaign 'Rights for all seasons', calling attention to the need to promote fair and safe working conditions for seasonal workers employed across EU countries (European Labour Authority 2021).

According to the Spanish representative from Catalunya, it is not the regions, but the member states that should communicate with the European Commission. This is interesting, as the countries

show a great variety in how they approach regional issues at a European level. From Spain, for example, there ae 17 representatives in Brussels as the regions greatly differ as well in Spain. As this country is very decentralized, some laws will be differently interpreted from one region to another. For example, in Huelva, the *Ley de extranjería*, a law that allowed seasonal workers to have a one-year contract that is renewable and apply for a residence permit, was denied. Between 2000 and 2010, most people registering to work temporarily in Spain were going to Huelva in the strawberry sector, being almost exclusively females between 25 and 45 years old, coming from Romania and Poland. The agency started registering workers by discriminating criteria, choosing women that are divorced, with young children, and coming from very poor places, factors that in their view increase the rate of return (Indacochea and Bovia 2019: 1-14).

First and foremost, the problem of housing and better regulation and labour inspection was mentioned. In addition, the language barrier has been mentioned, especially in the Spanish departments in Brussels. Navigating the bureaucracy in registry for residence for example, has been mentioned as though. To register for a certificate as an EU citizen, which is needed after a three-month contract, the NIE (Foreign Identity Number), is difficult if you do not speak the language.

The local policy perspective

From a local perspective, there are some interesting differences between all studied municipalities. The smallest number of inhabitants was 7,435 (Guissona, Spain), and the largest was 222.333 (Cork, Ireland). Interestingly, the second largest number of EU Mobile Citizens was found in Guissona (3,027) as well, as opposed to 1,600 in Cork. The largest number of EU mobile citizens was found in Westland (4,500). In the following table, all the details are summarized:

Table 1. Demographic and political details about the small to medium-sized towns.

Municipality (country)	No. of inhabitants	Political representation	No. of EU Mobile Citizens	Represented in Brussel by
1. Sindelfingen (Germany)	64,151	Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU)	800	Baden-Württemberg
2. Hollands Kroon (the Netherlands)	48,583	Labour Party (PvdA)	1,900	North Holland
3. Waalwijk (the Netherlands)	48,815	Independent	1,000	North Brabant
4. Moerdijk (the Netherlands)	37,185	People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD)	1,000	North Brabant
5. Westland (the Netherlands)	111,382	Labour Party (PvdA)	4,500	South Holland
6. Cork (Ireland)	222,333	Liberal Conservative and Christian Democratic party of Ireland (Fine Gael)	1,600	Ireland
7. Guissona (Spain)	7,435	Independent	3,027	Catalunya
8. La Palma de Condado (Spain)	9,925	Independent	500	Andalusia
9. Murcia (Spain)	460,349	Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE)	1,500	Region of Murcia
10. Varberg (Sweden)	66,658	Independent	700	Southwest Sweden
11. Kielce (Poland)	197,724	Independent	110	Lesser Poland and Świętokrzyskie

Source: Own calculation from qualitative data

In the towns, the main problems the study focused on was housing and registration. This overview will start with housing, continue with registration issues, and then turn to the business and temporary agencies' perspectives.

Housing

In Germany, it is a pressing issue to find housing. Other stakeholders than the municipality can help to find housing, but it is mentioned as the most difficult as the competition in the real estate market is so high. The responsible stakeholders for housing, the town hall, and private and public stakeholders, have not found solutions yet.

In the four towns in the Netherlands, Hollands Kroon, Waalwijk, Moerdijk, and Westland, affordable and decent housing were the most pressing issues as well, even increasingly so. Especially in Westland, where the number of EU mobile citizens is the highest. In the Netherlands, the housing is more expensive than the EU mobile citizens can afford. The association for flexible living, *Stichting Normering Flexwonen* (SNF) is an association that made norms for housing, and employers take these rules seriously in Moerdijk.

In Ireland, Cork, there is a housing limitation due to the increasing building costs (Power 2022). Cork has around 210.000 citizens including the EU Mobile Citizens, but only 10.000 social housing units provided by the City Council. Unfortunately, this is not a lot and not enough since there are already around 4000 people on the waiting list to get a social housing unit.

In Spain, the three participating towns, Guissona, Murcia, and La Palma de Condado, different problems than housing were pressing. A big movement started in Andalusia, where 2000 women marched in the streets of Huelva to protest the constant abuse of female workers in the strawberry industry. In Guissona, there is a problem regarding to housing. The company that employs the most EU Mobile Citizens, Grupo Guissona, owns 350 units of housing for workers who just arrived, but there are as many as 4,000 jobs in the company. In Murcia, the increased competition for rental properties makes it difficult for EU citizens to secure a suitable home, too.

In Varberg, Sweden, there is a fluctuating number of EU Mobile Citizens, the workers are allocated to hospitality, tourism, agricultural sectors, and some work in the care industry. Due to the housing crisis, less and less people work and live in Varberg.

Kielce in Poland has some areas where people are hiring flats and houses. It is the market for that. It is not very problematic, but it needs money and some income.

In conclusion, the function, location, and quality of accommodation of EU Mobile Citizens form a problem much greater than foreseen. Spatial policies even tend to set a stage for potential conflict between foreign workers and residents (Ulceluse, Bock and Haartsen 2022).

Registration

The EU Mobile Citizens are, as they are citizens of the EU, not obliged to register in a new location. Nevertheless, in most EU countries, it is the case that temporary contracts end, people need to get registered in their new municipality after three or four months of work. In Sindelfingen, Germany, there is a sufficient system to register, and EU Mobile Citizens also get language and integration support.

The four towns in the Netherlands will have different registration rules. In Moerdijk, for example, the local company DSV makes an appointment with the government for each EU Mobile Citizen they employ. The duration time of the process differs per region in the Netherlands. In the south and east, it can take weeks or months before the government approves. In the north and west, it is usually day-to-day or a couple of days.

In Cork, it is easy to process the registration, the new citizens need to apply for a Personal Public Service (PPS) number. Then, workers can make use of medical care and other services. In Spain, All EU Mobile Citizens need to register with the local authorities of

the responsible municipality of the Region of Murcia if they intend to live in the region for more than three months. To register for housing and apply for a TIE (Tarjeta de Identificación Extranjera). To become a citizen in La Palma del Condado is relatively easy. Immigrant workers do not need to fill in a great variety of documents when registering. However, there is an incentive to revise the registration process since it's too simple.

The obstacles in Kielce, Poland, are that people need to know the Polish language to register, and that understanding the documents also needs to be done with the help of locals.

In Varberg, the employer is obliged to help register a new employee if they need help. According to Swedish immigration laws, registration can easily be done by filling in an application form, either in English or in Swedish. To then have it brought to a service office. All applicants must be present with a valid ID or passport.

The business and temporary working agency perspective

From a business or temporary working agency perspective, the challenges with EU Mobile Citizens look different. On several dimensions the circular movement of EU citizens has economic and spatial effects: there are inequalities between sending and receiving areas, which cover economic dimensions (income, access to services), but also immaterial dimensions (culture, environment, political system) (M. Ulceluse, et al. 2020). For most studied regions, the workers are essential; some regions cannot economically survive without them. At the same time, the employment histories of Central and Eastern European labour migrants show that a third of these labour migrants engage in settlement migration, being retained by the new local municipalities successfully. Only a very small proportion can be considered as circular migrants, thus going back and forth from the sending to receiving countries (Strockmeijer, De Beer and Dagevos 2019).

In all the participating towns, the temporary working agencies had a major role in keeping contact with the local government. At agricultural companies such as Combivliet (in Westland and Hollands Kroon), the temporary working agency the company worked with is NL Jobs, and there always needs to be a close relationship between NL Jobs and the registrations as the municipality registration, health insurance, bank account, employment contract, and working procedures. In Waalwijk, North Brabant, the temporary working agency is called Covebo. In 2019, an initiative of T&S Flexwerk started: WorkinWaalwijk, a building that would be able to house all the workers. With the municipality, agency Covebo also set up the application MyinfoNL, where all the information on the importance of registration as a migrant worker is available. Another big employer in Moerdijk, DSV Solutions, a global transport and logistics company, is sticking to the SNF (Stichting Normering Flexwonen) rules. Local governments in the neighbourhood have plans to expand the housing and care facilities for workers, but simultaneously bound to solutions for refugees and starters in the housing market. As the municipality of Moerdijk keeps moving its plan to build three new housing locations for 300 people in the Netherlands as well as Belgium, the contact between the employer and the municipality has deteriorated. Nevertheless, the company makes sure that not more than 25% of the workers' income is spent on housing, that not more than two labour migrants are living in one bedroom, and that 55% is the tax rate if the mobile workers do not register in the Netherlands.

In Spain, the rules are different. Workers pay 30-50% of their income on housing, and there is less monitoring on the rules for employers. Besides, the registration at a local level is less encouraged by the companies where the EU Mobile Citizens work. In Andalusia, as well as Catalunya and Murcia, the problems of human rights violations and discriminatory aspects have been worse than in the other areas (European Coordination Via Campesina 2019). The instability of EU Mobile Citizens' residences and permits also creates issues of legal entrapment. In EU law, this issue of not having any social security scheme is called *negative conflict of law*, as opposed to being

subject to social security insurance in two or more Member States, *positive conflict of law*. (Van Ooij 2022).

In Ireland, Germany, and Sweden, the results were similar. On average spending on housing is 30% to sometimes a 100% for a bigger three-bedroom apartment (Białek 2023). The City Council, in many cases, avoided dealing with the topic of housing and social services for highly mobile workers, and the Covid-19 crisis made the situation worse (Cork City Council 2022). Due to the pandemic, employment conditions of workers in agriculture, logistics and food industries have peeked above the radar (Kremer 2020). Furthermore, due to the current war in Ukraine, more EU Mobile Citizens are expected to be divided on the European continent. Indeed, available housing and well-functioning registration rules across the EU, and thereby also the correct treatment of EU Mobile Citizens, are often a challenge.

Conclusion and discussion

The stories of the municipalities and businesses interviewed reveal different obstacles and aspects of the registration process. As there is no EU policy for registration in a new locality upon arrival, the system is created by individual countries or by municipalities themselves. In Spain, the registration system in national, in the Netherlands, it is up to the municipality. In Spain, the municipality is responsible for the registration of newcomers but within municipalities, the way the municipality assists, varies. This is more elaborate in Guissona where municipal workers assist in multiple languages than in La Palma del Condado. In the Netherlands, each municipality searches for ways to register temporary workers. In Varberg, Sweden and in Sindelfingen, Germany national rules are implemented by different actors.

In Varberg, Sweden, registration is a responsibility of the employer, while in Sindelfingen, Germany it is up to the municipality. In

the Spanish system, the municipalities are responsible, not employers. In the Dutch towns there is no clear responsibility. Each municipality creates its own system, where there can be collaboration between employers and municipal workers. This is not systematic or linked to formal policies. Obstacles for registration are linked to lack of information: information about the registration process; information about the benefits of registration; and lack of information in the own language. Another issue is the time it takes to register: as flexible workers may change jobs and location often, municipalities may not have the bureaucratic capacity to keep up with the changes.

Different stakeholders try to improve the information flows, but these attempts are all-in an initial stage. In Guissona, language issues are partially solved by employing civil servants who speak multiple languages. In Germany, the municipality is working on improving access to the registration process by providing forms in different languages – at the time of the interviews these were not available yet. In the Netherlands, some of the municipalities are working on translating the registration procedure. Moerdijk already has forms in different languages. They are experimenting with 'local connectors' to improve information flows. Two of the municipalities are working on the creation of an information application, in multiple languages with information on different aspects of living in the Netherlands.

In Guissona, the link between registration and housing illustrates the connectedness of these topics: one cannot register without housing. The municipality has invented a creative solution by allowing people to use the address of town hall for registration. In other municipalities, housing and registration is also connected. General shortages on the housing market are an issue in all municipalities that we spoke to. Only in La Palma de Condado, housing was not the most pressing issue.

Dependency on employers in housing is only a partial solution. One suggestion, from Sindelfingen, Germany, was on collaboration between the public and private sector: public land could be used for

private housing. The public-private housing collaboration in Waalwijk has just started – long term results will have to be evaluated. In Moerdijk, these partnerships are difficult to establish because of national and regional laws and regulations. Similarly, in HollandsKroon, health regulations block housing solutions created by municipal-private partnerships.

Indications of public-private partnerships suggest that an innovative approach is needed – the workers cannot be dependent on their employers for housing but with municipal oversight this option may be fruitful. National and regional collaboration is required. Ideally, EUMCs and other residents are actively involved in these approaches.

The municipalities of this study all struggle with similar issues around registration and housing. Research as ours sheds light on these common problems and on possible solutions. We did not only look at the municipal side, but included interviews with employers in the regions. As such, we could verify if businesses shared the views of the civil servants. A next step is to include EUMCs in the study. The quadruple Helix approach – with involvement of public and private sectors, knowledge institutes, and citizens - for social innovation is recommended. Comparative research and innovative approaches may help solve struggles of registration and housing for municipalities across the European Union. The position of EUMCs needs to improve: a just and fair Europe calls for equal treatment of all EU citizens, on national levels and on an EU level.

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From Zero Migration to Migration Crises and to Local Citizenship: Contrasting Transitions in a Small Town at the Triple Border of Bulgaria, Türkiye and Greece

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The world is a bridge across which the way of the king and the poor man passes.

Saibai

ABSTRACT

The objective is double: to analyse the migration flows, actors, politics and policies in the double perspective of migration crisis and local citizenship, both conceived in innovative ways. The article examines the dynamic processes of de/re/bordering on the case of the town of Harmali and surrounding villages at the borders of Bulgaria with Türkiye and Greece and compares the impact of deterritorialisation (emigration of Bulgarian citizens) and reterritorialisation (by immigrants and refugees) on local development. This study is based on

a multi-method approach that combines various complementary methods. The first part introduces temporality as a theoretical lens for the migration profiles. The migration profile of Harmanli and Haskovo region is characterised by the transition from 'zero migration' to mass emigration and diversified immigration profile of refugees and asylum seekers from Syria, Afghanistan, amenity migrants from UK and EU countries, and family migrants from Russia and other former soviet Republics. The second thematic circle examines how two types of crises – migration and populist – shape migration politics and policies, as well as migration-related public images, imaginaries, and mobilisations. The third part introduces the perspective from below in the light of local citizenship for constructing the place and sense-making practices.

Introduction

A magnificent, vaulted stone bridge is the emblem and pride of Harmanli. It was built in 1585 on the orders of the then governor of the province, Siyavuş Pasha, a Croat by birth who converted to Islam and rose to the rank of grand vizier of the Ottoman Empire. The metaphor of the world as a bridge by the poet Saibai is engraved on a large marble slab that adorns the bridge to this day. By the non-coincidental coincidences of the intersection of Harmanli's cultural calendar and the academic calendar of the study I conducted in the region (2020 - 2023) , at the beginning of our fieldwork the bridge was under repair and closed to the public. By the end of our fieldwork, the bridge shone forth in all its renovated beauty, coming alive with people, and we held some of our final intercultural meetings there.

I have chosen to begin with this brief historical account because it poetically and philosophically combines the central themes of this article: mobility, interculturality, history, memory, identity, difference.

The bridge is a concept, a metaphor, an image. Georg Simmel has left us the classic comparison between a door and a bridge – as two images of the identity/difference relationship. The door may be hospitably open, but it is always asymmetrical, control over the threshold and over movement is on one side. On the bridge, conversely, movement is two-way. Identifying which of the two images dominates local imaginaries, politics and practices of immigrant integration is one of the research tasks of this analysis.

The aim of this article is to analyse the specific case of an abrupt transition from almost zero migration to significant migration given the size of a small town. It is articulated in three thematic circles. The first explores temporality as a theoretical zoom that highlights different dimensions of migration flows in the longue durée and in the short term. The second thematic circle examines how two types of crises – migration and populist – shape migration politics and policies, as well as migration-related public images, imaginaries, and mobilisations. The third thematic circle seeks an alternative to the securitisation of migration and finds it in forms of local citizenship.

The small town at the centre of this analysis is Harmanli in the Haskovo region.[1] The town of Harmanli is located near Bulgaria's borders with Türkiye and Greece. It has a population of 18,589.[2] Harmanli Municipality, which includes the town as well as 24 villages, has 24,947 inhabitants, who make up 11.4% of the population of the Haskovo region and 0.37% of Bulgaria's population. Its population density is 37 people per sq. km, or half the national average.

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2   https://www.harmanli.bg/bg/harakteristika-na-naselenieto-na-obshtina-harmanli.

The research interest in Harmanli is due to four main groups of reasons:

- Harmanli is extremely interesting because of its almost instantaneous transition from a town with almost no migration to a town with significant migration given its size.

- Small and medium-sized towns are relatively less studied in the Bulgarian migration literature because of their specific place in the Bulgarian migration profile. Migration in Bulgaria is mainly concentrated in the capital and large cities (Krasteva 2019a). New migrations, such as those of UK expats, are mainly attracted by rural areas.

- The nexus small town – villages is indicative because of the differentiation of their migration profiles on the one hand, and on the other, because of the interaction between different groups of migrants and locals: for example, business practices in Harmanli of British people from the villages or intercultural practices in villages without their own migrants but with migrants from Harmanli invited to local festivals.

- Despite its modest size, Harmanli occupies a key place in the political geography of populist anti-immigration actors and leaders, and their actions in the town against the Registration and Reception Centre for refugees have national resonance.

Harmanli is not a mini-Bulgaria, which makes it a particularly theoretically attractive case study. Bulgaria's migration profile is asymmetrical and can be summarised in three poles: significant emigration, relatively low immigration, and a very low number of refugees settled in the country. The number of Bulgarians who have emigrated abroad is approximately 1.3 million overall. Regarding the Bulgarian diaspora more broadly, it is estimated that the number of people with Bulgarian ancestry worldwide is well over 2 million. This

huge emigration of Bulgarians, particularly since 1989, is a loss of demographic, social, educational, and democratic capital, but also contributes to the country's development through significant remittances. Remittances from Bulgarian emigrants exceed foreign direct investment: 1,152.6 million euros vs 901.9 million euros in 2017. The number of immigrants in Bulgaria is approximately 150,000. The number of refugees with international protection status who have settled in Bulgaria is very low: 1,000–2,000 (Krasteva 2019a).

Harmanli's migration profile and Bulgaria's national migration profile have an asymmetrical relationship. Harmanli shares the nationwide characteristic of high emigration throughout the post-communist period. However, Harmanli differs significantly in terms of immigration. The key challenge is the high number of refugees. Another difference is that while Bulgaria's immigration in general is mostly urban, Harmanli's immigration is mainly concentrated in the villages surrounding the town.

The conceptual apparatus in this article is structured around three clusters. The first is migration, de/re/territorialisation, agency. E/I/Migration is conceptualised in reference to agency, the dynamics and interference of the opposite processes of de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation, as well as to the emergence of local citizenship. Migration in the asymmetrical flows of emigration and immigration is theorised in reference to the place-based and place-sense practices of de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation. Agency is articulated in different social and political actors: migrants; local residents, populist anti-migration leaders, and activists. The second conceptual cluster is structured around the migration crisis in two varieties: ontological and constructed. It applies to the Harmanli case study this author's provocative thesis: 'If migration crises did not exist, they would have been invented by populist politicians.' The third conceptual cluster introduces local citizenship in the perspective of 'acts of citizenship' (Isin 2008), performative citizenship (Barbera *et al*. 2018), solidary citizenship (Krasteva, Saarinen, Siim 2019).

'It's the economy, stupid' vs places matter

'It's the economy, stupid!' Bill Clinton's slogan in his 1992 presidential campaign, is the arrogant political translation of the dominance of economic factors in explaining numerous social and political phenomena. Neo-economic migration concepts are their theoretical translation in the case of migration. Do they work to explain migration flows and stocks in Harmanli? I will answer this question in two steps. The first looks at the socioeconomic profile of the region, highlighting the most significant indicators and trends. The second analyses the types of migration in the town and surrounding villages.

The regional profile of the Haskovo region is the socioeconomic context in which the settlement and inclusion of immigrants in local development takes place (IME 2022):[3]

- Haskovo is the region with the *lowest GDP* per capita in Southern Bulgaria after Sliven, with only BGN 9,100 per capita in 2020 (compared to a national average of BGN 17,300), and has been growing at a rate lower than the national average. The average annual gross salary in 2020 was BGN 11,600 (the national average was BGN 16,700).

- These indicators determine the relatively *high poverty levels* in the region. A total of 27.4% of the population are living with material deprivation (compared to 19.4% on average nationally), and the share of population living below the national poverty line is 32.9% (versus 22.1% on average nationally).

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3 The Sofia-based Institute for Market Economics (IME) conducts regular analyses of the regions in Bulgaria. The data and trends in this article are from the IME's 2022 report (IME 2022) and, unless otherwise indicated, they are for 2021.

- The annual average *economic activity* rate of the population aged 15 to 64 is 67.5% and remains lower than the national average of 72.0%, while the annual average employment rate is 66.3% (compared to a national average of 68.1%). The educational structure of the workforce and population ageing are challenges for the labour market.

- *Investment activity* is low. Foreign direct investment is far below the national average – 794 euros per capita compared to a national average of 3,900 euros per capita in 2020.

- Utilization of EU funds is also relatively poor. By 30 June 2022, payments made in the region to beneficiaries of EU operational programmes amounted to BGN 1,649 per person, which is half the national average.

- The demographic structure is characterized by two trends: a decrease in both the natural population growth and the net migration rate, and *population ageing*. The share of the region's urban population is comparable to Bulgaria's average (71.7% versus 73.1% nationally), but its population density is low: 1,027 persons per sq. km, compared to 1,489 persons per sq. km nationally.

- The healthcare system in the Haskovo region suffers from a shortage of doctors and hospital beds. The number of doctors is below the national average.

- Students' results are low.

- The region's public order and security indicators are average. The crime rate is comparable to the national average, but the detection rate is considerably higher.

- In contrast to its many low socioeconomic indicators, the region's *assessment in the environment category* is high.

It is mainly due to the relatively low volumes of generated household waste – 313 kg/person, compared to a national average of 409 kg/person in 2020; 71.2% of all generated household waste was handed over for recycling and treatment, compared to 69.3% on average nationally (IME 2022).

Table 1. Panoramic overview of the Haskovo region's economic and social development

	Weak	Unsatisfactory	Average	Good	Very good
Economic development					
	▓	▓	▓		
Income and living standard	▓	▓	▓		
Labour market	▓	▓	▓	▓	
Investment and economy	▓				
Infrastructure	▓	▓	▓	▓	
Administration	▓	▓	▓	▓	
Social development					
	▓	▓	▓		
Demography	▓	▓	▓	▓	
Education	▓	▓	▓		
Healthcare	▓	▓	▓		
Public order and security	▓	▓	▓	▓	
Environment	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓
Culture					

Source: IME 2022: 31

The socioeconomic profile of the region is a key factor for explaining the specificity of the local migration profile. The latter cannot be understood within the explanatory scheme of wage differentials, more opportunities for employment, and other classic arguments of

migration theories. It is noteworthy that a key type of migration is absent in Harmanli and the Haskovo region – labour migration, foreigners who have come to the town and region in search of higher wages or more job opportunities. Four different types of migration have been identified: family migration, amenity migration, entrepreneurial migration, and refugee migration. The economic impact and labour integration strategies vary from one group to another.

Family migration easily evolves into labour inclusion. The access to the labour market takes place relatively quickly and easily because of immersion in the husband's circles and neighbourhood and the good knowledge of Bulgarian. The labour integration of Russian women is diverse and successful (Krasteva 2018) – during our fieldwork, we met Russian women teachers, hairdressers, family business owners, doctors.

Amenity migration involves people moving to perceived desirable regions, usually for non-economic reasons, such as a physical or cultural environment that is seen as more beautiful, tranquil, or inspirational than their current environment (Borsdorf, Hidalgo, Zunino. 2012). In Bulgaria and in the Haskovo region, the most typical representatives of amenity migration are the British. Numerous amenity migrants are pensioners, while the rest do not look for jobs on the local labour market – they are self-employed. The impact of this new group of third-country nationals on local development is in creating employment and boosting local business. House renovation provides new clients to building materials companies and jobs for construction workers. Service companies also benefit from the new clients, whose standard of living is higher than that of the local population: *'British families have three or four cars each. They are serviced by the local auto repair shops.'* As a local businessman put it in a nutshell: *'Local business is boosted. The more [migrants] settle here, the more they boost the economy.'*

Turkish immigration is attracted by three pull factors: a border factor, a minority factor, and a business factor. Harmanli is located

close to the border with Turkey. The ethnic Turkish minority is the largest in the Haskovo region and in the country. A specific push factor for the region and Bulgaria is the possibility of setting up a business comparatively more easily, especially at the beginning of Bulgaria's transition to a market economy. Some of the Turkish entrepreneurs in the region are of Kurdish origin. The migrants from Turkey are employed mostly in Turkish companies in the region or are entrepreneurs. As a company manager said, *'The Turks are usually entrepreneurs. My husband [a Turkish citizen] is about to open a kebab shop with a young Turk who will work there but will also be a business partner.'*

Refugees are the latest immigration phenomenon in Harmanli. Their profile differs from that of all other previous groups in several respects. Unlike the other immigrants, they have not chosen Harmanli – they have been placed by the host country in the Registration and Reception Centre (known informally as the 'refugee centre') in the town. The key difference lies in the type of migration – they are not seeking sunlight and family life, but asylum from wars and conflicts. A third difference is that refugees are the most mobile migrant group – for the overwhelming majority of refugees, Bulgaria is a transit country.

Temporality – a theoretical lens for the urban and regional migration kaleidoscope

The temporality and migration nexus is a relatively new arena in migration scholarship (Gardiner Barber, Lem 2018). This nexus forms different conceptual clusters. The biggest cluster is with agency, subjectivity, and capacity to act in migration processes, where the nexus is conceived as a feature of migrant experience shaped

by the political, economic, and securitarian order (Andersson 2014; Gardiner Barber, Lem 2018; Baas, Yeoh 2019). In this article, temporality is introduced in another theoretical perspective. The various temporal perspectives serve as theoretical lenses that offer distinct insights into migration patterns. When we zoom out and adopt a long-term view, we can observe overarching mega-trends. Conversely, when we zoom in and focus on the short term, we can identify emerging micro-trends and specific migration events. This analysis is based on Fernand Braudel's concept of the different types of temporality. Braudel distinguishes two poles of time, two different types of temporality. The first one is the long-time span, the *longue durée*. The second temporality is the instant. The *longue durée* refers to mega-trends and structures; the short-time span is *'proportionate to individuals, to daily life, to our illusions'* (Braudel 1980: 28). The attention of contemporaries is focused precisely on events. These three types of temporality are necessary as a precaution against allowing the theoretical attention to be usurped by the most dramatic events and the loudest actors.

Our temporal zoom-in on migration has identified the dominant migration profile and the corresponding key type of flows. In the *longue durée* of structural history, emigration is at the centre of the migration profile at three levels – national, regional, urban. Conjunctural history, with a mid-term perspective, is marked by refugee crises involving refugee flows that differ in origin, composition, and destination. Episodic history is the relevant perspective for explaining migration or migration policy events. A key event for Harmanli was the construction of the Registration and Reception Centre for refugees.

Table 2. Migration profile according to different temporalities

Type of history	Temporality	Migration profile	Dominant type of migration
Structural	Longue durée	Emigration	Labour
Conjunctural	Mid-term	Migration & refugee crisis	Irregular
Episodic	Events	Construction of Reception Centre	Asylum seekers

Source: Own creation based on Fernand Braudel's concept of plural history, and its application to migrations in Harmanli and Haskovo region

Emigration is the *differentia specifica* of the Balkan, Bulgarian, regional and Harmanli migration profile. In the political, media, and scholarly discourse and public imaginaries, emigration is like Janus and has both a crisis and an anti-crisis potential. The emigration of the best and the brightest, that is, youth emigration, is often experienced as a loss and trauma – as both a family and national trauma. On the other hand, labour migration plays a significant role in reducing unemployment and remains a crucial livelihood strategy for the country and the city (Krasteva *et al.* 2018).

The residents of Harmanli experienced the refugee crisis in a dynamic mix of three different temporalities: the emergency temporality of the Balkan migration route as a state of exception; and the more gradual national temporality connected with the gradual increase in immigration into Bulgaria, from 1,236 in 2008 to 39,461 in 2022.[4] Of key importance to local residents was the third temporality, a sharp discontinuity associated with the establishment of the Registration and Reception Centre in Harmanli, which opened on 12 October 2013 (Krasteva 2023).

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4   National Statistical Institute, www.nsi.bg.

If migration crises did not exist, they would have been invented by populist politicians

Migration crises exist, but the provocative paraphrase of Sartre expresses this author's thesis that populists need migration crises just as much as anti-Semites need Jews. The author has developed the concept of two types of crisis: the classic crisis and the populist migration one (Krasteva 2019b, 2020, 2021a). Agency is different in the two types of migration crisis. In the classic migration crisis, the key role is played by institutions – national, local, and European – and migration management policies. In the populist migration crisis, the key role is played by securitising actors – far-right nationalist parties and organisations and their anti-migration discourses, which often criminalise migration. The securitisation of migration unfolds in two directions, vertical and horizontal – from political actors towards citizens, and from small groups or local communities towards individuals, other groups, and society at large.

Both classic and populist migration crises are at work in this study. The classic crisis describes the institutional unpreparedness and inefficiency in crisis management in the face of the unprecedented surge in refugee flows in 2015–2016. The concept of populist migration crisis is relevant for situations where, with reduced migration flows and functioning institutions, far-right politicians electrify public opinion by inciting fear, hatred, and hostility.

The first crisis is related to the refugee centre in Harmanli as an abrupt transition from small-scale and well-integrated immigration to migration 'imported' by the national authorities and unwanted by either the refugees themselves or the locals.

The refugee centre brought about four important changes in Harmanli. The first was a radical increase in the number of foreign-

ers and a change in the ratio of locals to refugees, with the number of refugees growing to several thousand in a town with a population of fewer than ten thousand. The second was a substantial change in their national, ethnic, language, and religious profile – the asylum seekers came from the Near and Middle East, Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Iran. The third concerns visibility. Whereas Russian women migrants are more invisible in public because they are well integrated, as are the British migrants because they are scattered across the countryside, with no more than several British families living in one village, the refugees are concentrated in the town. Locals experienced the top-down asylum policy, the opening of the Registration and Reception Centre without sufficient consultation with and preparation of the population, and the sharp increase in the number of refugees as a culture shock. An informant said that she had been out of town for a week, and when she came back, *'The cultural shock was enormous. … The whole town was swarming with foreigners. … The locals were worried about what would happen.'*

Towns with refugee centres are preferred places for far-right parties. Their leaders *'start their campaign from Harmanli'*. Several informants stressed the role of nationalist parties as organisers of anti-immigrant actions such as rallies against the refugees, *'at which people from elsewhere outnumber those from Harmanli.'* The electoral cycle, not refugee waves, determines the temporality of the activity of political brokers of hatred. Locals find themselves in a vortex of both crises – the refugee wave and its political instrumentalization by extremist actors – even in periods of significant reduction in-migration flows (Krasteva 2023).

Symbolic politics takes precedence over development politics. The refugee centre is among the largest employers in Harmanli, it is attractive and efficient in retaining a young and educated workforce in the town. This factor is totally ignored by securitarian discourses. Anti-migration politics also impacts the overall policy of the local administration, which is extremely reserved towards activities and projects related to refugees and migrants.

Local citizenship for constructing the place and sense-making practices

The activist understanding of citizenship covers all actors who contribute to 'constructing the place', including newcomers and international migrants considered as members of a local community regardless of their legal status (Barbera, Negri, Solento 2018). The emergence of actors and acts of local citizenship is key both for countering the populist securitisation and politicisation of migration, and for including different actors – local and migrants – in practices for constructing the place. Here I will examine several such practices in different spheres: mobility and migration for a spiral of local development, volunteering, innovative intercultural educational practices, and place-based practices promoting the territory's attractiveness.

Spiral of development. I define as 'spiral of development' the phenomenon where each positive change stimulates and brings about another positive change. I will illustrate this phenomenon with a village near Harmanli. The village is small, with only about 100 inhabitants. After a Finn settled there, he was followed by others, and they formed a small community that is now 10% of the local population. They introduce the typical changes that expats make in all villages – renovating houses, improving the look of the village, boosting the local economy through consumption – from building materials to food. They have also made village life more dynamic by getting involved in a range of activities – from painting the church dome to planting trees in the village hall courtyard. The second change has to do with the impact of the village's new attractiveness on de/re/population. In the first stage the locals who had moved to the big cities were glad to have someone to sell their houses to in the village. The more attractive the village became to foreigners, the more Bulgarians began to rediscover its charm and wish to restore their links with it. In this new stage of the spiral, some sellers pulled their houses off the market. The village is now enjoying a third wave of

change – house owners, although they are not returning to the village, are increasingly involved in development initiatives, multiplying and empowering local agency. At the time of writing, an inspiring recent example is the restoration of a beautiful but abandoned fountain, thanks to the visionary mayor, donations, and volunteer labour of all active fellow villagers – Bulgarians, foreigners, and recent returnees alike (Krasteva 2023).

Volunteering – From Day One. The unexpected first wave of refugees also gave rise to volunteering and solidarity. It is noteworthy that people without any experience in volunteering immediately volunteered and began helping the asylum-seekers. It is interesting that we found volunteers from day one both among the Bulgarians and among the migrants. A woman informant described her personal path to volunteering as an individual civic commitment, not as an NGO activity: *'I personally have been working with refugees since they arrived in Harmanli not on behalf of a non-governmental organisation but as an individual. They needed to communicate with people in the town, they were looking for support, help, etc.'* This case is interesting also for the transition from volunteer to professional service provider. *'My office is in the square where the refugees usually hang out and they often came to me for help – for information, help in filling out forms, looking for housing.'* The informant started helping the refugees spontaneously and informally; a few years later, she is working professionally with a big international organisation for their inclusion. A British woman informant told us how her mother had immediately started helping the refugees. Initially, by providing food, clothes, and staples. When the authorities gradually improved the organisation of reception at the refugee centre, the volunteer focused her efforts on the most vulnerable group, children.

Innovative intercultural education practices. Migrants are on both sides of some of the most interesting innovative practices – as initiators and authors, on one side, and as beneficiaries on the other. The best-known innovation is the **PlaySchool** at the refugee centre in Harmanli. It was introduced by a young British woman mar-

ried to a refugee. Its purpose is to form behaviour for learning and emotional skills. Play methods help children to overcome the trauma. All migrant parents I interviewed at the refugee centre praised the PlaySchool. The PlaySchool is a dual educational innovation – in terms both of methodology and of financing. Having started as a volunteer project, it now relies on crowdfunding – 'Fund a teacher.' The vast majority of educational and intercultural practices are funded by projects or large international organisations such as Caritas, the Bulgarian Red Cross, and the International Organisation for Migration. PlaySchool is exemplary precisely for its excellence in terms of both agency and sustainability – a young British woman with an elite education, who came with a short-term project to visit her parents, settled permanently in a small town; in a situation of lack of funding from state institutions for innovative intercultural practices, she managed to secure global support through the creative mix of the cause of empowerment of refugee children, information technology, and a network of national and international sponsors.

Place-based practices promoting the territory's attractiveness

Local identity is promoted as an amalgam of the advantages of the territory, its connectivity with other spaces, and local traditions, on the one hand, and mobilities on the other. An emblematic example in this regard is the festival 'Na Harmana' (On the Threshing-Floor): *'People come from all over the country to attend, it's a very grand event.'* The image of the region equally valorises the town and the local villages: *'Every village has a stall [at the festival] and presents its foods and specialties.'* The festival promotes the image of Harmanli as a site of international, national, regional and local mobility. The local mobile people – migrants and refugees – are also included: *'refugees take part in the folkloric programme, British mi-*

grants sometimes play music live at the wine-tasting events.' The festival amplifies the social capital: the initiators' strategic vision that increasing the territory's attractiveness requires innovative practices; the intensive positive communication between locals and guests, Bulgarians, foreigners, and migrants.

Conclusion

I will summarise the conclusion with two pairs of contrasting trends: de-territorialisation vs re-territorialisation and populist securitisation vs local citizenship.

De-territorialisation is a key challenge for remote regions and small towns with declining populations, but re-territorialisation is assessed in polarised ways. On the one hand, it is experienced as intensifying the trauma of de-territorialisation:

> Many young, gifted people are leaving Harmanli to go either to the bigger cities or abroad, while refugees from Pakistan, Afghanistan are coming in their stead. This is very depressing. Young, fine people are going away, to be replaced by others with another culture and religion. This is hard to accept.

On the other hand, the impact of expats on re-territorialisation and on revitalising villages is assessed positively:

> The most interesting thing is that even the grandmother in the village, who doesn't depend on the British in any way whatsoever, is delighted at their presence because she wants there to be people in the village.

The second pair of contrasting trends is between the populist securitisation of refugees and its impact on the attitudes of small-town residents and the emergence of actors and practices of inclusive in-

tercultural local citizenship. The bridge, with its metaphor of mobility and two-way movement, holds promise for actors and practices of constructing places that are worth making.

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Migrant incorporation in small towns and rural areas of Crete and Sardinia: a comparative analysis

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ABSTRACT

How does the place of living impact the socioeconomic integration and perceived well-being of migrants residing in different urban and rural spatial typologies of Crete and Sardinia? Drawing from survey data collected between March 2019 and May 2020 and in-depth face-to-face interviews with key informants and migrants, this empirical research combined elements of both qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis to respond to this research question. Cross-national and within-region comparisons gave interesting insights into the interplay between the place of settlement and the well-being of migrants. The analysis of the findings suggests that: a) migrant incorporation outcomes varied only slightly between urban and rural areas in both objective and subjective terms; b) migrant incorporation in rural areas was not homogeneous across the various rural typologies examined (intermediate, remote, coastal); worth noting variations emerged in various domains such as employment, housing, financial conditions and the attitudes of the local society towards migration; and c) personal characteristics (rural/urban background, nationality, educational level,

religious affiliation, adaptive capacity) and aspirations influenced the initial settlement and migrant incorporation outcomes significantly.

Introduction

International migration to small towns and rural areas of Southern Europe has been taking place since the late 1980s, having a significant demographic and economic impact on these areas. Many migrants have settled there for over three decades, but we know little about their experiences, perceptions, needs, living conditions and aspirations. Their incorporation into these places has been influenced both by *objective* factors, i.e., the actual conditions in terms of access to fundamental realms of life such as work, home, school, health, etc. and *subjective* factors such as their aspirations, expectations, quality of social relations between them and the locals of each setting. The objective factors are mainly influenced by the structural factors of the host place, such as the institutional capacity and quality of public administration, the labour market structure, housing opportunities, etc. and vary significantly from one area to another. By examining both types of factors, this paper aims to shed light on spatial trends, patterns, and determinants of migrant incorporation based on the typology of the place of living (urban-rural) in the regions of Crete (Greece) and Sardinia (Italy).

Stemming from the assumption that the place of residence can play a key role in the whole integration process (Kordel, Membretti 2020), the main objective guiding this cross-case empirical study was twofold: on the one hand, to examine to what extent the place of residence has influenced the socioeconomic and socio-cultural integration of two long-term settled migrant communities (i.e., Albanians and Moroccans) in these two regions objectively, while on the other hand, to illustrate the influence of the place of living on the perceived well-being subjectively. Thus, the two working axes are the

spatial typology as the independent variable on the one hand, while on the other, migrant integration outcomes and migrants' well-being were the dependent ones.

The entire regional territory was examined in both Crete and Sardinia, opting for comparisons between the rural and urban spatial typologies (i.e. primary and secondary urban poles, intermediate, remote and coastal rural areas) of the same region. The rationale behind this choice was that several strengths and weaknesses pointed out in the rural areas of a region could be spotted in the urban areas, too, and vice versa, thus qualifying them as structural features/problems of the whole regional territory and not particular to a specific urban/rural area. Based on the above objectives, a three-level spatial comparison emerged: a) within-region comparisons between urban and rural areas, b) within-region comparisons between different rural typologies, and c) cross-regional comparisons between Crete and Sardinia.

Methodology & Data Sources

Combining elements of both qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis was fruitful. On the one hand, the qualitative analysis was fundamental in examining the experiences, practices and needs of the migrants living in the two regions, allowing for a wider exploration of the factors that influenced their incorporation. On the other hand, collecting quantitative data through a sample-based survey, apart from permitting to avoid hasty generalisations, allowed to clarify findings better and be specific: to what spatial typology, gender, age group, family status, educational level, generational cohort, employment status, duration of stay, or life-course phase do results refer to? To what extent were these findings relevant to others living in the same typology?

Fieldwork was divided into two stages. In the first stage (January 2018 - January 2020), insights on local government policies and

integration-related programmes, non-state actors' role at the local level, local society's attitudes towards migration, migrant living conditions, as well as migrant integration prospects in that locality, were gained through semi-structured face-to-face interviews with heads of local public offices, street-level bureaucrats, academics, civil society stakeholders, labour unions', NGOs' and migrant associations' representatives.

In the **second stage** (Crete: June - August 2019 /Sardinia: March 2019 - May 2020), data were collected through a sample-based quantitative survey conducted with the survey target population through face-to-face interviews (mostly PAPI mode and some through CAPI mode). The sample consisted of 100 Albanians in Crete and 75 Moroccans in Sardinia. The lack of reliable sampling frames in Greece and Italy (see Sanguilinda *et al.*, 2017) determined that respondents would be recruited using snowball sampling. Some random interviews were also conducted at the offices of public services, with the assistance of staff working there, thus introducing some elements of random sampling in the survey. In the absence of population lists, a list of municipalities was set up in which a relevant number of Albanians and Moroccans were living and where efforts were made to establish some first contacts/"seeds" with local stakeholders through which I was able to gain access to the survey population. The many referral chains led to a highly diversified and geographically dispersed sample (25 localities in Crete and 41 localities in Sardinia). While the sampling unit was the individual, the questionnaire was designed so to allow for gathering information about the living conditions of the entire household. In any case, only one person per household was interviewed to provide a more diverse sample.

Case studies selection

These two regions were selected based on several common migration, institutional (e.g. quality of governance at the local level), demographic, economic, social, cultural and geomorphologic features

also presented in other *coastal, predominantly rural or intermediate rural regions* (according to the OECD 2014 classification). That said, it should be stressed that the research findings mainly concern regions with similar features to those of the two regions selected. The author's view is in line with those of Hatziprokopiou (2006: 171) and Bijl & Verweij (2012:32-38), who suggest that migrant integration research must emphasise context specificity as integration into various receiving societies is contingent on specific conditions and contexts.

On the other side, the reason for examining only two national groups (i.e. Albanians and Moroccans) has been to better focus on the spatial dimension of migrant integration and how integration is influenced by the place of living, considering the limited sample size in each spatial typology. Several potential differences between different national groups living in the two regions could have strongly influenced integration outcomes in objective and subjective terms (e.g. access to the labour market due to very diverse individuals' characteristics such as the ethnic group, the colour of skin or religious affiliation; adaptive capacity due to similar customs between the host and the country of origin, etc.). That said, the Albanian and Moroccan communities were selected on various grounds, such as their important numerical presence in the small rural settlements of the two regions, their high dispersion and long-term stay in these areas, but also to common grounds in their migration trajectories and individual characteristics (e.g. rural background, low educational level, family settlement)[1].

Questionnaire

The questionnaire's thematic areas and sections were strongly inspired by the set of the 2010 Zaragoza indicators (which use as data sources EU-SILC and EU-LFS surveys), integrated by those further developed and elaborated in the two joint reports of EC and OECD

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1 A more detailed analysis of the case studies selection can be found in the author's PhD thesis (Tservenis 2021, pp. 33-36) here: https://www.didaktorika.gr/eadd/handle/10442/50717?locale=en

in 2015 and 2018, 'Settling In: Indicators of migrant integration'. The aforementioned indicators capture mainly the *structural* dimension of integration – namely, the acquisition of rights and access to them (e.g. legal status, education, housing, labour market, etc.) (Heckman 2004). Additional indicators from the 'Survey on the Social Conditions and Integration of Foreign Citizens (SCIF)' conducted by ISTAT in 2011-2012 were used in synergy with the indicators above. The empirical investigation followed a life-cycle approach, asking survey respondents about their life in their home country, the reasons for migration, retrospective information about their living conditions in the host country and finally, their future aspirations.

Classifying the urban/rural typologies

Classifying and selecting the urban and rural settlements where fieldwork was conducted was also crucial. To guarantee the best possible comparability, the most recent and relevant classification at the EU level and the OECD – the Degree of Urbanisation (DEGURBA)- was used. It is based on a three-level area classification, identifying: a) cities (densely populated areas), b) towns and suburbs (intermediate density areas), and c) rural areas (thinly populated areas). While it is a very useful tool in creating a Europe-wide framework that supports comparative research between descriptively similar urban and rural areas in terms of population density, size and remoteness, unfortunately, it does not capture the particularities and wide diversity of rural settlements.

Thus, considering that the research focused on integration in rural areas, classifying the various typologies of rural settlements further was deemed necessary to take their heterogeneity into account as best as possible. For doing that, the following national and regional spatial development plans were used that employ common EU criteria and that, in turn, are adapted to each local reality by the national and regional authorities: a) the EU Rural Development Programmes (RDP) 2014-2020; b) the EU Community-led Local Devel-

opment (CLLD) / LEADER programmes 2014-2020; c) the Regional Spatial Planning Framework 2017 (for Crete) and d) the 'National Inner Areas Strategy' (SNAI) 2013 (for Sardinia). After consulting all the above classification instruments, rurality was conceptualised based on: a) the accessibility to the principal public and private services and goods or, in other words, the remoteness dimension (based on driving distance using Google Maps web service), b) the physical distance of the settlements from the coast (within a distance of 10 km from the coastline), and, finally, c) their population size (based on the updated list of Local Administrative Units of 2019 by Eurostat).

Five different spatial typologies were conceptualised and examined to enable meaningful urban-rural and rural-rural comparisons:

1. *Cities*: Primary urban poles with more than 50,000 inhabitants, including the metropolitan areas' broader space and commuting zones;

2. *Towns and Suburbs*: Small and medium-sized towns with 5,000 - 35,000 inhabitants or municipalities located in the hinterland of the primary poles;

3. *Intermediate rural areas*: Rural settlements close to or along the main traffic corridors leading to the primary and secondary urban poles of the two regions (25 to 45 minutes driving time) with up to 5,000 inhabitants

4. *Remote rural areas*: Lagging remote rural areas far away from the primary or secondary urban poles (over 45 minutes driving time) with up to 5,000 inhabitants.

5. *Coastal rural areas*: Dynamic coastal and multi-functional rural areas with up to 5,000 inhabitants

Fieldwork key findings

The empirical research in both regions has provided the following key insights[2]:

Respondents' profile and settlement in rural areas

Findings showed that **personal characteristics and aspirations** matter a lot when it comes to integration outcomes and well-being in rural areas. In particular:

Urban/rural background: As emerged both in Crete and Sardinia, respondents with a rural background[3] were more likely to settle in small towns and rural settlements compared to those with an urban background. In addition, integration outcomes in rural areas were more positive for migrants with a *rural background* who possessed both intuitive knowledge and skills to work and live in rural areas.

Educational level: Respondents' *educational level* overwhelmingly drove settlement in urban/rural areas. In particular, respondents with a higher educational level were overrepresented in cities and towns compared to rural areas in both regions[4].

Family status: Many key informants and respondents stressed that living with their family in rural areas significantly improved local society's attitudes towards them and, subsequently, their incorporation and living conditions.

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2 A more detailed analysis of the survey findings can be found in the author's PhD thesis (pp. 216-265), here: https://www.didaktorika.gr/eadd/handle/10442/50717?locale=en

3   It refers to the urban/rural place where respondents lived most of their life before migration.

4   For instance, in Sardinia, of the 14 Moroccan respondents having attained tertiary education, ten lived in cities, three in towns and just one in coastal rural areas. None lived in intermediate or remote rural areas.

Stage in life-course: Migrants' personal needs fluctuate according to their life-course phase. Confirming previous insights from the literature (Papadopoulos, Fratsea 2021: 9), respondents' decision to settle or stay in rural areas depend highly on their family's needs, especially those of their offspring. This implies that while families with kids in their early childhood were likely to settle in rural areas due to the high level of safety and good environmental quality they offer, on the other hand, families with kids in their adolescence were less likely to settle or feel satisfied in such areas. Similarly, those already settled in rural areas were likely to move to the nearest large city due to the variety of cities' activities and opportunities they offer.

Family and social networks: The prior existence of family and social networks was central in shaping respondents' decision to settle in rural settlements. As also the literature suggests (Massey *et al.*1993, Hatziprokopiou 2006; Migali *et al.* 2018), migration networks reduce the financial costs and natural risks of migration and integration significantly by providing immediate assistance or passing on useful survival information to the newly arrived migrants (e.g. easier access to employment, housing, etc.). Their decision to settle in rural settlements should also be linked to migrants' weak position in the housing market and the discrimination they face from local landlords. More to the point, in various cases, their social/family networks were the only way to find housing. Finally, several respondents reported that such presence was also a precondition for their overall well-being in the rural place of living (e.g. finding a job). In this regard, considering that the national groups under examination have been the most numerous migrant communities in each region (at the time of the case selection) and that the majority of the participants moved to the two islands mostly through migratory chains due to their prior presence of social networks in their place of settlement, it is assumed that the survey findings could differ significantly for other less numerous national groups living in the rural areas of the two islands.

Reason for migration: Respondents were likely to settle in rural areas when their migration project was *driven by labour*, especially

when their skills or professional aspirations matched the rural labour market of the host place.

Personal preferences and aspirations: People who preferred a simpler and slower pace of life, loved nature and wide spaces were more likely to settle in rural areas.

Ethnic background / Country of origin / Religious affiliation: In line with the findings of Koutsouris *et al.* (2009) and MacKrell & Pemberton (2018), different ethnic groups show different potential for integration in rural areas. Many respondents and key informants reported the importance of similar customs, religious affiliation and social norms for successful integration, while others believed that certain national groups would face important difficulties in integrating into rural societies. Cultural (e.g. social norms, habits) or religious distance proved to be a particularly important factor influencing migrant integration in rural areas in both regions. In any case, it should be stressed that variations among rural areas were notable (i.e. coastal versus intermediate & remote areas), too.

Driving ability: As it emerged, especially in Sardinia, many women living in places other than the island's large cities highlighted their inability to drive (i.e. not possessing a driving license) as a reason for being excluded from various social and economic opportunities.

Adaptation-assimilation capacity/will: Albanians' high capacity and/or will to adapt to the local society (e.g. agreement with values and habits of their settlement, strong social networks and long-term relationships with the local population, baptism, name change, learning the local dialect) appeared to be highly relevant for their successful integration in the rural areas of Crete. These findings confirm what literature (Jentsch, de Lima & Macdonald 2007) suggested about the assimilation into rural societies as a necessary precondition to successful integration. At the same time, this also implies that cultural and religious diversity is likely better accommodated in urban areas than rural ones.

Structural features of the place of residence

Local housing market: Moroccans were more likely to settle in rural settlements of Sardinia due to the wide differences in the rent prices between urban and rural areas, which are not that pronounced in Crete.

Local labour market: Areas that combined agricultural and non-agricultural activities, where diversification of the rural economy has been most marked by tourism, offered a more favourable economic environment for migrant integration. Moreover, in line with the findings of Papadopoulos (2012: 178), the specificities of the local rural labour markets guided, to a large extent, the possible professional trajectories for respondents' mobility. Indeed, comparing migrants' previous and current jobs showed that Albanians living in rural areas where intensive agriculture is dominant (e.g. Tybaki in Crete) mostly continued to work in this sector, even though their work position and conditions significantly improved. On the other hand, those who lived in coastal rural areas or closer to cities had the opportunity to "switch" to different sectors of activity (e.g. from construction to catering or tourism activities).

Legislation and national/local policies: Various Moroccans settled in rural areas to fulfil the legal housing requirements for family reunification. Moreover, as we witnessed in the case of Sardinia, smaller municipalities' welfare policies and capacity influenced or better incentivised Moroccans' settlement in such places, too.

Local culture and social norms: Various respondents settled in rural areas (or used them as a stepping stone before moving to towns or cities) due to the fewer risks, informality and 'invisibility' that such settlements offered both for stay and work in the local underground economy. In fact, in both regions, the local societies are rather tolerant of irregular migration status and informal work conditions, features which shape in different ways migrant integration trajectories.

Integration outcomes and well-being at the place of residence

Respondents living in small towns and rural areas of Crete did extremely well in terms of employment, self-employment and activity[5], while in Sardinia, they did similarly (poorly) to those living in urban areas.

As it emerged in the case of Sardinia, particularly high levels of self-employment (20% of the economically active respondents) might indicate difficulties in accessing decent, well-paid and stable employment and subsequent problems in retaining a regular status rather than a strong tendency to entrepreneurship.

Great differences were observed between the two islands and national groups regarding respondents' working conditions and job quality. In Crete, all salaried workers declared to work full-time and to have a quite stable job, despite most working on a daily wage without a long-term contract. Respondents living in rural areas reported a medium-to-high level of satisfaction with their employment or self-employment conditions. In any case, only a small number reported labour exploitation issues. Overall, as discussed earlier, the working conditions for Albanians in Crete improved significantly over the years. Comparing respondents' previous and current occupations, we see that many Albanians achieved upward socioeconomic mobility in both rural and urban areas and found or started themselves a more skilled, secure, better quality and better-paid employment. On the other hand, Moroccans in Sardinia reported low to average satisfaction with their working conditions regardless of their place of settlement. However, important variations emerged among rural areas. Moreover, negative economic trends were witnessed regarding their employment all over the island. To sum up, over time, the quality of Albanians' employment improved; that of Moroccans did not, except for those who were highly educated.

5　All economically active respondents declared to be employed or self-employed at the time of the survey.

Both in Crete and Sardinia, most respondents reported enjoying decent to good housing conditions all over the region. In Sardinia, no important differences were observed between the different spatial typologies, while in Crete, worth noting variations were observed among rural areas. Moreover, in Crete, great difficulty finding affordable and decent housing was recorded in all typologies examined, especially those living in cities and coastal rural settlements, where 33% and 38% of respondents reported living in overcrowded dwellings.

An intriguing pattern in Crete and Sardinia was observed regarding respondents' financial conditions. Respondents who lived in rural areas assessed their satisfaction with their household income with a slightly higher score (Crete: 6.49; Sardinia: 6.09) than those living in urban areas (Crete: 6.39; Sardinia: 5.41). This finding is considered particularly interesting as it highlights the importance of the subjective assessment of financial conditions, which is strongly related to the personal needs and aspirations of each person, while it can also capture, to an extent, important differences in the cost of living in each place of living or the satisfaction with the income derived by informal economic activity. In Sardinia, strong variations were also observed among rural and urban areas alike (Table 1).

Table 1. Satisfaction with the household financial conditions

Spatial Typology	Cities	Towns & Suburbs	Intermediate rural areas	Remote areas	Coastal rural areas
Albanians in Crete: Degree of satisfaction (0-10)	6.43	6.18	6.54	6.55	6.38
Moroccans in Sardinia: Degree of satisfaction (0-10)	5.91	4.76	6.61	5.1	6.25

Source: Author's own elaboration

As shown in Table 2 below, findings from both Crete and Sardinia suggest that satisfaction with the place of residence reduces as we move further from the islands' large cities. However, it is important to stress that the differences between the different typologies are not significant. In addition, as we move further from the islands' large cities, there is a higher will to move elsewhere in the following years. It is also important to stress that, most often, those who would like to move elsewhere reported their preference to move to the regional or provincial capital city. Most of them justified this choice on the better services, activities and personal growth opportunities that cities offer for them and their offspring, particularly once the latter arrive in their teens. Furthermore, respondents' aspirations for moving elsewhere also had a strong age component, with most respondents under 29 years old preferring to move to urban areas due to the lack of job opportunities and cultural offers in the rural settlements in which they lived.

Table 2. Satisfaction with the place of residence and staying preferences

Spatial Typology	Cities	Towns & Suburbs	Intermediate rural areas	Remote areas	Coastal rural areas
Albanians in Crete: Degree of satisfaction (0-10)	9.18	8.73	8.38	8	7.92
Albanians in Crete: Will to stay at current place of residence (% of respondents)	84.62	81.82	76.92	54.55	61.54
Moroccans in Sardinia: Degree of satisfaction(0-10)	7.79	6.65	6.7	6.4	8.93
Moroccans in Sardinia Will to stay at current place of residence (% of respondents)	58.33	36.84	55.56	30.00	25.00

Source: Author's own elaboration

The above findings could also be linked with both Albanians' and Moroccans' similar views regarding the prospects for migrant integration in rural areas of the two regions, which appear to decline. An exception to this might be the coastal rural areas and some intermediate areas with multi-functional dynamic economies. In any case, it is beyond any doubt that remote rural areas show extremely poor prospects for migrant integration, especially compared to the intermediate or coastal ones.

Finally, reaffirming previous insights from the literature (Papadopoulos 2009; 2012), the *socioeconomic mobility* of respondents was likely to go hand-in-hand with *spatial mobility* (rural to urban movement). Moreover, regarding the spatial mobility within the country or region, evidence showed that respondents' movement had been unidirectional (i.e. rural-urban). Only a few Moroccans moved from urban to rural areas, in the case of Sardinia. When this happened, it was linked to the necessity to fulfil the preconditions for family reunification or to find better housing for their family. In a similar vein, the fact that many respondents lived in rural areas before moving to cities of the two regions underlines that the research findings concern those who stayed in such settlements in the long run. More to the point, the several Albanians and Moroccans who lived in the past in rural areas and later moved to urban centres already responded in a way to the main research question regarding their needs and aspirations with their feet.

Conclusions

The empirical evidence confirmed that the character and direction of migrant integration processes reflected the wider set of economic, socio-cultural and political features and customs of each rural locality to an important extent. For instance, features such as

the local labour market, economic and demographic trends, infrastructure, local culture and attitudes (i.e. familism, parochialism, weak local culture of entrepreneurship in Sardinia), prior migration history and experience, and the welfare capacity of local municipalities strongly framed respondents' settlement and integration in the rural areas of the two regions.

Moreover, the fieldwork findings showed greater advantages for migrants living in urban areas than rural ones and conditions in the cities were more favourable for successful integration in all domains examined. Indeed, overall, migrants' living conditions have been "objectively" better in the cities of the two regions where labour markets are larger and infrastructure is better consolidated. Furthermore, additional "objective" downsides observed in rural areas imply that the settlement in such locations is more suitable for specific migrant profiles than others, as also analysed in the previous section. For instance, as Jentsch, de Lima & Macdonald (2007) also suggested, opportunities for social and economic mobility and growth in rural areas are fewer, and often, there is a lack of high-quality employment or employment opportunities in previous careers due to the small-scale rural economies. Subsequently, more highly-skilled migrants will likely be discouraged from settling or remaining in rural areas in the long run. Similarly, those who might settle in rural areas need to "enjoy" performing available jobs to continue staying in these. They must also possess specific skills that match the limited in-scale rural labour markets.

However, it also emerges that differences between urban and rural areas in subjective terms were less relevant than the literature suggested (OECD 2018a; Natale et al., 2019) when assessing integration outcomes only in objective terms. In fact, the survey findings showed that integration outcomes varied only slightly between urban and rural areas in subjective terms. Important assets in certain realms of life compensated significantly for drawbacks in others based on respondent's characteristics (gender, age, family status, length of residence, generational cohort, the reason for migration,

employment status, educational level, life-course stage) and aspirations, while "hidden" outcomes linked to the widespread informal economy of Southern Europe possibly surfaced, too.

Findings also showed that migrant integration in rural areas is not homogeneous across the various rural typologies examined (i.e., intermediate, remote, coastal). Worth noting variations emerged in various domains such as employment, housing, financial conditions as well as the attitudes of the local society towards migration. In addition, respondents living in each typology faced different challenges (e.g. cost of housing in coastal rural areas, lack of entertainment in intermediate and remote rural areas) or the same challenge in varying degrees (e.g. housing, employment). Overall, different rural typologies influenced migrant integration outcomes and well-being differently and drove migrants to very diverse professional trajectories.

Building on the findings of this research, some suggestions for future inquiry emerge. First, further harmonised, comparable and timely quantitative evidence is needed at the municipality level that will allow for a more geographically precise and richer analysis of migrant integration in rural areas of the EU Member States. In this respect, scholars should further exploit the under-utilised existing data produced by national and sub-national surveys that targeted directly or indirectly TCN or foreign-born populations[6]. Second, considering that migrant integration is highly complex and infinite variations in each case may occur both in terms of the rural typology and the migrants' profiles, it could be extremely useful to explore further whether artificial intelligence software can contribute to generating meaningful matching between the structural features of the host rural settlements, on the one hand, and migrants' skills, capabilities, needs and aspirations, on the other, thus optimising both their initial settlement and long-term incorporation prospects.

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6   In this regard, the Ethnic and Migrant Minorities (EMM) Survey Registry is a very useful free tool that allows users to search for and learn about existing quantitative surveys to EMM populations through survey-level metadata. You can access it here: https://ethmigsurveydatahub.eu/emmregistry/

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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 widespread 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 apartments) 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 exacerbate 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 education 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 Education, 7,769 (90%) of the 8,637 children enrolled as of March 2021 attend primary and secondary education classes in person. However, 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 neighbourhoods, 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
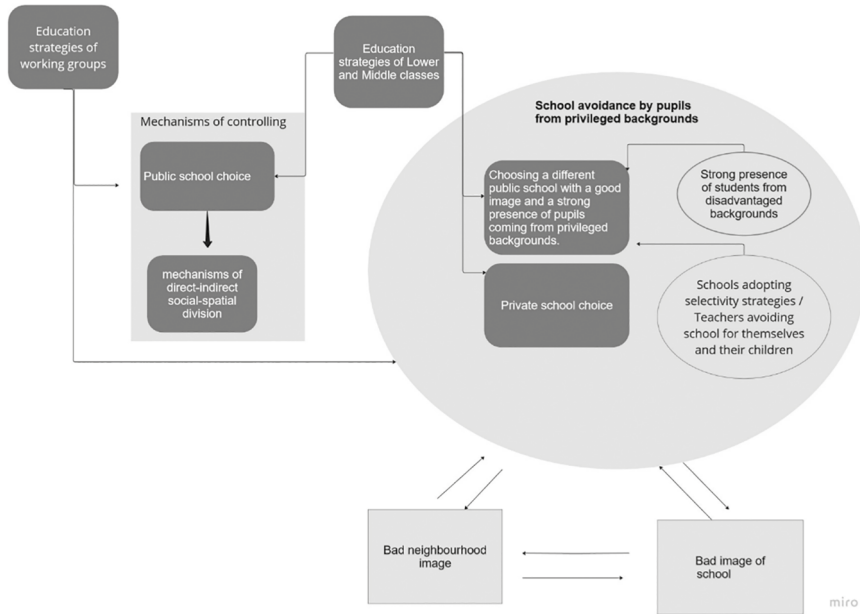
Source: Compiled by the author, adapted from Francois (2002:20)

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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SECTION 2

MIGRATING IN SMALL- AND MEDIUM-SIZED TOWNS: POLICY CHALLENGES

Socio-economic integration and migrants' agency in the Italian Alps

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ABSTRACT

Migrants interact with places of arrival in multiple ways. The configurations of local structures, places and people determine the extent and quality of interaction and can result in processes of inclusion or exclusion. Moreover, the relationship between individuals and the socio-spatial and structural contexts of action is also defined by migrants' agency, as highlighted by the analysis of qualitative data collected through an action-research conducted in the mountain area of Metropolitan City of Turin, Italy. In this context, a close interrelation emerges between socio-economic and labour integration of migrants and other dimensions that come into play in the process of their integration in a new reality. As shown in the case study, innovative policy tools seem necessary to be designed in order to stimulate virtuous processes and to strengthen migrants' real participation in the social life of local communities: these tools should deal with the crucial issues of public space and shared care of the territory between old and new inhabitants, enabling new forms of integration in rural and mountainous areas.

1 Although the paper was conceived together, Fabio Lucchini is the author of paragraph 1, Monica Gilli is the author of paragraph 2 and Andrea Membretti is the author of paragraph 3.

1. Migrants' agency in the light of social structures and infrastructures

Migrants interact with places of arrival in multiple ways. The configurations of local structures, places and people determine the extent and quality of interaction and can result in processes of inclusion or exclusion in terms of access to housing, education, work, health, social security or political participation (Ager, Strang 2008). Migrants experience inclusion and exclusion simultaneously and use experiences gained over time to acquire knowledge about places and their accessibility. Positive representations and practices associated with places foster the development of place-based belonging (Radford 2017).

Moreover, previous migration experience and the settlement of migrants in particular places may facilitate or even predict the arrival of new migrants (Bakewell et al. 2012): social capital embedded within networks of relatives, friends, or even merely co-nationals in the place of destination are likely to reduce the costs and risks of migration, and thereby increase the likelihood of setting in motion migration dynamics independent of their initial conditions (Garip 2008). Research highlights the varied forms – either requested or received - of migration assistance, resulting in cumulative causation mechanisms (Bashi 2007).

Everywhere and also in rural and mountainous areas, successful integration depends on the ability/availability of migrants and local population to establish social bridge: in other words, enabling positive and enriching interactions with *local social structures and infrastructures* (Ager, Strang 2008; Schech, Rainbird 2013). The analysis of migrants' multiple interactions with *local social structures and infrastructures* is therefore a valuable starting point for assessing the impacts of settlement (Kordel, Weidinger 2019; Baglioni et al. 2021). An important reference here is, in fact, the Ager and Strang's mid-level theory (2008), as they discuss the structure of

integration and inclusion/exclusion, showing interdependencies between the spheres of employment, housing, education and health, as well as between social interactions and facilitators of spatial mobility, linguistic/cultural knowledge and security/protection: focusing on migrants' participation in the economic, social, cultural and political life of the host society, here it is possible to find an analysis from the perspective of both migrants and receiving society through several interdependent dimensions (citizenship and rights, education, employment, housing, and health, linguistic and cultural knowledge).

The relationship between individuals and the socio-spatial and structural contexts of action is well defined through the concept of *agency*, that, with reference to migrants, denotes an important spatial dimension; in particular, *agency* describes and clarifies the capacity or power to act in relation to the existing structures, considering action as embedded in a specific context (and its opportunities) (Halfacree, Rivera 2012). In this sense, development of migrants' agency can find valuable support from civil society actors, especially at local level, i.e. volunteers, churches, welfare organisations and associations in general. However, if members of the local population have not experienced the 'other' in the past or if they see migrants as a threat to their jobs, or their identity, building social bridges becomes complex (Connor 2007).

In this regard, the perplexity towards migrants of some local social groups - in both urban and rural contexts - is often particularly marked. Indeed, members of socio-economically disadvantaged groups, who occupy a weak position within society, tend to have little confidence in their own possibilities, perceive little control over their lives and consequently experience a range of negative feelings (anxiety, shame, frustration, anger). Migrants and ethnic minorities pose a threat to the disadvantaged in terms of employment, housing and services (Volpato 2019), and such a threat perception - particularly high in times of economic recession and growing inequality - constitutes the core of prejudice. The aversion to immigrants is explained in terms of objective conflict: in difficult times, the scar-

city of resources increases competition between groups and leads to perceive newcomers as competitors and rivals. The worsening of socio-economic conditions trigger social comparisons causing feelings of relative deprivation. Interestingly, the perception of having less than one's fair share and what other groups have act at all social levels, as indicated by studies according to which even individuals with high levels of education express negative attitudes towards immigrants when they are seen as an employment threat (Kuppens et al. 2018). In relation to these processes, the condition of foreign immigrants appears peculiar, due to the complexity of factors that influence actions in daily life and to the considerable variability of these factors over time and space.

Several studies also focus on how - during their migration trajectory - individuals abandon passivity, implementing specific agency practices and a resilient attitude (Innes 2016). With respect to this particular aspect of migration phenomena, the temporal dimension of agency appears particularly relevant. As emerges from a now-classic work on the ways in which agentic dimensions interpenetrate with forms of structure, the authors conceptualize agency as a temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its iterational or habitual aspect) but also oriented towards the future (as a projective capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and towards the present (as a practical evaluative capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment) (Emirbayer, Mische 1998). In other words, migrants, as all other social actors, "are always living simultaneously in the past, future, and present, and adjusting the various temporalities of their empirical existence to one another (and to their empirical circumstances) in more or less imaginative or reflective ways" (ibid.: 1012).

That considered, migrants develops agency in various areas of their daily lives - acting to improve their housing conditions, to participate in cultural and political life, to enhance their education and qualification. From this point of view, direct and interpersonal social relations - embedded in spatial contexts and/or framed by

them - can be crucial for the development of agency, as migrants learn to interact with the structures present on the territory. The feedback effects of migrant agency are associated to processes of socio-cultural negotiation, social construction of everyday places (Woods 2018) and horizontal transfer of knowledge to other migrants. A process that, in certain circumstances, can be institutionalised by migrants' own organisations. Therefore, also in the light of this the-oretical framework, in the debate between proponents of agentivist or structuralist approaches, sounds appropriate, for analytical and explanatory purposes, to consider structures (*local social structures and infrastructures*, in particular) not as mere limits to action but as elements that make it possible instead.

2. The self-construction of a public space of recognition: an action-research in the Alps of Piedmont

MATILDE (Migration Impact Assessment to Enhance Integra-tion and Local Development in European Rural and Mountain Areas) is a 3-year EU Horizon 2020 project focusing on the role and im-pact of migration on the local development of rural and mountain re-gions. MATILDE used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods and adopted an action-research approach, emphasising the agency of migrants and the site-specific features of the 10 re-gions involved (https://matilde-migration.eu/about-matilde/). In this project, Italian researchers (University of Turin) worked on two dif-ferent case studies, one in South Tyrol (dealing with migrants' labour inclusion), while the other - discussed in this contribution - located in the Metropolitan City of Turin (Piedmont region) and focusing on the impact of migrants on housing patterns and socio-spatial trans-formation of mountain villages. Here it has been selected the small-size municipality of Bussoleno (5,806 inhabitants), at the end of

Susa Valley, about 30 km from the main town of Turin. In this village the opportunities to engage local actors and residents in action-research activities appeared good due to the local history of welcoming international migrants, dating back to the early 1990s (and even before, if considering internal labor migration from southern Italy).

Bussoleno has been therefore identified as an interesting case-study because of its relevant and long-lasting share of migrants; the presence of relevant public spaces that could be targeted by action-research activities; diversified interconnections (railway, commuting, etc.) between the small municipality and the regional capital of Turin; and, not least, local actors available to collaborate in the project, in particular active in the field of migrant inclusion (as Italian Red Cross, local Mayor, catholic church and several associations).

The aim of the action-research conducted in Bussoleno in 2021 was to investigate - using a participatory approach - the use of public spaces by migrants and locals, the different self-perceptions and ways of living with respect to the considered mountain territory, and the connections between such a mountain area and the metropolitan core (Gilli, Membretti 2022a).

The first step of the action-research was the field preparation that allowed to recruit participants for the activities in an atmosphere of trust and mutual cooperation. This preparation involved three types of stakeholders: territorial partner, local stakeholders and migrants. The territorial partner was identified in the Metropolitan City of Turin that, supporting the research with an intense institutional communication activity, decided to assign to the research institute FIERI the most operative part of its work (collaboration in preliminary investigation and in action-research itself). Then, a wide range of local stakeholders were involved: public institutions, third sector associations (operating in the reception of migrants and social/housing inclusion) and different actors operating in the field of education (e.g. school for adults, etc.). These local actors worked

also as socio-cultural mediators between the research team and migrants in Bussoleno.

Migrants directly involved in the action-research in Bussoleno were 30 (one third female) and were mainly Albanians and Moroccans, both first and second generation migrants. Of the 14 Albanians, half were first generation and half second generation migrants, all living in Bussoleno or maintaining close links with Bussoleno; other migrants (N = 12) were either first and second generation Moroccans, or people coming from other African countries (Guinea, Somalia) or Bangladesh, most of them resident in – or gravitating to - Bussoleno, as attending the CPIA adult school (Gilli, Membretti 2022b). Moreover, some "migrants in transit" - that is, people intending to cross the nearby border with France - were also engaged in the activities. These last subjects (4 males, from Central Africa) were hosted by the Red Cross in Bussoleno, some of them engaged in a professionalization process within project LISA (acronym for: work, inclusion, development, independence), which targets fragile people, homeless or asylum seekers.

Different participatory tools were used in conducting action-research: focus groups (in the preliminary work and in the final evaluation), mobility mapping, social mapping and a 4-days participatory architecture workshop. Mobility mapping and social mapping resulted useful tools to re-construct the mobility trajectories of migrants living in Bussoleno and the map of public spaces in the village, used and frequented by migrants in their free time.

The field work brought out some needs expressed by participants with respect to the territory they live: one of the most relevant resulted in creating a new meeting place in the centre of the village, close to the public market area and accessible to different groups of people (youngsters, mothers with children, etc.). Therefore, with the aim of self-building a convivial wooden structure (the "MATILDE big bench"), a 4-days participatory architecture workshop was organized, involving migrants, local population and a group of students (also coming from other regions, and responding to a national call

organized with the support of Camposaz association, partner of the initiative).

The final output of the activities is represented by a new and concrete public space of encounter, offered to the different populations of the village as a common good to take care of in the future.

The action-research conducted in Bussoleno has led to different considerations and reflections, with respect in particular to the issue of integration and agency of migrants in rural and mountain areas. First of all, it has showed that the engagement and even the empowerment of migrants can take place not only through labour integration but also through a mindful co-creation and shared use of public spaces. Public spaces play an important role for social cohesion and recognition, especially in mountain and rural areas where there are fewer places for organised socialisation with respect to bigger cities. Public spaces play an even more important role for migrants living in mountain and rural areas because they have fewer economic resources and relational networks, and lack non-commodified spaces of encounter.

The action-research and participatory activities enforced at the same time the idea that engagement of migrants and locals can translate into rootedness and sense of belonging, also for different communities with respect to the same places, trough not only to the use and maintenance of an asset but also to its design and creation. In this way, the space-making process becomes a sense-making process (Weick 1969) with a construction of shared meanings through the creation of concrete spaces.

Let us look at these points analytically.

Engagement and even empowerment of migrants can take place through a conscious use and co-creation of public spaces. This means the habit of frequenting - in addition to one's private home - a set of spaces for collective social use, without access con-

straints, both indoors (such as a public library) and outdoors (such as a garden, or a street). In public spaces, individual carries out activities, establishes ties, exchanges information, while he/she is visible and recognised within the social fabric, thus exercising her/his rights of citizenship. What are the characteristics of a public space? First of all, it must be a semanticized space. It is not a question of simply having an empty space, such as a field or a courtyard, but a space to which the community gives specific meanings and values. Its characteristics are often site-specific and can vary, but common features include being an accessible, safe, visible place, facilitating relationships, adaptable to different uses over time (Gilli, Membretti 2022b).

Public spaces play an important role for social cohesion, especially in mountain and rural areas where there are fewer places for organised socialisation, both public, such as museums, and private, such as associations, places of cult, shopping centres. Among the indoor public spaces in Bussoleno there is a library, a museum-workshop for schools (a former mill, the Varesio Museum) and a railway museum currently closed. However, the research conducted in MATILDE project was mainly aimed at focusing on outdoor public spaces because - as it emerged in a previous work (Ibid.: 201) - there is often a low level of awareness of migrants about mountain space and landscape: migrants often do not realise that they live in a mountain village and do not often frequent paths and outdoor spaces. The action-research, with the realisation of a public outdoor space offering also a view on the mountain panorama, aimed to facilitate this use and a wider awareness.

In Bussoleno, existing outdoor public spaces include some playgrounds, mainly dedicated to the youngest (kindergarten and primary school children) and a football field, while there is a lack of meeting grounds for adolescents; for this reason, adolescents and young people often move to other villages by train. Migrants in Bussoleno mainly use the benches they find scattered around the town, including those in front of the station, where, however, there is no space for a real square. The largest square of the village, the market

square, is used for market purpose one day a week and becomes a car park the other days. There are no other usable squares for socialising. The central street of the village is narrow and has to guarantee access to the cars of the residents, and therefore cannot be pedestrianised. Private leisure spaces are also somewhat limited and mostly indoor, while access is related to consumption: the nearby shopping centre (not easy to be reached by walking), some shops, bars and restaurants/pizzerias. There are plans to use the old cinema, closed a long time ago, to build an indoor climbing gym, a very important project that would give space to young people and would connect indoor to outdoor. In Bussoleno there are some cultural, sport (CAI, Italian Alpine Club) and voluntary associations, but they are thought more for adults than for young people. There are no migrants' formal associations. For Moroccans, the most important place of indoor encounter remains the mosque, that is a small Islamic prayer room, which only welcomes men. Finally, there is the parish with its spaces. In this context, Turin, the regional capital, plays an important role. Many migrants go to Turin on Saturdays for the Porta Palazzo market, which is large, cheap and multi-ethnic, well connected by train, offering a way to 'counterbalance' the daily mountain experience with occasional urban incursions. Despite the fact that there are not many outdoor spaces for meeting, many activities are implemented to foster civic participation and engagement, mainly through the synergies developed by the Municipality and local authorities on one hand, and associations, cooperatives and the local parish (which also coordinates Caritas activities) on the other (Gilli, Membretti 2022b).

Public spaces play an even more important role for mountain and rural migrants that have fewer economic resources and relational networks. When focusing on public spaces, some considerations on the issues of housing have to be recalled[2]: those who do not have

2   Mountain villages generally have a high percentage of old and cheap houses, often old-fashioned but poor in technical and material terms; for the owners (Italians and non-Italians) the houses are now renovated and thermally insulated, but for the tenants, often immigrants, this represents a situation of housing hardship.

a sufficiently large and comfortable house need public spaces more than others. It must also be said that migrants - when they have money enough to be spent - do not always have a leisure culture similar to that of Western Europeans: membership of gyms, clubs and associations is not always frequent, and if someone join those facilities, are usually children, but not adults, and certainly not women, often relegated to the domestic space. Therefore, public spaces become crucial for getting out of the private and domestic dimension, exercising one's right to visibility and socialisation, and avoiding socio-spatial ghettoisation. Among migrants (but the same applies to Italians) the most disadvantaged individuals seem singles or couples without children. The loneliness of the big city is in reality only partial: at metropolitan level there are cultural associations, sports clubs, organisations of all kinds promoting socialisation among singles. In mountain villages, on the contrary, this social infrastructure does not exist and a single-person risks to be just a lonely man/woman with no landing fields; even more in the case of a migrant (Ibid.).

Finally, engagement of migrants translates into their rootedness and sense of belonging to the place. For developing rootedness, mere frequentation of public spaces is not enough: what is needed are engagement activities as the design and transformation of places, which can be stimulated by an inclusive public debate, participatory planning and choral implementation. Migrants visibility in a public place designed and shared with locals can foster mutual recognition and thus lay the foundations for negotiated pathways of citizenship.

In this way, the public space is not given – as a top-down intervention - but is self-produced by the community within a bottom-up approach: each migrant participating in this process will be able to say to her/his children with pride, "we made this and you will have to take care of it in the future", thus laying the foundations for a common intergenerational heritage (Ibid.).

3. From action-research to policy design: conclusive remarks

The analysis of the qualitative data collected through the action-research conducted in the mountain area of Metropolitan City of Turin seems to highlight the close interrelation between socio-economic and labour integration of migrants and other dimensions that come into play in the process of their integration in a new reality, with particular reference newcomers' agency.

Taking up the conceptualisation of Ager and Strang (2008), as referred in the introduction of this paper, a key component of integration is represented by citizenship and rights, i.e. the legal-political basic conditions nature for inclusion process. On the one hand, in the areas examined, guaranteed rights as freedom of religion and political expression and equality before the law can be asserted by individual and groups; on the other hand, certain obligations can be imposed on migrants, such as, for example, to participate in language and culture courses. Moreover, residential placement of migrants in rural and mountainous areas in many cases has been imposed by central institutions: this is the situation of the resettlement of many asylum seekers, relocated by national dispersal policies in even remote areas of Italy. Therefore, policies supporting migrants' agency should consider and guarantee the right to choose one's own place of settlement as part of migrants right to self-determination.

Another relevant aspect of the inclusion of migrants refers to the relations between them and local structures and institutions, and relates to the capacity of public administration to meet the special needs of the former and to facilitate their access to services on an equal and non-discriminatory basis. Local administrations in rural and mountainous areas often lack adequate knowledge of the needs of migrant groups and the rights that should be guaranteed to them, a circumstance aggravated by the fact that civil servants often do not

have intercultural experience and language skills to deal with ethnic diversity. Policies supporting migrants' agency need to be based on specific competencies and qualifications hold by local institutions.

Another important area for socio-economic and labour integration is access to education and training, and the interaction with educational facilities and infrastructures that can offer migrants the opportunity to acquire additional skills useful for social interaction and future job search. In the case-study of Bussoleno, these facilities are sometimes only accessible with non-negligible individual investments of time and money, especially when public transportation is underdeveloped and/or too expensive for people with poor income. Related to this problem there is in fact the issue of spatial mobility, which is particularly felt in rural and mountainous areas. Assuming that local spaces can be both experienced as places of conviviality and conflict (Radford 2017), mobility here refers to the ability to move from one's residential space in order to access employment, education and health, as well as to create and maintain social contacts and networks. Policy supporting migrants' agency have to consider their concrete right of internal mobility and the access to territorial resources, at different scale and considering budget's constraints.

Undoubtedly, again following Ager and Strang's approach, a relevant aspect of integration refers to the conditions of access to housing and spatial infrastructures, in particular public spaces. The literature here emphasises the interdependencies between housing and physical and emotional well-being, pointing out how perceived satisfaction with one's living arrangements is influenced by size and quality of housing, cost and contractual situation (Stewart, Shaffer 2015), but also by environmental and contextual factors, such as accessibility to health, education and work facilities. In addition to the structural conditions of the housing market (e.g. vacancy rate, level of renting), other access mechanisms determine whether and to what extent migrants are able to rent flats or houses in rural areas - mechanisms also partly similar to those operating in urban areas (Membretti, Quassoli 2015): specifically, differential treatment,

when not overt discrimination associated with landlords' reluctance to rent to migrants are among the most important obstacles, whereas support from the local population and social proximity facilitate access to housing (Weidinger, Kordel 2020). As we have seen in the case study, public space is relevant, assuming the role of a fundamental socio-spatial infrastructure for the development of citizenship trough public visibility of migrants and their recognition by local community. Policy supporting migrants' agency need to be designed as place-based and place-sensitive, taking into account the role of spatial dimension for the quality of life and empowerment of people.

Access to health and health facilities/infrastructures clearly have positive impacts on the well-being of migrants and, consequently, also on their opportunities for socio-economic and labour integration. However, accessibility to health infrastructures in general and to medical specialists in particular can be problematic, in particular in the rural and mountainous areas under consideration, also due to linguistic-cultural barriers, besides the issue of costs and mobility. A related issue is that of security, especially for those migrants (in particular, refugees and asylum seekers) coming from war zones or who have experienced violence during their migration trajectory. In rural and mountainous areas, and specifically in those here considered, ambivalence is given by the fact that, while some migrants experience racism even in these remote territories (Garland, Chakraborti 2006), the majority consider rural Italian locations much safer than their countries of origin. Especially migrants' families emphasise the opportunity to raise their children in a protected environment, away from urban risks (Stenbacka 2012). Policy supporting migrants' agency should foster the overall well-being of newcomers, enhancing the role of health and perceived security at different territorial levels, in relationship to their active and concrete citizenship.

In conclusion, the data gathered in the above-mentioned case study, as in the other different territorial cases considered in MATILDE project at European level, show how rural and mountainous areas present ambivalent conditions with respect to the development of migrants'

agency in the integration process and in relation to a public policy ecosystem that is constructed on a local scale, but is based on norms and institutions that are also extra-local. Moreover, it is important to recognise that the dimensions described here - related to socio-economic and labour integration and to spatial inclusion - are subject to change as a result of migrants' impact on local social structures.

In this sense, the "ecosystem of public policies" (e.g., their interplay at different scale) can provide the structural basis for the development of migrants' agency, which - reinforced through participatory processes and the building of connections, bridges and social bonds - in turn interacts with local social structures. Clearly, social connections play an important role in conveying the process of socio-economic and labour integration at local level. Following Putnam's reflections on social capital (1993), relationships with family members, ethnic, national or religious communities (social connections) allow migrants and refugees to share cultural and social practices and maintain family patterns of relationships. In addition, these networks can also be made fruitful for building relationships, creating contacts and receiving assistance in navigating a new environment (Schech, Rainbird, 2013).

In the light of these reflections, innovative policy tools seem necessary to be designed and tested, in order to stimulate virtuous processes and to strengthen migrants' real participation in the social life of local communities, overcoming obsolete institutional models and developing different channels of involvement. As shown in the case of Bussoleno, these tools should deal with the crucial issues of public space and shared care of the territory between old and new inhabitants, enabling new forms of integration in rural and mountainous areas.

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Drivers and Constraints for Integration Policy Learning in Small European Localities

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ABSTRACT

This conference paper illustrates some preliminary findings of the Whole-COMM Project, asking which key factors obstruct or favour the diffusion of best practices in the local integration policy field in small and medium-sized towns and rural areas in Europe. This is a highly relevant question if we consider that these localities have been at the forefront of refugee reception and integration in Europe since the 2015 European 'asylum crisis'. The paper identifies three overarching factors that prevent policy learning in small localities: the isolation of local governments from higher levels of government; the lack of policy discussions between local governments on immigrant integration; and the very infrequent use of specialized sources of information by local officials and policymakers Subsequently the paper identifies a number of enabling factors that seem to allow policy diffusion despite the above-mentioned challenges. These include: the presence in these small localities of local officials or bureaucrats who are formally assigned a specific competence or mandate on integration; local policymakers' perception of being responsible for the integration of migrants; and a low local salience of the immigration issue (in contrast to the growing local political contestation of immigrant integration policy in most of the small localities analysed).

Introduction

This conference paper illustrates some of the findings of the Whole-COMM Project, addressing the following research question: Which specific conditions or factors allow or constrain transfer of good practices in the immigrant integration policy field in European small and medium-sized localities? What are the key differences compared with big cities and metropolises?

These are highly relevant and salient questions. Since 2014, small-sized and medium-sized localities in Europe – most of which had previously very low experience with cultural diversity – have been at the forefront of refugee reception and integration (Caponio and Pettrachin 2021). This was mainly an effect of the implementation of 'redistribution' systems by national governments (in the vast majority of EU countries) which led to the dispersal of asylum seekers and refugees who arrived in Europe during the so-called 'asylum crisis' outside the bigger European cities (van Liempt and Miellet 2021). Small and medium-sized towns have been therefore described as 'key actors in the multilevel governance of migration' by OECD and the European Commission (OECD 2018). Once again in the past two years, in the aftermath of the arrival of thousands of Ukrainian refugees in 2022 and following the increase in asylum applications in 2023, asylum seekers' dispersal to small localities and rural areas has been framed in EU policy debates as a potential solution to the challenges related to the housing crisis that is affecting European big cities (Karasapan 2022).

Despite this new centrality of small localities in European policy discourses on immigrant integration, the very few scholarly works have so far specifically analysed integration policymaking in these localities suggest that integration policy responses that local governments of these localities have developed tend to be very much isolated from each other and fractured. Despite the growing number of research projects and initiatives organized by civil society and

international organizations aimed at favouring policy diffusion in this field (Yilmaz 2023), scholars have therefore suggested that best practices on immigrant integration policy very rarely transfer across localities (Broadhead and Hillmann 2021).

It is therefore important to study how best practices transfer across localities, which factors prevent policy diffusion, and how small cities differ from bigger cities in this respect.

In order to answer these questions, this conference paper uses findings of the Whole-COMM project , an H2020 research project which is looking at asylum-seekers and refugees' integration in 36 small and medium-sized towns and rural areas across 7 EU countries (Caponio and Pettrachin 2021). In particular, it relies on around 600 semi-structured interviews conducted by Whole-COMM researchers in these localities with policymakers and local stakeholders, with the aim to know more about the integration policies developed at the local level. These interviews also included a short, structured survey which was designed to gather quantitative data about policymaking interactions between local governments and all the other actors involved in integration policymaking and about collaborations and conflicts within local integration policy actors. Interviews were conducted between October 2021 and February 2022 and therefore refer to policy processes that precede the recent Ukrainian crisis.

In the following sections of this conference paper, I will first describe three major obstacles to policy transfer in the integration policy field in small European localities and, second, I will outline a number of 'enabling factors' that seem to favour such policy transfer.

Three major constraints to policy transfer in the integration policy field

Three main insights emerge from analyses of this interview material which are highly relevant for the research questions addressed on this conference paper about the potential transferability of best practices on refugee integration across small localities. These connect to some established findings in the existing literature on knowledge transfers and policy learning, and specifically to works that adopt network-centred approaches to explore the diffusion of policies and practices (Füglister 2012; Gilardi and Wasserfallen 2019; Krenjova and Raudla 2018).

First, the transferability of knowledge and good practices requires meaningful exchanges or discussion on immigrant integration between local governments and between localities and other stakeholders involved in integration policymaking. This is an obvious point, but a highly relevant one when we focus on small localities. The data collected by the Whole-COMM project on the interactions of small localities related to immigrant integration indeed suggest that most of these small localities are very much isolated. They have occasional interactions related to immigrant integration with their regional governments and national governments, they have no direct contacts with the EU level. They sometimes interact with other local governments, but these are mostly neighbouring municipalities within their countries. Local governments of small localities have no interactions with other localities outside their country.

This is a first striking difference with big cities and metropolis. A vast body of literature in the past decade has explored policymaking interactions of European cities, finding that many of them are very proactive in trying to build alliances with other policy actors at the EU level, and that they often have direct access to national and EU policymakers (Caponio, Scholten, and Zapata-Barrero 2019). A grow-

ing scholarship has focused on European city networks on migration, which are becoming increasingly important actors in the multilevel governance of migration in Europe (Caponio and Pettrachin 2023; Triviño-Salazar 2023). Some European cities have even succeeded in building global partnerships and engaging in diplomatic activities beyond the borders of their nation-states (Stürner-Siovitz 2022). Compared to big cities, small localities are much less frequently or never invited to international events, they are rarely part of transnational city networks. Such isolation seems to have a direct and negative impact on learning processes.

Moving to my second point, the data we collected on the interactions of local governments in small localities suggest that NGOs and particularly NGOs which operate across different localities and regions seem to be the actors that are potentially in best position to indirectly favour the transferability of policies and learning processes within countries. On the one hand they – indirectly – connect different localities. On the other hand, they often have close and direct contacts with policymakers in these small localities, often much closer than in bigger cities. In this sense, it is however important to highlight that interactions with civil society are very different across localities. Progressive local governments tend to have more frequent and more collaborative interactions with civil society actors, while conservative localities tend to have much less frequent and more conflictual interactions. More broadly, rather than finding a pragmatic orientation of policymakers in small municipalities as some studies seem to suggest (Fisher Williamson 2018; Whyte, Larsen, and Olwig 2019), our preliminary results show that the political affiliation of LGs influences policymaking relations and also the kind of integration policies that are developed at the local level. The research conducted therefore challenges a rather established finding in the existing scholarship on local integration policy that, mainly analysing big cities, has often argues that party politics is not a key driver of local integration policymaking in small localities (Steen 2016). One possible explanation might be related to the more central and prominent role that elected policymakers play in integration policymaking

in small localities compared to bigger cities, where local officials and top-level bureaucrats often develop integration-related policy-making interactions independently from elected politicians. Another possible explanation might be related to a generally higher public salience of the migration issue in small localities compared to bigger cities, where public opinion tends to be more welcoming towards migrants and more used to cultural diversity (Tintori et al. 2018).

Finally, my third point concerns the role of access to relevant sources of information. When describing the key sources of information that local policymakers use to guide their decisions related to immigrant integration, most local policymakers in small localities referred to "non-specialist" sources, newspapers, local media, sometimes even social media (see also: Pettrachin 2019, 2022). Very few policymakers reported that they consult "specialist" sources. This might certainly again have a decisive impact on the potential for transferability of policies as access to specialist sources or material published by international organizations or civil society reports might in principle compensate for the absence of direct contacts between local governments of small localities and these other policy actors. These findings describe therefore a situation where the composition and features of the local integration policy network – and the configuration of interactions between local governments and other actors therein – represent a major obstacle for the transfer of best practiced in the integration policy field.

Enabling Factors for Policy Diffusion

Having identified some general trends and challenges that prevent the transferability of good practices in small localities, in the second part of this conference paper I focus on four enabling factors, that seem to favour the transfer of best practices possible under specific circumstances.

The first enabling factor is the presence in these small localities of local officials or bureaucrats who are formally assigned a specific competence or mandate on integration. This is very rarely the case in small localities, and particularly rural areas and small towns (while in medium towns – with more than 100,000 inhabitants – the presence of specific officials with a mandate on immigrant integration is slightly more common). Our data suggest that the smaller the size of the locality, the lower the likelihood to find local officials with a specific mandate or competence on immigrant integration. In many localities responsibility for immigrant integration is (often implicitly) delegated to officials responsible for local social services. At the same time our research also suggests that very rarely these officials in small localities have received specific training on – or have any specific expertise about – migration or integration-related issues. The lack of personnel is particularly evident in Southern and Eastern European countries, but also affects localities in central and norther European countries – while the lack of expertise seems to be a crosscutting challenge across most of our case localities. Once again, this seems to be a specific feature of small localities compared to big cities, which tend to have permanent staff with specific expertise and with specific mandates and responsibility on migration-related issues.

A second important factor that seems to enable the transfer of best practices is a low politicisation of the migration issue, which seems to foster more proactive policymaking approaches in many of our localities and therefore remove some obstacles for the transfer of good practices. In fact, when asked about the factors that influenced their decisions in the integration policy field, many policymakers we interviewed pointed first and foremost to constrains related to public opinion. As already mentioned, existing research on public attitudes to immigration has shown that locals' attitudes to immigration tend to me more negative in smaller localities than in bigger cities (Tintori et al. 2018). The Whole-COMM project is further testing this finding in a large-scale survey that will be conducted in 2023. Beyond that, however, our data suggest that policymakers'

perceptions of public opinion also matter. As part of our research, we asked both local policymakers and other actors involved in integration policymaking in our case-localities to assess locals' attitudes towards migrants on a scale of 1-5. The data collected suggest that perceptions of public opinion vary remarkably even among actors within the same locality. In particular, we found that conservative policymakers tend to assess public attitudes as much more negative than progressive policymakers, and that policymakers in rural areas tend to assess public attitudes more negatively compared to policymakers of medium towns (with small towns positioned somehow in between). More research is needed to establish whether this decoupling between policymakers' and other actors' perceptions of public attitudes to immigration emerges also in big cities.

Policymakers' perception of being responsible for immigrant integration is another important enabling factor that seems to favour processes of mutual learning and the diffusion of best practices. During the interviews conducted for the Whole-COMM project we asked policymakers and local officials about their perceptions of the role of local governments in the multilevel governance of migrant integration. Certainly, legal frameworks variously distribute competences and responsibilities to municipalities across different EU countries but beyond that our interviews suggest that local policymakers – even within the same country – have very diverse perceptions of the role that local governments can play for immigrant integration. Most of the interviewed policymakers, in fact, perceive immigrant integration as an issue for which local governments are not primarily responsible. Some of them think that national or regional governments should be primarily responsible, while others think that this is largely migrants' own responsibility. Not surprisingly, those policymakers that perceive immigrant integration as a key responsibility of local governments are those who seem to adopt more proactive policymaking approaches and to be more open to learning about policies successfully implemented in other localities. Conversely, these perceptions of not being responsible for immigrant integration is another key obstacle for processes of policy learning.

Finally, our analyses also suggest that the covid-19 pandemic has represented another important obstacle for learning processes in the integration policy field. Our data on the frequency of policy-making interactions between actors (collected for both the 2020-2021 and the 2018-2019 time periods) suggest that interactions/discussions on immigrant integration have been remarkably affected by the pandemic. In particular, interactions between LGs and between local governments and nongovernmental actors have become even more infrequent during the pandemic compared to the previous time period. Interestingly, conversely, the (very rare) interactions between local governments and national governments seem not to have been affected.

Which role for the Ukrainian 'refugee crisis'?

As already mentioned, these analyses have been conducted relying on interviews and data collected in early 2022, before the arrival of thousands of Ukrainian refugees in many European localities. An important open question concerns the role of the Ukrainian crisis on the above-described dynamics and whether this recent 'crisis' has opened a positive window of opportunity for enabling more transfer of good practices. Research has indeed shown that public attitudes towards Ukrainians are more favourable compared to public attitudes to non-EU migrants (Drazanova and Geddes 2022). The activation of the Temporary protection Directive has led to a very different management of these refugee flows (Irastorza 2022). Ukrainian refugees have settled in many European localities on the basis of pre-existing social networks, and not merely as an effect of national dispersal schemes (Karasapan 2022). This different mode of arrival of refugees in small European localities might have had important implications for policymaking processes and for the dy-

namics described above in this conference paper. Some anecdotal evidence we have collected suggests that the Ukrainian crisis might have pushed some more small localities to develop initiatives on immigrant integration and therefore maybe to be more open to learn some good practices but definitely more research is needed to shed light on these very recent dynamics.

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Migrant Political Participation in Small Towns.
The Case of Bebra

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ABSTRACT

While migrant political participation in urban areas has seen extensive research, limited attention has been given to the unique context of small towns. This article provides an analysis of the factors that influence migrant political engagement in such settings. Our focus is on the small German town of Bebra, which has been shaped over decades by a migrant influx. It is situated in the federal state of Hesse, which is considered a pioneer for migrant participation in Germany. The research summarises institutional, socio-economic and discursive dynamics that shape political participation. It explores the roles of social networks, migrant self-organizations (MSO), and local governance structures in facilitating and constraining migrant access to political processes. The findings highlight particular challenges for small- and medium sized towns (SMT) in this regard, which include a lack of resources, a high degree of political and administrative embeddedness, and a low level of strategic orientation. The article concludes

with recommendations for the promotion of political participation as well as suggestions for future research.

Introduction

As part of the international research project PISTE , which aims to improve the political participation opportunities of migrants in small and medium-sized towns, we have been cooperating with the Hessian municipality of Bebra and its mayor for around a year. Our goals are to strengthen the political participation of people with a migration history in the evaluation, design, and transformation of their city and, more generally, to enhance local integration policy and political participation in European small and medium-sized towns. We aim to fill the attention gap that affects both small city research and planning in general and the issue of political participation in particular. To this end, we conducted two qualitative empirical sub-studies on local networks and integration practices in Bebra. The small town of Bebra has a long history of international immigration comparable to big cities in its dynamics but also subject to specific small-town logics.

Following a brief outline of our conceptual framework, we present key findings from our case study in Bebra focussing on institutional and structural conditions for political participation, formative discourses, as well as the role of local (key) actors, social networks and integration policies.

Conceptual approach

The analysis of political participation requires a pluralistic approach that synthesizes different factors. It should include both top-down and bottom-up perspectives and look at structural as well as dis-

cursive and action-related aspects. Geographical factors and historical trajectories should be incorporated, and this includes immigration stories and economic developments as well as the development of political institutions and governance traditions (Gesemann, Roth 2018).

In recent decades, migration research has identified features that influence migrant integration and participation: we now know about the need to change institutional frameworks and the influence of structural conditions as well as the influence of different actors on local and regional policies and discourses. These features can influence institutional norms and rules as well as their application. In addition, extensive research on small towns in recent years has identified specific conditions that shape migration and integration policies in SMTs (Damm 2019; Enßle-Reinhardt et al. 2023; Enßle-Reinhardt et al. 2022; Kühn, Münch 2019; Martínez-Ariño et al. 2019; Hanhörster et al. 2011).

Municipalities operate in a multi-level system (Kühn, Münch 2019; Scholten, Penninx 2016; Caponio, Pettrachin 2022), and the degree of their legal discretion—granted by the higher levels through the decentralization of tasks to the local level—plays an important role in the potential to shape integration and participation. When it comes to the local level, centralization is likely to produce inactivity and decentralization of certain tasks to the local level, granted by the higher levels, instead produces activity at the local level (Schamann et al 2021). Towns belonging to a district tend to have less scope for action than independent cities do.

Nevertheless, the effect of the institutional framework depends on how proactive the local actors are, the basic attitudes of the coalitions that have formed, and the positions of individuals and MSOs. Some studies have viewed this from the perspective of conflict negotiation (Budnik et al. 2020) or the influence of local party politics (Martínez-Ariño et al. 2019; Hepburn 2014). Others have analyzed the role of individual (Dahlvik 2017) or collective actors (Schenkel 2007). Actor- and structure-linking aspects were described by regime the-

ories (Stoker 1993) and governance-theoretical approaches (Blömker 2010). Recently, Schamann and others were able to show that a higher level of cooperation between mayors and administrations as well as between key actors, civil society and migrants strengthens integration policy activity (Schamann *et al*. 2021).

Structural conditions are also relevant to the design of migration policy activities. These include, on the one hand, the respective history of urbanization and urbanity in the sense of an openness to the world and to change, as well as social, cultural, educational and socio-economic factors and the number of inhabitants. On the other hand, municipal resources in terms of finance, personnel and expertise are important (Dörrenbächer 2018). In addition, the size and composition of the migrant population, local historical experiences with migration as well as current migration events and shrinkage contexts also matter (Schamann *et al*. 2021). Social proximity seems to play a recurring role in rural areas as well, although it is evaluated differently. Schamann and others highlight "..a pressure to adapt due to social proximity, which leads to inactivity (Schamann *et al*. 2021). Schenkel and others, in turn, point out two possible results that proximity and the high degree of organization in small communities can cause: inactivity and exclusionary attitudes on the one hand, and active integration on the other (Schenkel *et al*. 2022).

However, none of these aspects works on its own, and they often only gain significance in the context of powerful narratives. Thus, immigration is sometimes seen as playing an important role in maintaining the function of a municipality that would otherwise face existential hardship under conditions of shrinkage. However, discourses can also act as amplifiers of local problem perceptions and conflicts (Budnik *et al*. 2020; Boswell, Hampshire 2017) and might be used in an interest-driven manner that can influence stakeholders. They also differ considerably between cities (Schamann *et al*. 2021), where opposed strands of discourse can exist in parallel. Finally, discourses can concern notions of belonging, exclusion or demarcation within urban society (Budnik *et al*. 2020; Barbehön, Münch 2016).

The case of Bebra in consideration of small-town features

Institutional framework for political participation

Migrant political participation in Bebra has been shaped by multi-level governance. In Germany, the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community (BMI) regulates integration and migration issues at the national level, and the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) is responsible for implementing national integration policies. In order to realize the objectives for migrant political participation described in the national Immigration Act, the federal states (Länder) have drawn up integration concepts and guidelines as well as legal frameworks to enable the implementation of integration policies at the local level.

In the case of Bebra, it's a municipality subordinated to the district of Hersfeld-Rotenburg. Migrant political participation is regulated by the Hessian County Code (HKO) and the Hessian Municipal Code (HGO) for the Federal State of Hesse. According to these codes, municipalities in Hesse have been free since 2020 to decide whether to establish a foreigners' advisory body (FAB) or an integration commission (IC). Both formats have an advisory function and possess the right to make suggestions to the city council, but they differ in their legitimacy and composition. In Bebra, an IC was successfully constituted in 2021 but still has a low level of participation. This is certainly due in part to its lack of a clearly defined mandate, objectives and rights of the board on the part of the HGO, as well as generally insufficient training on political culture and institutions.

A crucial prerequisite for political participation are policies that support social integration at the local level. In Germany, these

policies occur at different levels of political decision-making. Consequently, the district office is responsible for central state tasks like social integration support (e.g. language and integration courses) and regulating access to state benefits while the provisioning of financial support for integration and migration counselling is a responsibility shared by the municipality and the district. This centralization leads to higher dependency and less autonomy for small towns like Bebra. Finally, the municipal administration can influence structural and social participation opportunities for immigrants at the local level, especially in the fields of urban development, housing, economic policy and education.

Centralization and dependency lead to a limited scope of action in the field of integration policies, but they can also provoke local activity if solutions from higher levels are absent (Schammann et al. 2021). In Bebra, an initiative by local stakeholders to elaborate integration guidance and establish rules of procedure for the integration commission can be seen as an example of such proactive action at the local level. This guidance will not compensate for an absent local integration plan at the district level (for example), but it might provide political and strategic guidance for integration policies in Bebra.

Structural conditions

Bebra's "degree of urbanization" is classified as "town and suburb" (Eurostat 2022). Almost 14,000 people (Eurostat 2022) from over 80 nations live in Bebra. More than half of the inhabitants have a migration history, of which 15.4% (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2023) do not have German citizenship. In contrast with the district as a whole, Bebra's population development is slightly positive, as the negative natural population development is compensated for by a positive immigration balance (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2023), counteracting former population decline in Bebra.

As a once-important industrial location, the town has experienced labour migration since the mid-nineteenth century. Due to economic developments in the 1980s, work-related immigration to Bebra became less significant while since the 2000s an influx of refugees from different parts of the world has continued. As a result of this shift, the core city, which had in the past decade been inhabited by established migrant workers and their families, became the place of residence for primarily low-income immigrants. Established migrants followed the German population to the village-districts close by in a process of suburbanisation of the young and affluent. This has led to the socio-spatial segregation of Bebra's inhabitants into a predominantly migrant core, in which approximately 22% do not have a German passport, and the surrounding eleven village-districts, which are mainly inhabited by long-established residents and of which only 8% are not German citizens (Kindler 2023). In recent years, the local government has implemented urban redevelopment measures to meet this spatial disparity. The upgrading of the city centre promoted the re-identification of Bebra's inhabitants with their core city. However, the socio-spatial segregation remains, and it has consequences for the political representation of migrants.

Due to local electoral laws, the surrounding districts are over-represented politically since they can elect more representatives than the core city is able to. Although only one third of Bebra's inhabitants live in the village-districts, they are represented by two thirds of city parliamentarians. Therefore, migrant political participation is limited, since they do not receive an adequate number of representatives simply due to their places of residence. This also demonstrates the intersection of socio-economic factors and political participation. With regard to the socio-economic aspect, second-generation labour migrants in Bebra have been especially well integrated into the labour market, and large numbers of immigrants have succeeded in moving up into the middle or even the upper class. As a result, ethnic segregation has become less important than socio-economic segregation.

Bebra's long history of immigration favoured the emergence of structures that promote migrant integration and participation, including social networks, numerous migrant self-organizations, municipal institutions and public support services. However, our research has also identified barriers, such as the lack of safe places and formats in which particularly marginalized or multiply disadvantaged people (e.g. women) can express their needs and become involved.

Today's general open-mindedness toward migration in Bebra can therefore be strongly attributed to its historical experience with immigration, its diverse resident structure, the slowing effect that immigration has on natural shrinkage processes, as well as the image-enhancing upgrading of the town's core area.

Public migration discourse in Germany, Hesse and Bebra

The development of public migration discourses in Germany has changed significantly in recent decades. During the reign of Chancellor Helmut Kohl (1983–1998), policies adhered to an integration concept that was referred to as "German Leitkultur" or "guiding culture" (Reinhardt 2021), a "[…] historical ethnocultural understanding of nationhood" (Habermas 2004 after Takle 2007). With the Red-Green government of 1998–2005, and later under Chancellor Angela Merkel (2005–2021), there was a shift toward an integration policy that recognized Germany as an immigration country. For the first time, it was publicly stated that migrants were not staying in Germany temporarily but had become residents. Since this time at the latest, there has been an ongoing debate in politics, academia, and the public sphere about the recognition of people with a "migration background" and the consequences for their participatory rights and opportunities (Reinhardt 2021). Since the beginning of the 2010s, the German debate has been increasingly influenced by the term post-migration, opening up space to demarcate the problematic and hierarchical aspects of the term migrant. The prefix post- also in-

cludes the recognition of migration as a constitutive component of the social structure, a given, a normalcy. Lines of conflicts that are being disguised as migration-related conflicts can then be decoded as social conflicts, gender inequalities, or racism (Foroutan 2018; Römhild 2015; Yildiz 2018).

These discourses are also echoed in discussions about the improvement of participation opportunities for migrants in the federal state of Hesse. Recently, this led to Hesse's renewed municipal legislation (see above). However, MSOs in particular criticize integration commissions as a step backward constituting a loss of electoral legitimacy. They criticize the integration commission's composition with 50% members delegated from the municipal council and the mayor's strong influence. On the other hand, small towns like Bebra have had rather negative experiences with foreigners' advisory boards due to low rates of election participation, the fact that the boards did not lead to sufficient migrant representation in the municipality, and because they did not manage to represent the interests of all migrant communities (Schenkel et al. 2023).

Examining Bebra, we can see a change in the public perception of migration over the years. Bebra has been labelled as a "Turkish town" since the 1970s due to its high proportion of foreigners. After the political change in 1990, many jobs were lost and a pessimistic mood dominated. Suddenly, migrants were perceived as competitors rather than colleagues. Bad news strengthened anti-migrant sentiment, and many natives held a negative perception of the newcomers. Today, a different narrative is being spread, labelling Bebra as a multicultural role model that benefits from its immigrants. Many small shops and associations in the town are now run by migrants and fulfil social responsibilities. The residential area "Göttinger Bogen", once stigmatized as being dominated by the "Turkish", is now considered a and "multicultural and vibrant" neighbourhood, at least by some. Moreover, the view of social problems seems to have changed as well. Families with a migration background are no longer considered "problem cases" while today it's the socially deprived

residents of German origin who are perceived as such (Municipality of Bebra 2018). Although this image of Bebra must be viewed critically, it nevertheless shows a change in opinions.

Local (key) actors, (in)formal networks and migrant stakeholders

We analyzed the local networks in Bebra that address migrant integration in general and migrant political participation in particular. Due to the limited number of local stakeholders in the small-town context, these two subjects often overlap in terms of staff. The network structures primarily provide a variety of support and services for social and cultural participation, which we see as a precondition for political participation (Schenkel *et al.* 2023). Only a few actors are concerned with promoting political participation overtly, for which there seems to be little awareness in Bebra. The local network is characterized by the interplay of formal and informal structures and a small number of key figures and groups. Unquestionably, the network's key person is the head of the Department of Social Affairs. He has established connections to almost all migrant communities, has considerable influence on the work of local MSOs. He is himself part of the administration, and, typical of a small town, has a direct line to the mayor. He is also the person who repeatedly calls for awareness of migration- and integration-related issues in administration and local politics.

When it comes to formal bodies, the central decision-making positions in Bebra are held by the mayor (who is of German origin), the political and administrative bodies—the magistrate and the city council—and the political parties. Migrant interests are poorly represented since the parties are dominated by local German communities. Since 2021, the IC has provided a formal body for greater representation of migrant interests (see above). It is composed of the mayor (endowing him with the power to define the extent to which migrant interests are heard), three councillors (including one woman and one migrant), and ten residents, most of whom have a migrant

background and come from different ethnic groups. Many of the less-organized ethnic groups in Bebra are not represented, however.

The informal structures are represented by the three large MSOs resp. their representatives, the Turkish Mosque, the Syrian Orthodox Church and the multicultural football club Real Espanol. The activities of these MSOs focus primarily on providing practical support for their own communities. In the process of professionalising and establishing themselves in the city, however, they have come to increasingly work outwardly, with stronger connections, acting as a voice for their members in society. By contrast, communities that are organized less formally or not at all, such as refugees, are poorly represented if at all. The needs of marginalized groups such as women, people of colour, young people, the elderly and the educationally disadvantaged are also not represented.

The case of Bebra demonstrates once again that greater cooperation strengthens integration policy activities (Schamann *et al*. 2021). This affects all observed stakeholders and was visible due to the activities that were initiated within our project period.

Migrant political participation in Bebra

In Germany, foreigners have limited voting rights and limited rights to be elected. This entails that migrants both with and without German citizenship are not proportionally represented in formal political bodies (Roth 2018), which is also the case in Bebra (see above). The structural lack of opportunities for civic co-determination, language barriers, and the influence of other political cultures make access even more difficult. Municipalities, including Bebra, are increasingly trying to enhance the political participation of their citizens through informal means. At the same time, MSOs are professionalising their structures to better identify the needs of their communities and address these needs to policymakers through formal and informal channels. By organising their members, MSOs also

partially reach groups that are marginalized and remain underrepresented, and they can provide the groups with a voice.

We can identify two types of participatory activities initiated by the municipality: 1) Activities required by the legal system, including the IC, which has the right to present the city council with proposals for decisions (this right has not yet been exercised in Bebra). 2) Voluntary activities, which are divided into formal occasion-related activities and informal citizen participation processes. In formal occasion-related activities, the municipality invites the different stakeholders involved in a given process, such as road construction, to voice their concerns. Even though these meetings have no decision-making capacity, MSOs in Bebra are routinely invited. Migrant stakeholders are also invited by the city to informal citizen participation events like neighbourhood walks and workshops. Such voluntary formats are becoming more common in Germany, but their results do not bind the municipality. A self-created participation instrument in Bebra is the neighbourhood management advisory board for the northwest city centre, made up of equal numbers of migrants and non-migrants.

In sum, Bebra's MSOs tend to implement their political participation through informal, rather than formal, channels. The MSOs organize themselves into subgroups like women's groups and a youth parliament, enabling their members to participate more actively in the organization. They also initiate informal political engagement by organising casual discussion evenings with political and administrative representatives. Finally, migrant stakeholders contact political and administrative decision-makers through informal means. However, these communication channels are strongly related to socio-economic status, social capital, the goodwill of the decision-makers, and other individual factors.

Conclusion

In reference to the small towns examined in the PISTE project (Schenkel et al. 2023), specific characteristics responsible for the lack of migrant representation in the political process can be described for SMTs: Especially small towns that belong to administrative districts or counties, have difficulties to provide basic support for integration, which are a prerequisite for migrant civic and political participation. These provisions include language courses and legal status clarifications, as well as housing, employment and socio-cultural spaces. The non-fulfilment of these needs must be seen as a major obstacle. Small towns have also long been affected by limited municipal resources, which fundamentally impede strategic action through a lack of administrative capacity. This is especially true for areas where procedures are only now developing, such as migrant political participation. Instead, these activities rest on only a few shoulders due to the limited ability to divide labour in small towns. Since integration work is also based on relationships and has a high degree of informality, a rise in dependencies results. Often, one bridge-building actor provides impulses for integrative processes and takes on overlapping roles in both civil society and the administration.

Even if not all small towns are affected to the same extent, a strong sense of belonging to the autochthonous society leads to social control and—according to the self-assessment of migrants in Bebra—to self-censorship, making it difficult for one to take an active role in addressing contradictions and demands. On the other hand, the increasing demand for labour in SMTs, which suffer from population decline, has led to increasing legitimacy and acceptance for migrants. This, in turn, makes it easier for migrants to become politically active.

Extend political participation in small- and medium-sized towns

In order to strengthen migrant political participation in SMTs, legal changes and political measures are required at all levels of governance. At the national level, the conditions for naturalization and the obtainment of dual citizenship should be facilitated in order to provide access to political co-determination for those with a migration history. In addition, financial support programmes—for small towns especially—should assist voluntary social and political work that provides migrants and other groups likely to live in precarious conditions with the resources (in terms of time and financial support) to participate socially and politically. The case of Bebra shows that the rights and objectives of ICs should be substantiated and their mandate defined at the federal state level in order to increase their political commitment and improve their attractiveness for participation. This goes along with the necessity of political education programmes supported by federal states and districts with competence in the education sector.

The example of Bebra shows that for SMTs, greater integration of immigrants into the municipal parties is necessary. This could be realized through a quota system, for example. Local electoral laws that restrict the political participation of migrants, as in our example, should be critically reviewed with regard to the selection of mandates. To this end, SMTs also need arenas for conflict negotiation and local conflict management. Informal formats should be used more frequently in order to complement formal instruments.

A call for more intersectionally oriented research

The case of Bebra has shown that migrants are still limited in their opportunities for political participation. Nevertheless, it has also become clear that ethnic segregation is becoming less impor-

tant than social segregation and that discourses have shifted to a post-migration perspective. For the explanation of social inequalities, aspects such as income, integration into social networks, lifestyles, and gender are playing an increasing role alongside factors such as origin, cultural background, and religious orientation. This effect will increase given that the proportion of people with a migration history will continue to rise in the future. A person's migration history will continue to lose importance as a category of distinction and explanatory factor for social inequalities. Future research should therefore adopt intersectional perspectives and focus on the various overlapping and reinforcing moments of exclusion. An intersectional approach might help to uncover the complex power dynamics and inequalities that migrants—and other marginalized groups—face in their political participation. It would acknowledge that migrants experience political engagement within systems of oppression and privilege. It might also assist in seeing migrants not as a homogenous group but instead as individuals with unique identities and experiences that shape their possibilities. Finally, intersectional analysis is necessary for the development of inclusive and effective policies and interventions that address the specific needs and challenges faced by different social groups, leading to more equitable and just political systems.

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Small destination towns of Ukrainian refugees in Poland. Case study of Karpacz.

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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses the role of small destination cities in spatial reception of Ukrainian refugees in Poland. It introduces the application of GIS tools for mapping existing settlement patterns at different urban scales and proposes its 3-level classification. The outcome of performed analysis is compatible with recent studies, however, the results suggest that small cities, such as Karpacz, may not only function as independent from major cities destinations, but also develop own reception network based on neighbouring small towns.

Introduction

In the last few years, there has been a growing interest in research related to the subject of refugees in urban spaces. The scope of conducted research is closely related to the region, where the reception of forced migrants occurs. The European "long summer of migration" and numerous resulting researches demonstrate the complex impact of sudden mass migration on the situation in Europe. Previous studies indicate that the key issue in mitigating the negative effects of the intensity and unpredictability of this phenom-

enon is a balanced policy and migrant-inclusive spatial scenarios. Spatial policy is of interest to researchers in terms of planning and managing the necessary infrastructure dedicated to refugees at the local levels, reshaping local communities and involving residents in these procedures (Schmal *et al.*, 2016; Boano and Nettelbladt, 2019; Doomernik and Glorius, 2020), as well as refugees seen as social capital of cities (Doomernik and Ardon, 2018). Vaz, Lee, Moonilal and Pereira argue that refugee settlement processes, including decision-making tools, should be systematically included in city management to ensure their encompassment (Vaz *et al.*, 2017).

Until recently, for various - mainly economic, political and geographical – reasons, Poland did not play a significant role as a destination country, regardless of being a European Union member. This situation has suddenly changed as a result of Russia's aggression against Ukraine in the beginning of 2022. According to statistics provided by Polish Border Guards, Ukrainian citizens submitted 1721 applications for refugee status in 2022 (Straż Graniczna. 2022); however, its total number is estimated in about 1 million in accordance with the Act on assistance to Ukrainian citizens in connection with the armed conflict on the territory of this country (Office for Foreigners, 2023).

Specificity of Poland differs diametrically from other European countries hosting refugees from 2015. In the first place, the long-distance factor is eliminated. Geographical proximity between Eastern Ukraine, where most refugees come from, and Poland is relatively small. It can be also noticed, that inter-state relations between both countries have been nurtured for at least a decade. Ukrainian diaspora is firmly rooted and developed. Ukrainian refugees receive exceptional political, cultural, social and economic reception conditions. Finally, the border between countries is not permanently closed. Constant movement, in both directions, is observed.

Despite the fact, that the refugee infrastructure in Poland is clustered around exclusive and isolating refugee centres under the supervision of Office for Foreigners and Boarder Guards, the major-

ity of Ukrainian newcomers elude them due to the shortened asylum procedure. Polish government adopted The Act on assistance to Ukrainian citizens in connection with the armed conflict on the territory of this country within three months of invasion on Ukraine. It guarantees immediate legal access to the labour market, education and health insurance.

When it comes to accommodation and social infrastructure, the solutions introduced by the Act also differ from standard procedures for other nationalities of refugees in Poland. The assistance organisation is shifted from central to provincial (Office for Foreigners, 2022). The scope and form of aid is defined separately by a body of each 16 local government units and can be distributed over a larger area around its main cities.

As reported by Wojdat and Cywiński, majority of Ukrainian refugees have settled in 12 biggest metropolitan areas. 62% of refuges reside within administrative boundaries of those cities, while 38% settle in other medium and small cities and municipalities of those metropolis (Wojdat, Cywiński *et al.*, 2022). However, one third of Ukrainian newcomers' lives in more distant, smaller cities. Spatial research on those locations are still lacking as little attention has been given to their importance in the literature.

The paper serves as an introduction to the shaping of the reception network from yet unrecognised perspectives of small towns. We raise a question, which of the small Polish cities, not related to metropolises, have become host points for refugees in the first place? In which regions of Poland are they located? What of its spatial factors make them potentially attractive to refugees?

Methods

The literature on urban organisation of refugee response shows a variety of approaches in current studies. Several publications have

appeared in recent years documenting suitability of GIS-oriented re-search in studies associated with decision-making processes. This tool is used in practice by the UN and other organisations for a pur-pose of humanitarian aid planning and management (Younes *et al.*, 2022). It can be applied for multi-criteria location models (Jinghai *et al.*, 2016), such as site-selection of temporary housing (Hosseini *et al.* 2022) or planning urban emergency shelter system (Wei *et al.*, 2017). In this paper, while we refer to above-mentioned research, the focus is different. Presented spatial analysis are associated with integration of a large set of multiple, conflicting referenced data and disproportionate evaluation criteria. Therefore, we have introduced GIS environment as a problem-solving tool that allows to establish connections between complex and diverse datasets. The software employed for this study was mainly ArcGIS Pro 3.0. provided by the University of Zielona Góra in Poland.

Data

In this study, we focus on small towns as places of first-stay in Poland for Ukrainian refugees. In order to perform necessary analy-sis, we have acquired two databases:

1. "Ukraine Regional Response Map" - the latest updates on number of refugees from Ukraine recorded and regis-tered for temporary protection in Europe (UNICEF, 2022)
2. "Poland Boundaries provides 2022 boundaries for several layers of administrative divisions" – the latest update on Pol-ish territorial units and its total population (ESRI_DM, 2023).

Ad. 1. The data source used for of the research is an open-source file provided by UNICEF. It presents the latest updates on number of refugees from Ukraine recorded and registered for temporary protection in Europe. It consists of data collected from personal ID numbers (PESEL) of refugees at the place of registration after arrival. It contains information on the number of registered refugees in mu-

nicipalities and the spatial representation of their initial residence in Poland. The database is provided as ArcGIS experience dynamic webmap with dashboard functionality.

Ad. 2. The data source used for of the research is an ESRI layer designed to be used for mapping and analysis based on geo.stat.gov.pl.

For the purpose of this paper, the data were pre-prepared in a separate form of a shapefile with attribute tables based on preselected criteria by the author.

Spatial-analysis framework

The GIS tool was used as follows: Stage 1. Pre-processing of the data listed above. Stage 2: An entirely automated process resulting in scenario summarising the provided data within another data with calculated statistics about its features. Stage 3: Graphical processing of result data for the purposes of the article. The obtained results were interpreted based on the adopted criteria.

Mapping the settlement patterns

As mentioned above, the spatial organisation of Ukrainian refugee settlement in Poland bases on distinct procedures and infrastructure than standard governmental refugee assistance. Its overall organisation scheme, prepared for the purpose of this article by the author, is presented in Figure 1.

The first migration phase is border crossing, followed by a registration process in one of the Prime Reception Points (PRP) (1). PRPs are located on the border and in transit terminals of main cities (airports, railway stations and/or bus stations). They offer first aid,

provide information and, at times, accommodation up to 72 hours. Further, refugees are directed to Temporary Reception Points (TRP) (2). TRPs are reception centres and other forms of accommodation in available locations (social housing, private hotels and apartments, schools, and other facilities). The available offer developed in time and space, from main voivodeship cities to province and more distant towns. The organisation of those places and supportive infrastructure derive on demand in an unstructured manner, based on local initiative and resources.

Figure 1. Spatial organisation of Ukrainian refugees' reception in Poland - theoretical model. Source: Own.
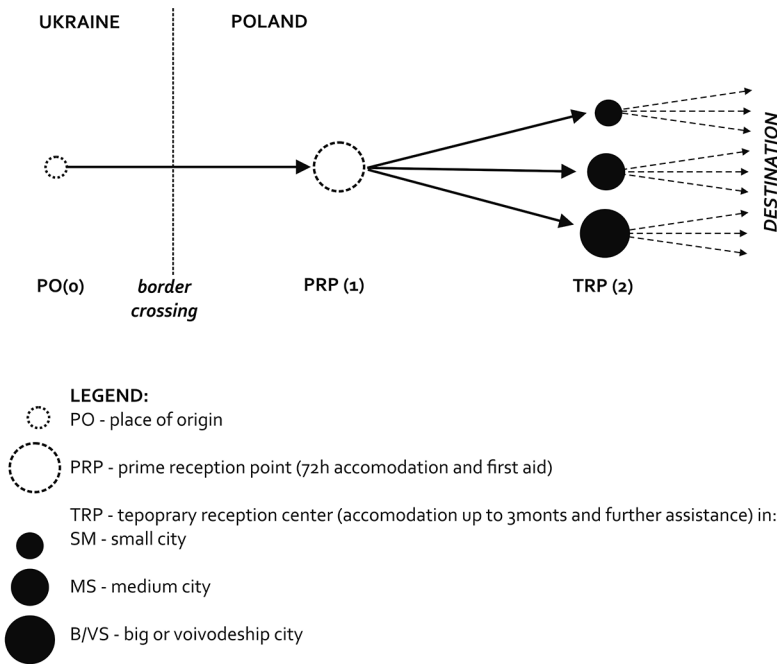
## Performed spatial analysis

We started by investigating Ukrainian refugee population in urbanised areas. The first stage was to build a database to be used

with ArcGIS for further analysis. The data provided by UNICEF applies to the districts, and this spatial division was applied to all performed analyses. For the visual representation of refugee population, the Jenks natural breaks classification method was used. The database of Polish boundaries consists of 2477 districts: 302 municipal, 677 municipal-rural and 1498 rural. The rural districts, including those related to the cities, have been detach from the scope of interest. Using the collected information, the base map consists of two sets of layers: one of Ukrainian refugee inhabitation in districts as of 2022 (shown as a dark grey areas), and second of borders of municipal districts as of 2022 (shown as hatched areas), were prepared.

The GIS Analysis Tools are dedicated to summarising the outstanding characteristics of a spatial distribution. Pairwise Clip, which extracts overlapping features of separate layers, was applied by the author to previously prepared basic map and was used for the indication of municipal areas, where refugees reside. As a result, a spatial model of cities forming a refugee reception network in 2022 was designated. The results were divided into three categories: big cities (over 100 000 residents), medium cities (20 000-100 000 residents) and small cities (below 20 000 residents).

Final GIS Analysis was performed to limit the area of research interest to small towns. The tool Select by Attributes allowed to isolate set of features representing the cities with the population below 20 000 residents, from the above model. As a result, 204 small cities were identified for further analysis. For visual representation of the results, the reader is referred to Figure 2.

Figure 2. Coefficients of determination of local models estimating share of Ukrainian refugee residency areas in the area of small Polish cities in 2022.
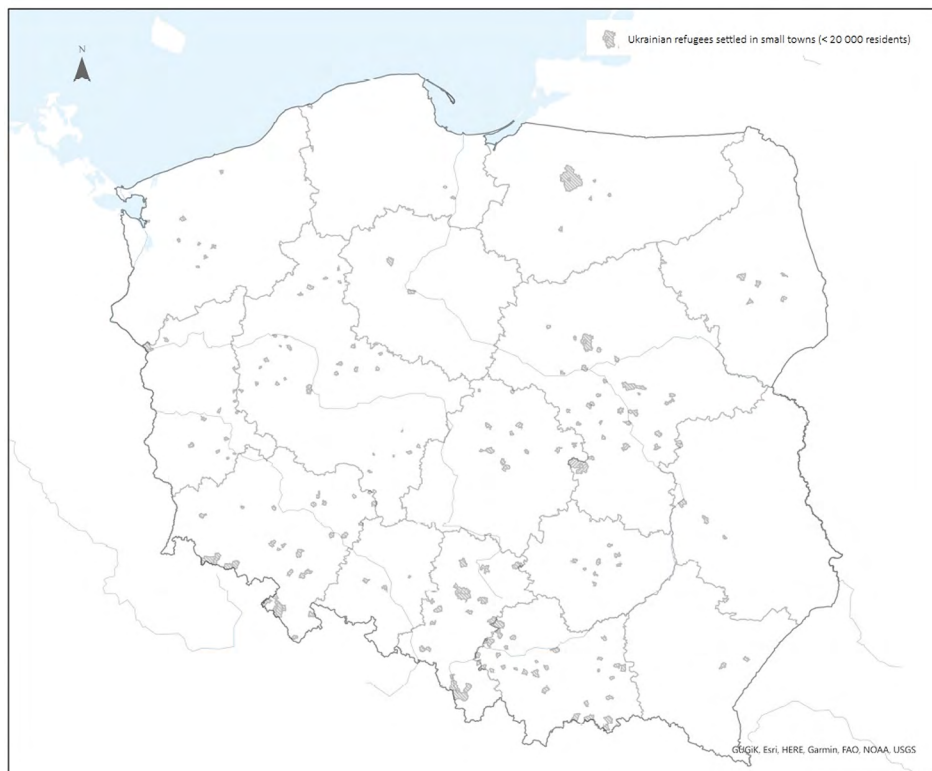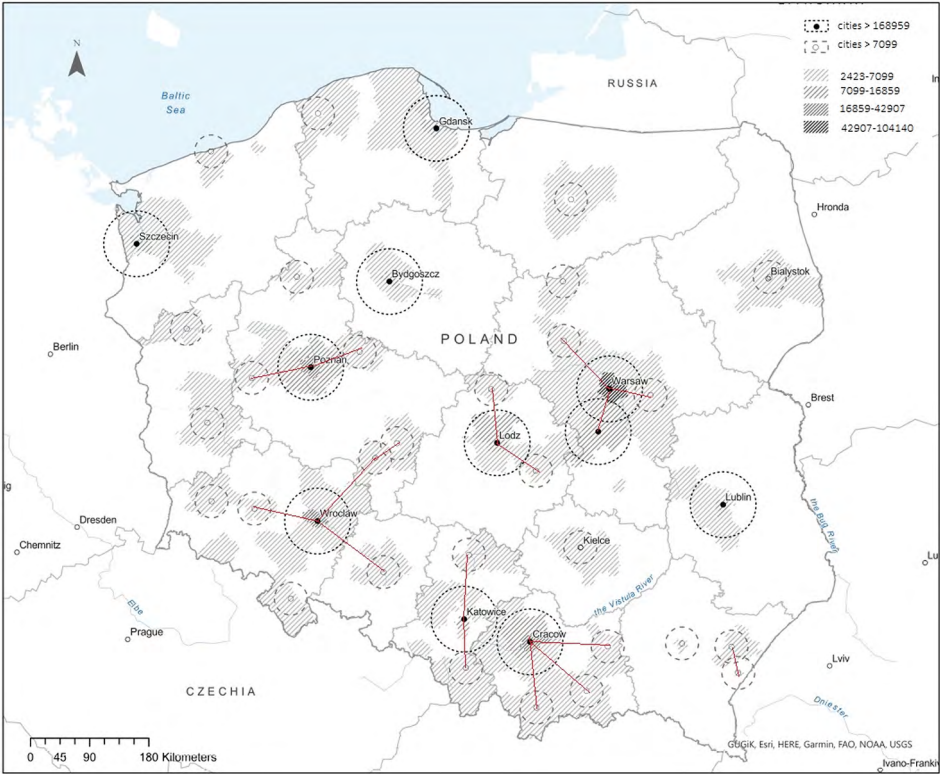

Source: Own

Results

Based on the first law of geography presented by Tobler, everything is interconnected and it is the objects that are closest to each other, that affect each other the most. Following this principle, one can assume, that the spatial organisation of refugee reception processes will follow certain patterns. Given that the location of small towns in relation to large agglomerations, which are the main centres of social and economic activity, is an important factor differentiating

the level of development and importance of small towns in regional systems in Poland (Konecka-Szydłowska, 2016), they will also play an important role in the spatial networks of refugee reception.

It has been found that the area of residence covers all of the 16 provinces; however, residential locations are not evenly distributed and differ in density and the size of the covered areas. They take the form of clusters. It can be clearly distinguished that the majority of them is related to the proximity of main metropolises and the highest density is cumulated in central Poland. Most refugees stay in Warsaw; however, intensively dense consolidation of refugees is also recognisable in connection with other main cities: Bydgoszcz, Cracow, Gdansk, Katowice, Lodz, Lublin, Poznan, Wroclaw and Szczecin. These observations are compatible with results published by Wojdat and Cywiński. The clusters of smaller population density are also noticeable on the presented map and were also marked by lighter dashed circles for better visual recognition. They relate to large and medium cities of less importance. Many of them concentrates around metropolises, such as Cracow, Lodz, Poznan and Warsaw. This is showed by red lines connecting the cities with its voivodeship. An interesting, additional observation refers to the inclusion of cities such as Bialystok and Rzeszow in this class. The lower number of residing refugees compared to similar cities in other parts of Poland may result from the proximity of border area. For the resulting plot, see Figure 3.

Figure 3. The visual representation of reception network for Ukrainian refugees in Poland.

Following the Tobler's principle, we assume, that there are small towns located in the proximity of above designated reception areas where refugees reside. Adamiak and colleagues claims that "Small cities are an important part of settlement systems. They are the glue that binds the network of villages, medium-sized cities, and large cities together." (Adamiak *et al*, 2021), whereas their locality, spatial scale and neighbouring social structure are the factors, that are crucial in the processes of refugee rooting and form the basis for development of reception networks. ArcGIS Near Analysis calculate distance and additional proximity information between the input features and the closest feature in another layer or feature class. It

was used to simulate the spatial links between 204 analysed small towns and nearest significant host cities.

It is evident that the majority of analysed small cities are spatially related to larger, nearby urban centres. In Figure 4, for visual representation of the dependence, the connections are shown as yellow lines. Ten main reception areas consist of a main voivodeship city, several other large and medium cities and numerous small towns. These are areas around Gdansk, Warsaw (1), Cracow (2), Katowice (3), Wroclaw (4), Poznan (5), Szczecin (6), Lodz (7), Gdansk (8), Lublin (9) and Bydgoszcz (10). They are characterised by the largest concentration of refugees in its municipal districts. Further, refugee residency places concentrate around voivodeship cities of less importance and its neighbouring municipalities. Such examples are: Bialystok (11), Kielce (12), Zielona Góra (13), Olsztyn (14), Przemyśl (15), Rzeszów (16), Koszalin (17) i Piła (18) Kalisz (19) and Częstochowa (20). Finally, there are small cities which are not explicit related to bigger urban structure. Such precedent may be noticed in South-West areas of Poland, close to the border with Czech Republic, in the touristic region of Karkonosze, and in the city of Karpacz (20; highlighted on Figure 4 by the yellow contour).

Figure 4. The visual representation of reception network for Ukrainian refugees in Poland – type A, B and C.
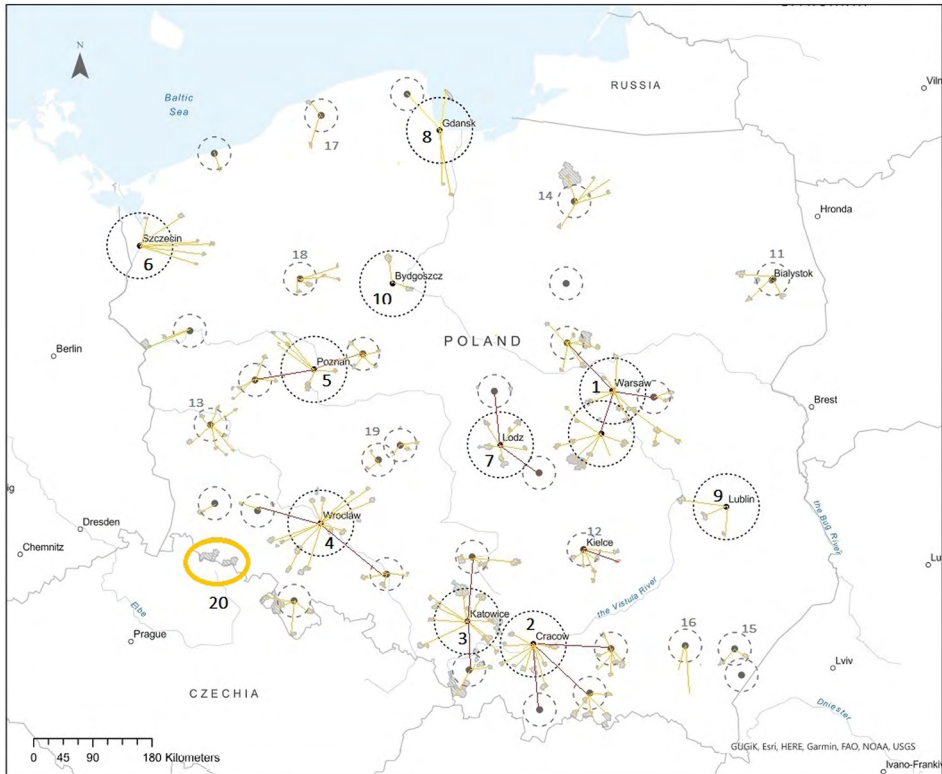
Within a year of Ukrainian migration to Poland, small towns have become visible points in reception networks. It has been found that there are at least 20 clusters, consisting of different scale and importance, where refugees reside. Considering the role of small towns, we propose to divide them in 3 main categories: Type A – clusters concentrated around major voivodeship cities, including municipalities of three scales: big, medium and small cities (1-10). Type B - clusters concentrated around large and medium cities of a less administrative importance including municipalities of three scales: big, medium and small cities (11-19). Type C – clusters compound of medium and small cities not related to large cities (20). Results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Juxtaposition of analysed refugee reception clusters by proposed spatial classification.

TYPE		A	B	C
DESCRIPTION	central territorial unit	major voivodeship city	large or medium city	medium or small city
	types of accompanying territorial units	large cities, medium cities, small cities	medium cities, small cities	small cities
CLUSTERS TYPE A				
no	central territorial unit	other major cities in cluster	medium cities	small cities
1	Warsaw	Y (1)	Y	Y
2	Cracow	Y (3)	Y	Y
3	Katowice	Y (13)	Y	Y
4	Wroclaw	y (1)	Y	Y
5	Poznan	N	Y	Y
6	Szczecin	N	Y	Y
7	Lodz	N	Y	Y
8	Gdansk	Y (3)	Y	Y
9	Lublin	N	Y	Y
10	Bydgoszcz	Y (1)	Y	Y
CLUSTERS TYPE B				
11	Bialystok	N	N	Y
12	Kielce	N	N	Y
13	Zielona Góra	N	Y	Y
14	Olsztyn	N	Y	Y
15	Przemyśl	N	Y	Y

| 16	Rzeszów	N	N	Y
17	Koszalin	N	N	Y
18	Piła	N	N	Y
19	Kalisz	N	N	Y
CLUSTERS TYPE C				
20	Karpacz	x	N	Y

Source: Own calculation

Case study of Karpacz

Carried out analysis have resulted in the selection of Karpacz as the only example of type C reception cluster. Further analysis of literary studies, reports and internet sources confirmed that it is a small town, which is hosting a significant number of refugees, even though it is not organisationally connected in terms of refugee reception to any of the areas of main reception cities. In addition, it is slowly shaping its own reception network, involving neighbouring cities and towns.

Karpacz, located in the Lower Silesian Voivodeship, has the population of 4358 residents. The town is accessible by public transport (bus) from Jelenia Góra, which is well connected with other regions of Poland by train. It is a tourist-oriented town, located in the areas of national parks and mountains. The region is one of the famous tourist canters in the Karkonosze Mountains. In addition to popular winter sports, such as skiing, it offers a wide range of mountain and landscape attractions, such as hiking and biking trails. It has a rich accommodation base, estimated at about 11,000 beds, various restaurant and catering facilities. Covid-Sars pandemic led to the closure of ski slopes, accommodation facilities and significant restrictions in the gastronomy sector. Restrictions on tourism-related activities had negative effects for both entrepreneurs and munic-

ipalities of the region (Jęcek. 2022). The majority of tourist resorts, hotels and private apartments for rent have closed.

Figure 5. The visual presentation of spatial structure of Karpacz reception cluster representing central territorial unit (Karpacz) and attendant types of accompanying territorial units represented by small towns: Lubawka and Kamienna Góra.
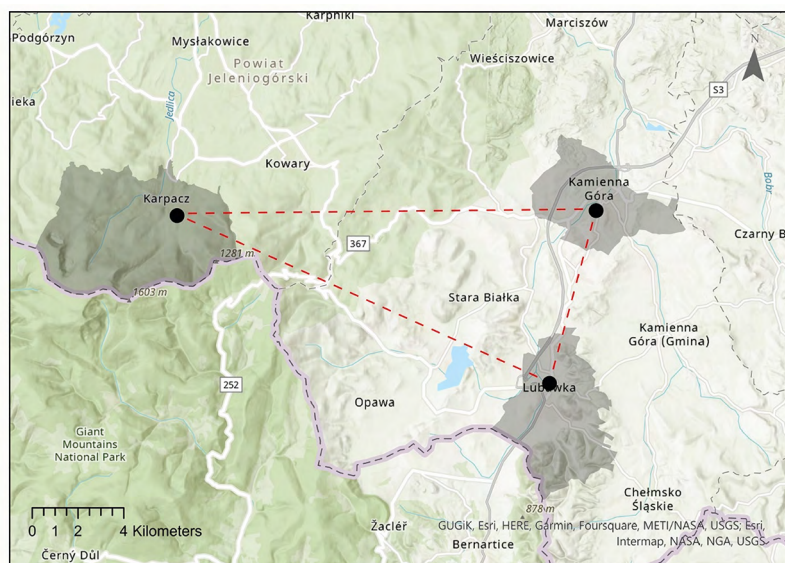
Karpacz has the highest number of refugees per capita in Poland. Over 1000 Ukrainians have fled here to seek shelter. From 2022, a part of a local prison in Karpacz and several private tourist facilities were used for the temporary reception of Ukrainian refugees. Over time, two public refugee canters in neighbouring towns were opened by local authority. Currently, there are three facilities operating: hotel Krucze Skały in Karpacz, refugee centre in Lubawka and refugee centre in Kamienna Góra, as can be seen in Figure 5. The locations are located less than 20 km apart and connected by public transport. Krucze Skały is a private refugee centre in former hotel. It functions as a local community space, bringing together local activists and volunteers. It offers workshops, activities, language courses and is equipped in warehouse. It also hosts weekly social gatherings,

exhibitions, film screenings, and more. Refugee centre in Kamienna Góra is located in a former school built in the 80s. It has 200 beds and mainly dorm rooms. The refugee centre in Lubawka is located in a former kindergarten. The building is undergoing renovation and will house a support centre for various groups which experienced exclusion. The planned program of the facility includes a therapeutic centre for refugees and Lubawka residents, a community space, scout workshops, temporary accommodation and flats for refugees.

Many refugees have found employment and private accommodation in nearby small towns as pandemic restrictions have been lifted. The restoration of tourism has increased the number of workplaces. Those who are unemployed collect seasonal fruits and mushrooms and distribute them to nearby hotels and gastronomies. The city cooperates with foreign institutions and organisations which organise relocations to other European countries.

Discussion and Future Directions

The network of reception cities faces many challenges in the studied region. The fact that big, medium-sized and small cities receiving refugees are spatially related is indisputable. The role of small town in this process from organisational perspective is emphasised by many recent research and authors, but the problem of determining connections that are locally existing and accurate remains underexplored. Its precise analysis and observation of spatial relations between its elements leads to the legitimate indication of crucial factors, that influence the process of settlement of refugees. It demonstrates general management patterns, yet, it allows its more detailed differentiation and highlights areas that are functioning in distinct forms. The results obtained in this way are compatible with previous research, but the analysis focused on small cities resulted in a more accurate and structured classification of main reception

cities. The analysis and simulation indicate that there are at least three classes of migration networks in Poland, which include 204 small municipalities.

The main concern of the paper was to define the spatial role of small towns as Ukrainian refugee destinations. An important implication of these findings is that they are a significant part of reception infrastructure. Basically, none of analysed clusters performs without small towns. Additionally, as presented in the Karpacz case study, small towns can form their own clusters with higher refugee capacity per capita than any other large or medium city. The paper is not able to make any causal claims, but the obtained results should be the starting point for further, more detailed research on the role of small cities in reception clusters in Poland, aimed for instance at capturing the relationship and patterns of actual migration movements.

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Spatial capital as a perspective on the integration of newcomers in small and medium-sized towns.

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ABSTRACT

As for other international contexts, in Flanders, small and medium-sized cities and towns are becoming increasingly important gateways for newcomers (Vandekerckhove *et al.* 2022). Flemish Integration policies aim to ensure autonomous and equal participation, and accessibility of all facilities and services. However, this research shows that these goals are being challenged by the Flemish urban-rural dispersed landscape, the diverse local institutional and political contexts, and the mismatch experienced by newcomers in the validation of resources and skills (Erel, Ryan 2018). To illustrate this, the concept of 'spatial capital' of newcomers is used. Spatial capital includes the resources actors use to exploit the spatial dimensions of their living environment (Lévy 1994). In-depth interviews and time-space diagrams reveal that newcomers experience a discrepancy between the 'old' spatial context, in their country of origin, where resources and skills were developed and formed, and the 'new' spatial context in which they must validate them as spatial capital. This raises questions about how local governments can influence the

spatial capital to facilitate integration and belonging. Our time-space research highlights, for example, different needs and demands in relation to public space, and points to opportunities for equal participation of newcomers at the local level through synergies with spatial planning policies.

Keywords: small and medium sized towns, integration, accessibility, spatial capital

Introduction

For much of the 20th century, the majority of immigrants concentrated in a small number of (metropolitan) gateways. Today, diverse opportunities outside these traditional gateways attract newcomers to suburban and more rural environments, as well as to urban areas with little or no recent history of immigration (Lichter, Johnson 2009; Saunders 2011; Erenhalt 2012; El Moussawi, Shuermans 2021; Vandekerckhove et al. 2022). That so-called 'changing geography of arrival' towards medium and small cities and towns increasingly engages these municipalities in processes of globalization (Barberis, Pavolini 2015). This is caused by the combination of spatial dispersal during the asylum procedure on the one hand, and a structure-agency duality on the other hand. The latter consists of a mix of anti-urban housing preferences in society, structural barriers to access the housing market, and practices and strategies of refugees and local intermediaries (other migrants and civil-society organizations) to overcome exclusion (Weidinger, Kordel 2020; Wyckaert, Leinfelder, De Decker 2021).

This contribution is part of a research on the residential behaviour of recent newcomers/refugees in Flanders (Northern part of Belgium)). It not only includes their settlement in new gateways but also their daily use of space in a context of urban sprawl and at different scales in relation to their (new) place of residence. The assessment

of the daily use of space allows us to gain insights into socio-spatial inclusion of newcomers, including movements between different locations according to livelihoods and social networks. It also illustrates the ability of newcomers to engage with the local and regional context, especially with (metropolitan) cities offering specific services they are highly dependent of. Geographic/spatial mobility is seen as an important source of social mobility (Reed-Danahay 2020), but what does it mean specifically for newcomers? How do opportunities and constraints, as well as strategies in the everyday use of space, influence newcomers' participation in society?

We did so by mapping the daily use of space by newcomers and then, in line with Riano et al. (2022), by questioning and analysing the use of space in terms of the role of/and the relationship between the individual's social position, its geographical location or place of residence and its mastery of the (wider) living environment. The latter including activities in other places, physical movements between places as well as strategies related to mobility and immobility. At the end of the contribution, we formulate some recommendations that enable (local) governments to improve and/or extend newcomers' social and spatial position within new gateways.

1. Individual's capital

Individuals accumulate different forms of capital throughout their lives - resources they can rely on in pursuit of their goals. Bourdieu (1986) distinguishes three forms of capital: economic, cultural, and social. But, as the quote at the start of the book 'Bourdieu and social space' (Reed-Danahay 2020, p.9) states, an individual's position in social space is inherently related to its position in physical space:

> "As a body and biological individual, I am, in the way that things are, situated in a place: I occupy a position in physical space and social space." -Pascalian Meditations (1997/2000c, 131)

Indeed, geographers such as Hess (2004) and Robinson (2010) emphasize the use of a spatial lens when considering people's embeddedness in society. This means that the position of an individual (or agent) in social space/different social fields also has a spatial dimension in the form of one's presence in physical places in relation to where one lives, goes to school, has a job, practices sports, and gets food (Reed-Danahay 2020). Depending on the (local) context in which one lives, and the place(s) one occupies, or can occupy, individuals have access to different resources (Félouzis, Perroton 2007; Hickman, Mai, Crowley 2012).

The three types of capital mentioned determine, next to personal characteristics such as gender, family situation, citizenship status and health, an individual's position in social space. But, we assume, like for instance Lévy (1994), Lussault (2003) and Réra and Lees (2011), a fourth type of capital: the 'spatial capital'.

Figure 1. Four components of individual capital
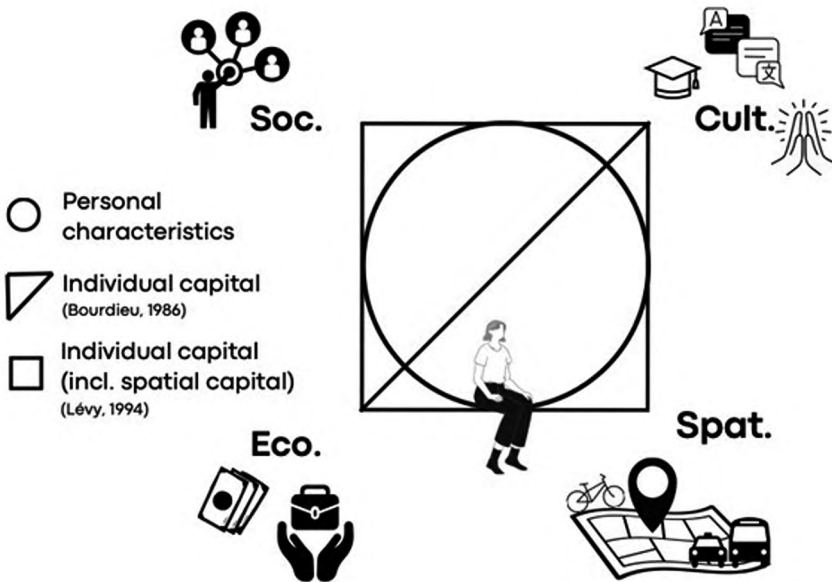
Source: drawn up by author (Wyckaert, 2023)

We argue that the spatial dimension of society and the actual functioning of newcomers in a spatial context, as part of their 'spatial capital', are given little consideration in the design and implementation of integration policies. It is not because policy documents focus on autonomous and equal participation and on accessibility of facilities and services for newcomers, that this is really implemented at the level of everyday practices in a city or municipality.

Before delving into the precise meaning of 'spatial capital' and then illustrating it through the everyday use of space by newcomers in Flemish small and medium-sized cities and towns, we will first discuss the importance of 'place' for integration policies in Flanders (Northern part of Belgium).

2. The importance of 'place' within integration policies

Flemish integration policies are defined as follows:

"Policies that respond, through coordinated initiatives, to the situations and dynamics related to the consequences of migration, with the aim of ensuring 1. autonomous and equal participation, 2. accessibility to all facilities and services, 3. active and shared citizenship for all, and 4. the achievement of social cohesion." (Vandermeerschen et al. 2020 a)

In the field of integration, participation is linked to specific sub-areas such as education, the labour market and housing, as well as to what is known as "social participation". The latter includes socio-cultural participation which refers to both social contacts and membership of associations. It emphasises that participation is the

result of interactions between individuals and institutions (or the host society in general). Increasing participation therefore means, on the one hand, empowering individuals and, on the other hand, improving the accessibility of services and facilities. Accessibility of facilities is thus closely linked to and a prerequisite for participation (Vandermeerschen *et al.* 2020 b). In Flanders, local authorities (municipalities) are largely responsible for implementing these integration policies. However, the transfer of policies from the Flemish to the local level, risks overlooking two important observations related to the specificity of 'place'.

Firstly, the fact that a growing number of newcomers live in Flanders' highly dispersed urban-rural landscape is ignored (figure 2). Thereby, the local implementation of integration policies depends on very different and specific institutional and political contexts. This results in an uneven distribution and accessibility of facilities and services for newcomers between locations (Pisman *et al.* 2021), which means that people have to (be able to) move around in this urban sprawl context in order to use these facilities and services properly.

Figure 2. Land use in Flanders 2019
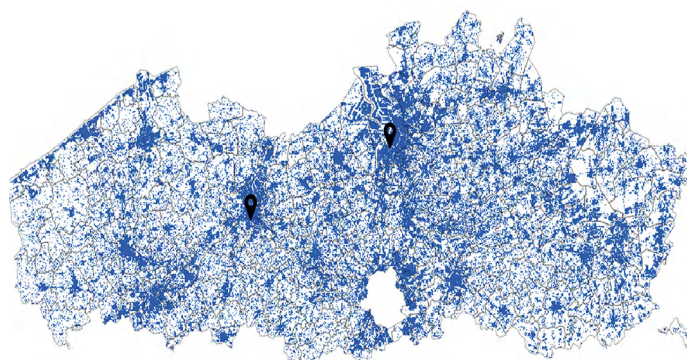
Source: Illustration based on Poelmans et al. (2021).
Notes: Brussels and the Flemish metropoles Antwerp and Ghent are marked by the author

Secondly, migrants experience in their everyday lives a mismatch between the spatial contexts in between the 'old' spatial context, in their country of origin, where resources and skills were developed and formed, and the 'new' spatial context in which they must validate them as a form of capital on the other hand (Erel, Ryan 2018). A very concrete example is not (or no longer) being able/allowed to drive a car to travel to spatially spread-out facilities and services because of a non-recognized driving licence (cultural capital) or a lack of financial means to buy a car (economic capital). Both observations bring us to (a loss or lack of) spatial capital.

3. Spatial capital: an overview

It was probably Lévy who first applied the concept of 'capital' directly in relation to the use of space in his 1994 work. Later, Lévy and Lussault (2003) defined the concept as follows: *"all the resources accumulated by an actor that enable him to exploit the spatial dimension of society according to his own strategy and capacities"* (p. 124).

Over the past two decades, other research has increasingly related the concept of capital to mobility. In this way, 'spatial' capital, although limited in its interpretation, has gained visibility in academic research (Flamm, Kaufmann 2006; Kaufmann 2002; Kaufmann *et al.* 2004; Riano *et al.* 2022). However, spatial capital is more than merely mobility, although mobility is of course an important part of it (Forsberg 2017). According to Lévy (1994), spatial capital consists of both "position capital" and "situation capital" (figure 3). In essence, we can link these concepts to what we refer to in planning analysis as 'proximity' and 'accessibility'.

Position capital is related to 'proximity' and concerns the environment in which a person lives and the resources available there, such as shops, people, facilities, parks, and social organisations. An

individual's position capital can be defined at different scales, rang-ing from the home (e.g., size of the house), the immediate neigh-bourhood of the house and the (lack of) amenities and infrastructure (roads, bus stops, etc.), to the municipality or even the region (work, health care, leisure, shops, etc.).

Situation capital concerns the ability of actors to effectively use the resources available in space. It is about the appropriation of resources, but also about mobility and thus 'accessibility': can peo-ple get to shops, parks, etc.? It is about the governance of space by individuals, so it differs from individual to individual and from situa-tion to situation. Besides, it is also a question of scale as it is linked to bridging distances between home and services and facilities. Af-ter all, if individuals are or can be mobile, they can compensate for or mitigate the shortcomings in their position capital – for example, living in an environment with few amenities.

Figure 3. Components of spatial capital
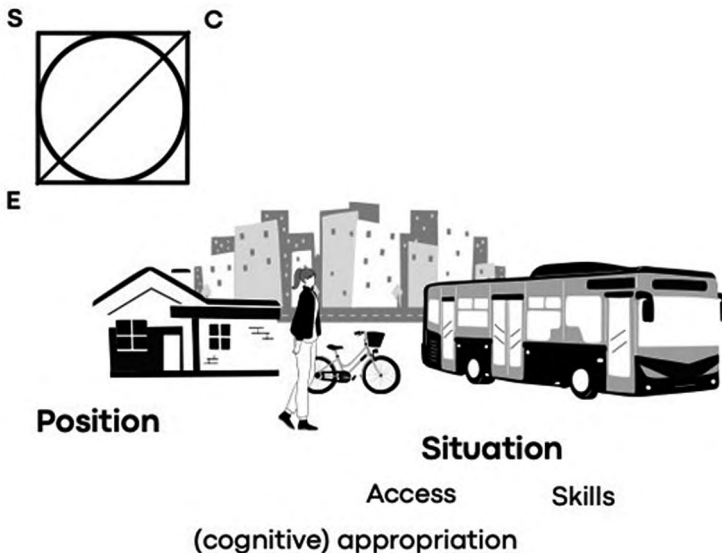
Places are no abstract notions, but realities in which individuals are able or unable to use their own spatial capital. It requires competences or skills. The ability to mobilize resources is not only about knowledge and skills, but also about access and (cognitive) appropriation. These are variables of what Kaufmann et al. call "motility" - the conversion of mobility into capital (Kaufmann et al. 2004, Jorritsma 2018). These variables show that the appropriation of facilities (including transport), or people's spatial capital, not only relates to their availability/proximity/accommodation and accessibility/approachability, i.e., "potential access" as we look at it from a spatial planning point of view. But that it also depends on "realised access" or whether these facilities are affordable, acceptable, and appropriate (e.g., preference for Arabic shops, ability to cycle or not), understandable (e.g., language) and reliable (Levesque *et al.* 2013 in Vandermeerschen *et al.* 2020 b). It illustrates how spatial capital is interchangeable and intertwined with economic, social, and cultural capital.

# 4. Data and methods to assess daily use of space

4.1 Approach through time-space research

Authors such as Hoelzel and Scheiner (2022), Erel and Ryan (2019) argue that it is inadequate to study and describe the links between spatial and social mobility merely in terms of macro processes. It is therefore necessary to map also so-called "geographies of opportunity" in the form of meaningful places in life courses at the micro level (Houston et al. 2005 in Hoelzel, Scheiner 2022). Mapping everyday mobility and use of space provides a picture of different meaningful places and the "action space"; the spatial entity in which all activities, undertaken by an individual (or group of individuals) in a given period,

are located (Dijst 1995). It appears to be a valuable starting point for mapping 'opportunities' (Hoelzel, Scheiner 2022) and the relationship between geographic/spatial mobility and social mobility.

The concepts of "action space" and "stations" as meaningful places can also be found within time-space geography. The basic principle of time-space geography, first developed by Hägerstrand in 1970, is that each individual travels paths in time and space. The scale of space and time can vary, allowing us to speak of daily paths as well as life paths. Our starting point are the day-to-day paths of individuals who make up the network through which society functions (Heringa, Bolt, Dijst 2018).

Figure 4. Representation time-space diagram
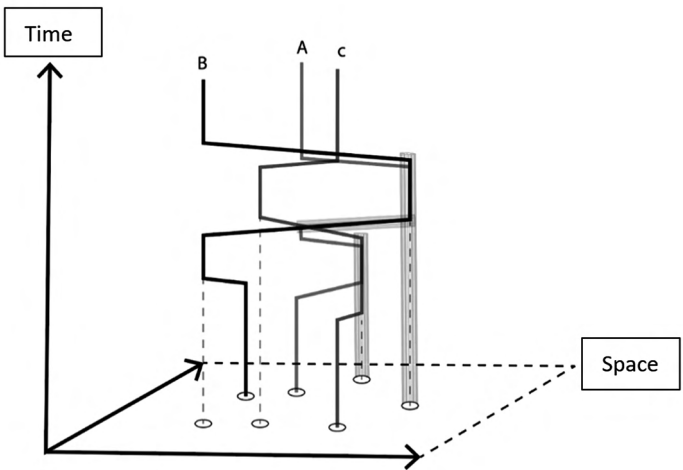
Source: drawn up by author (2022) based on Heringa, Bolt & Dijst (2018)

Figure 4 shows a time-space diagram showing the paths of individuals A, B and C. The axes x & y (the spatial dimensions within which activities take place) and z (the temporal dimension) provide the time-space context for these paths. The tubes are locations

where individual paths converge and can be considered as places of encounter or "geographies of opportunity" due to the collective presence of individuals. These tubes can be both bundles through which individuals move on their way to another destination, or the destinations themselves, so-called stations, or action spaces, where individuals are stationed in one place for a longer period of time.

In preparation for in-depth interviews with newcomers focusing on their everyday use of space starting from their place of residence in a small or medium-sized city or town, we asked our respondents (15) (table 1) to keep an activity diary. In this diary, for two days during the week (Wednesday/Thursday) and over the weekend, they listed all the places they visited, the activities they did and the people they met at these locations.

Table 1. Respondents

Country of origin	Gender	Family situation	Housing typology	Housing location
R1. Syria	V	Family (5)	House	Small city (37. 000)
R2. Syria	M	Family (5)	House	Small city (37. 000)
R3. Eritrea	M	Single	Studio	Medium-sized town (13.000)
R4. Eritrea	V	Family (5)	Appartement	Medium-sized town (13.000)
R5. Eritrea	M	Family (5)	Appartement	Medium-sized town (13.000)
R6. Syria	V	Family (5)	Appartement	Medium-sized town (11.000)
R7. Afghanistan	M	Single	Studio	Medium-sized town (13.000)
R8. Afghanistan	M	Single	Studio	Small city (37. 000)
R9. Syria	M	Family (6)	House	Small town (4.300)
R10. Iraq	V	Family (6)	House	Medium sized town (13.000)
R11. Syria	V	Family (5)	House	Small city (37. 000)
R12. Afghanistan	M	Single	Studio	Medium-sized city (80.000)
R13. Syria	V	Family (5)	House	Small city (37. 000)
R14. Syria	M	Family (5)	Appartement	Small city (37. 000)
R15. Syria	V	Family (5)	Appartement	Small city (37. 000)

Source: drawn up by author (2023)

During a subsequent semi-structured interview, the respondents' daily journeys were reconstructed (example figure 5), with additional attention paid to the means of transport and the choices/motivations, skills and strategies involved.

Figure 5. Time-space path interviewee
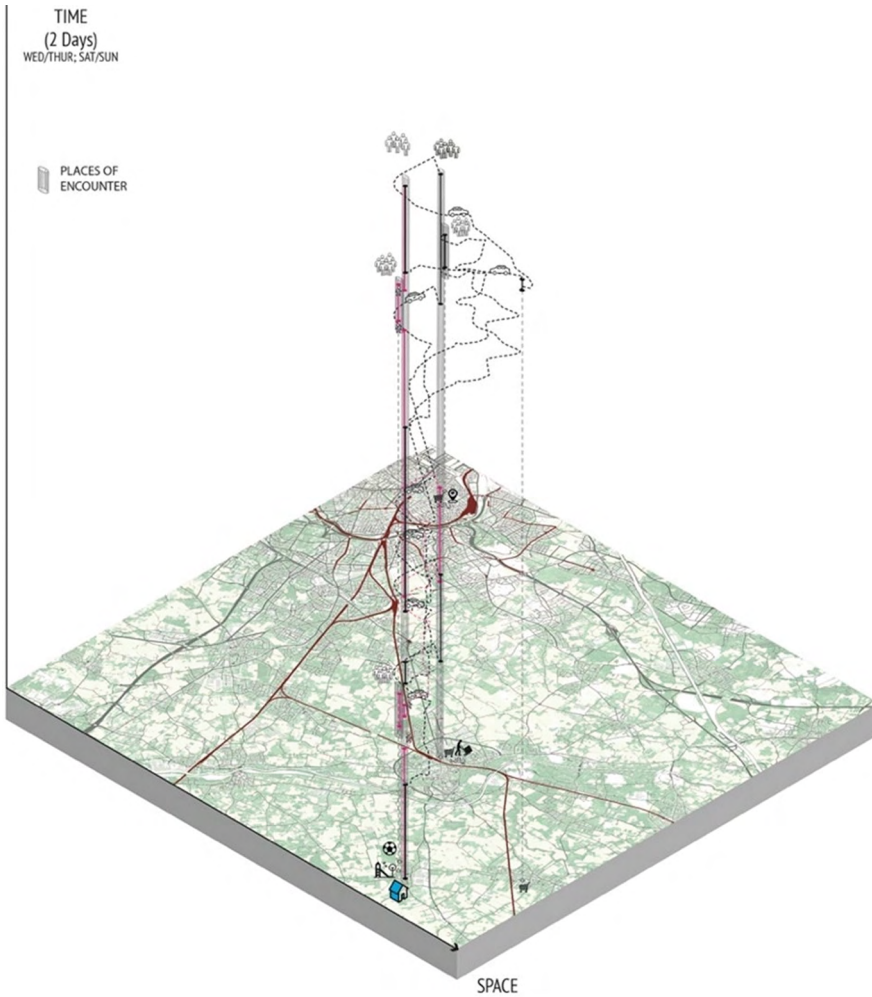
Source: drawn up by author (2022)

Additionally, in line with the study of Heringa, Bolt & Dijst (2018), we asked our respondents about the (3) most important people outside of their own household and the (3) most important places other than their own home. This allowed us to explore the composition of the social network and the value of interethnic contacts. Of course, it is

possible that some of these places and/or people were not addressed in the refugees' daily time-space paths, e.g., because they were inaccessible on those days (time, distance). The interviews were recorded and then transcribed to facilitate analysis using Nvivo. The time-space diagrams were drawn simultaneously with the transcription.

5. Results

In this section we discuss respondents' position capital, starting from their place of residence, at the scale of the house itself, the neighbourhood, and the wider residential environment in relation to other cities and towns. As we have argued, scale is key to understanding spatial capital. In addition, the findings can be related to elements of access (affordability, availability, etc.), skills and knowledge, and cognitive appropriation, and therefore include the relationship to other forms of capital (social, economic, cultural). Situation capital is approached in the same way.

5.1 Position capital

The following sections describe the formation of 'position capital' at the level of the dwelling a), the residential environment b) and in relation to other (metropolitan) cities c).

The structure of the housing market: housing quality and location

A place to live is much more than an address or a location on a map. It is not only a gateway to society, but also an assembly of 'resources' (or lack thereof) - and this has consequences for the life and well-being of the inhabitants (De Decker, Wyckaert, 2023). How people end up in a particular area or type of neighborhood is (partly)

related to the functioning of the housing market. The market not only determines where housing is available, but also what type of housing at which price. The house itself is part of position capital. The quality, including its size, of the houses affordable for the majority of our respondents, tends to be inadequate for family life, especially for entertaining guests and for children's play and study space, as the quotes below illustrate.

> On weekends … then I try to go to the park with my children. We use a lot of the park because the kids have more space there and they can play a lot of games there. Here in the house no … we have no space for kids (R2, Syria).

> For us, we know some families here and usually we see each other Saturday or Sunday in the park because our house here is a bit small for many people … Lier is also small, we see each other in the shop, in the park or at school. Because our children go to the same school (R13, Syria).

Parks, school environments and (bus)stations as places of encounter at the scale of the neighbourhood

The previous quotes also refer to parks as places of encounter. They appear as tubes/stations within the time-space paths of almost all respondents. Parks are thus important facilities in the position capital of these newcomers. However, research by Vandekerkchove et al. (2022) shows that the neighborhoods where newcomers live often have less or lack public green space. In addition to parks, one quote also refers to the school environment as a meeting place.

An individual's action space depends not only on their position and mobility in space, but is also influenced by their social position (cultural, social, economic capital), personal characteristics (gender, position in the family, ethnicity) and role-related obligations that are relatively fixed in time and space (Dijst, 1999). Although parks and school environments are the main and sometimes only places of encounter in the female respondents' diagrams (Figure 5), we can consider them, as Erel and Ryan (2018) do, as "geographies of oppor-

tunity" in terms of social mobility and argue that childcare can help migrant women to build wider social networks, knowledge and skills.

Figure 6. Time-space paths of female interviewee
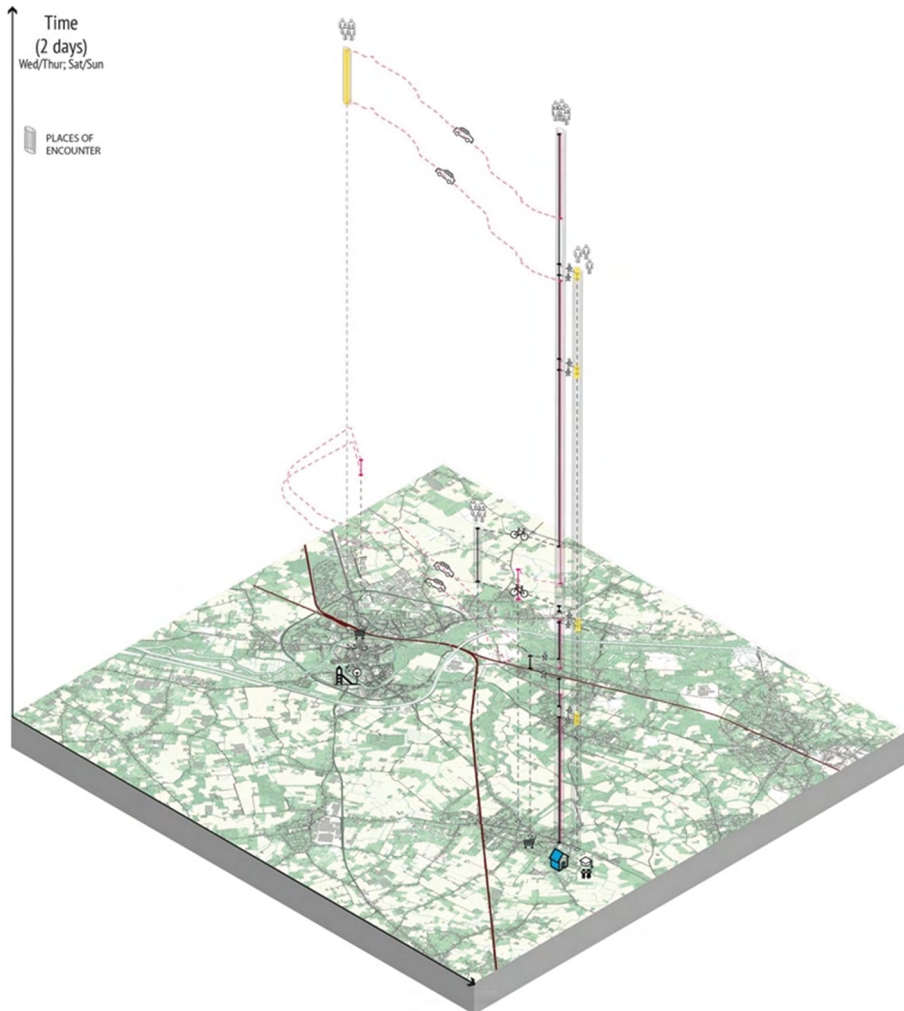
Individuals are not entirely free to choose their activities and time-space locations and are constrained in their daily use of space

(Hägerstrand 1970). There are coupling constraints (Hägerstrand 1970), as the previous paragraph shows, when people have to couple themselves together in time-space in order to transfer information or responsibility (for children) from one to another (Ellegård 2019). In addition, there are also capacity constraints which concern individual's skills, knowledge, material assets and tools. This will be discussed later on. A final form are authority constraints including laws, regulations and agreements that restrict actors in their actions. In daily life, opening and closing times of shops or timetables for public transport are good examples (Hägerstrand 1970 in Ellegård, Svedin 2012).

In relation to the latter, the time-space paths of most respondents show places of transit, such as train stations and bus stops, as important stations in time and space. Like parks, streets but also train and bus stops are routinely engaged with multicultural public spaces and can serve as places of encounter (Wilson, 2011). They are particularly relevant for newcomers, including our respondents, whose lives (work, leisure, shopping) unfold at the scale of the region and not just close to the house they live.

Searching for diversity and affordability in the (metropolitan) city

In search for affordable facilities which are useful in relation to cultural preferences, a number of metropolitan arrival neighborhoods emerge in nearly all of our respondents' time-space paths. Ethnic background and differences in cultural as well as economic capital are important when selecting facilities and activity locations (Dekker, Bolt 2005). Regular supermarkets are present in the vicinity of residential locations, but as one of our respondents points out, they tend to lack the desired variety and are more expensive.

To Antwerp we go for shopping and especially for Turkish shop at Handel and Elisabeth [arrival neighborhoods]. We take groceries and go to the hairdresser also. It's only 10 euros there (R10, Iraq).

Arab shops are not only perceived as affordable and useful but also as a places of encounter. As one of our respondents states:

> I don't know why but… in the Arab shop everyone talks to everyone. That's normal that you do that. After shopping you have five new friends. It's completely different from Aldi or Lidl [regular supermarkets] (R9, Syria).

5.1 Situation capital

Findings related to respondents' formation of situation capital are linked to elements of access (affordability, availability, etc.) a), skills and knowledge b), and cognitive appropriation c).

Accessibility of work (locations)

Certain (shopping) facilities in metropolitan areas may be accessible to our respondents, but job (locations) are not always. When migrants arrive in a new country, they experience how resources are valued differently (Kelly, Lusis 2006). For example, access to the labor market or skilled professions (economic capital) are differentiated according to access to information and social capital as well as the valuation of cultural capital (Kaufman et al. 2004).

For refugees, recognition of their qualifications/diplomas (incl. driving licence) is either not forthcoming or long overdue. As one of our respondents says:

> My degree is recognized but not for work, I have a general certificate. I think if I want to work, I have to take a course or something, but I don't know actually… but I understand that in Arabic language that is not easy and that is different material and different books. But it is still difficult (R14, Syria).
>
> The lack of validation of their diploma leads many of our (male) respondents to rely on temporary jobs, often in factories or ware-

houses located in industrial areas. These locations are not accessible by public transport, especially during late working hours. The problem in Belgium for refugees is to get work. It is very difficult. That is why whether you like or not you must have a car. Otherwise without car the opportunities or the probabilities to get work is very small. The first question they ask is do you have a car... Because as you know all the company and the workplace is a little bit outside from the city. So, they don't have transport access to a lot of these companies. That's why they ask this question and that's why refugees they prefer to have a car. In order to live in Belgium (R5, Eritrea).

Affordability as part of accessibility

It is not only physical access to public transport that is important, but also affordability also holds significance. Newcomers with limited income (economic capital) have no or less access to certain (transport) options because of price, and vice versa, newcomers with access to a car have faster access to work (e.g., temporary work).

By tram and bus, not by train, then you have to pay. I have a temporary driving licence but it's about to expire and I don't have a car to practice. I have to do everything again because I don't have a car, and it's going to cost me a lot of money. If I don't have a job and I have to pay for everything, that will not work (R3, Eritrea).

Cultural capital enhancing familiarity, utility, and accessibility of (mobility) facilities

Lifestyles based on certain habits, norms and values (Coppens, Oosterlynck 2009), but also knowledge and skills as part of cultural capital (e.g., knowledge of Dutch, being able to drive a car or bicycle), tend to influence the mobility or immobility of respondents.

The problem for me and not special for me but for Eritrean refugees, we are not familiar with a bike. I: Are you afraid to ride a bike? Yeah, I can ride it, even in Eritrea but it is not used as a real transport means. Yes, that is it. Just for playing or for sports (R5, Eritrea).

> Sometimes it takes almost two years because Dutch language is not good. The last exam was in January 2017 for theory of driving in Arabic. I go to theory in Arabic, but now no. And then a bit difficult driving practice because you needed Dutch. Right and left … I don't know… then five times, six times and then have driving licence… (R14, Syria).

In addition, for several of the interviewees, the help of civil society organizations was crucial in directly accessing spatial capital in terms of position capital (finding a place to live or a place to meet) or situation capital (cycling lessons, driving lessons).

> I learnt to ride a bike here in Belgium. F. taught me the first time he also volunteered for an organization to teach people how to ride a bike (R13, Syria).

6. Discussion & conclusion

6.1 Spatial capital and structure-agency

The results show that the use and accumulation of (spatial) capital among newcomers in a new context is conditioned by an interplay between the agency and strategies of newcomers and of civil society organisations and local administrations on the one hand, and structural barriers at different levels (macro, meso, micro) on the other hand (Figure 6).

First of all, not only the geographical layout and the temporal dimension, but also the economic, political and institutional context can be seen as constraints or structures for the deployment of capital by newcomers, but also for the acquisition of new capital in a different context (macro) (Jorritsma 2018). The recognition of qualifications/diplomas (including driving licences) is a good example.

> Our data show not only the barriers, but also the agency or strategies of newcomers in terms of mastering space and mobility, such as the use of parks as additional living space. Furthermore, lifestyles, aspirations and specific cultural and normative ideas and attitudes within families and other (social) networks influence these strategies, in addition to (micro) personal characteristics such as gender and family situation. As a result, spatial capital and the use of space by individuals living in the same place also differ (Kaufmann et al. 2004; Halberstam 2005). For example, time spent caring for children affects women's use of space and daily mobility (spatial capital), as well as their access to paid work (economic capital) (Erel, Ryan, 2018).

In addition to the newcomers' agency, we also see that volunteers' agency, for example in the form of NGO's organising cycling classes and housing clubs or providing meeting places, in response to a retreating government, can be important for the accumulation and transformation of (spatial) capital among refugees.

The decentralisation of regional integration policies shifts the responsibility for implementing integration policies to the local level of cities and municipalities. Refugees are therefore dependent on the (freedom of) choices (agency) that may or may not be made within a specific local political and institutional context. Recently, the regional (Flemish) government has developed an action plan "plan samenleven" (plan cohabitation) to support and steer cities and municipalities in the implementation of integration policies. However, actions focusing on the spatial capital of newcomers or on strengthening or expanding their spatial position are very limited.

Figure 7. Levels of structure and agency in the mobilization and accumulation of (spatial) capital
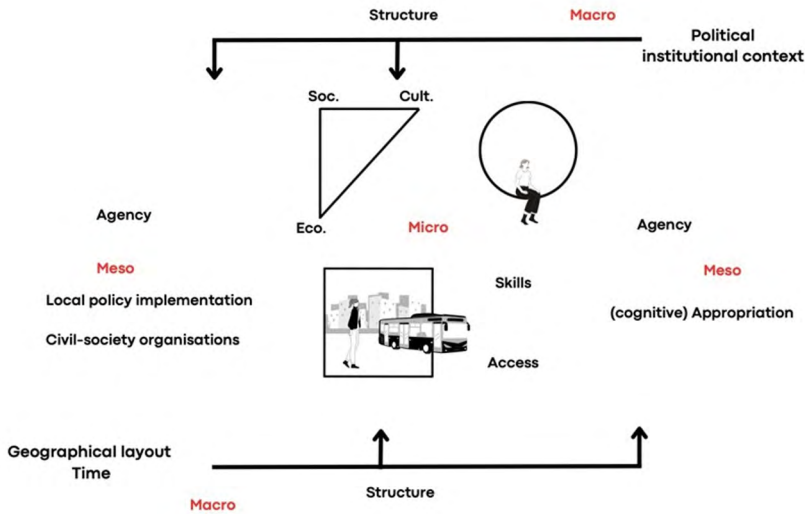
Source: drawn up by author (2023)

6.2 Integration (policy) is spatial (policy)

The lack of attention for spatial capital in integration policies is unfortunate, as newcomers settle in particular locations or places. Therefore, the integration of newcomers is to a large extent also a 'spatial' issue. We have shown that integration policies in Flanders, and the decision to implement them mainly at the local level, largely ignore the importance of 'place', including not only the geographical layout, but also the specific local political and institutional contexts. As a result, integration policies assume that all facilities, necessary services, and support are available everywhere to the same extent and with the same quality. Nothing could be further from the truth. First and foremost, resources; facilities such as shops and green public spaces, but also (social) services, are spatially unevenly distributed. In addition, local (political) decisions determine the access to certain facilities and services for newcomers. This implies that ongoing processes of

regionalisation in diverse domains (health care, education, ...) affect spatial capital (Thissen, Linseele 2001).

This contribution has shown that in order to achieve the objectives of participation and accessibility of facilities, integration policies must go hand in hand not only with other social policies, but certainly as well with spatial and housing policies. The question, however, is whether all this can be achieved solely at the local level.

It may be true that the very logic of integration policies should lead primarily to local and decentralised policy-making and implementation, since most individual and group interactions take place at the local level (Penninx 2009). However, can we leave it solely to local (political) decisions whether integration policies remain dead letter, or should there be a clearer supportive and/or regulatory framework with more attention to spatial aspects at regional or national level (Rommel 2023)? Moreover, it is a fact that living, working, leisure and shopping for newcomers in small and medium-sized towns and cities take place at a regional level. Services such as public transport are also organised at this level.

Furthermore, based on the residential behaviour and housing preferences of our respondents (Wyckaert 2020), but taking into account the secondary movements of increasing numbers of migrants (Vandekerckhove et al. 2022), it is crucial to work on the supply of affordable and appropriately sized housing with good connections to metropolitan areas. The time-space paths of our respondents as well as research by Schillebeeckx (2019), show that usable and affordable facilities or arrival infrastructure are prominent in these larger cities. But also the housing market is functioning at a regional level.

It likewise poses challenges for local spatial policy makers, as the settlement of newcomers has an impact on the required facilities. Accordingly, time-space research reveals different needs and demands in relation to public space. There are also opportunities for equal participation of newcomers at the local level through synergies with planning policies. Indeed, it is important to focus on parks, school environments and transport hubs (bus and

train stations) as 'geographies of opportunity' for social contacts, knowledge and skills. These facilities deserve additional space or can be designed differently to accommodate meaningful contact (Valentine 2008).

Those who also focus on skills, meaningful contact and encounters are self-organisations and civil society organisations (Schillebeeck 2019; Weidinger, Kordel 2020; Wyckaert 2021). They have an important integration function both in terms of access to facilities and participation in society, as they offer newcomers a network, knowledge and/or resources, for example in finding housing (position capital), a job or learning to drive and cycle (situation capital). The (potential) unwillingness of local authorities to provide this support, or to organise it themselves, will be disadvantageous to the implementation of an integration policy aimed at equal participation and accessibility of facilities.

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SECTION 3

MIGRATING IN SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED TOWNS: POLICY ACTORS' PERSPECTIVES AND EXPERIENCES

Providing services in inner areas: challenges and solutions

Margherita Asquasciati (Municipality of Fontanigorda),

Claudia Priano (Municipality of Fontanigorda)

ABSTRACT

A testimony from two small towns in the north-western Italian Apennines: the recepiton centre of the Municipalities of Fontanigorda and Rovegno, in Liguria Region. The geographical and social context in which the two small towns are located has been defined as Inner Area: a territory characterised by abandonment, distance from services, lack of opportunities and serious depopulation. Because of this, in 2015 the two municipalities have been involved in the National Strategy for Inner Areas promoted by Italian Government: it was a good opportunity to start imagining new development strategies to make these areas more attractive. The establishment of a reception centre for asylum seekers and refugees in 2018 was initially viewed with fear by the local community, but gradually it has become an opportunity to rethink the methods of provision of services to citizens and to experiment with innovative practices in which the beneficiaries of reception become providers of services to citizens with a reversal of roles.

Introduction

When the immigrant reception project was announced in 2017 to the inhabitants of the little villages of Fontanigorda and Rovegno, it was a cold and stormy day, exactly like the reaction of people.

At that time Margherita Asquasciati was the Mayor of the village of Fontanigorda. She put together all the community and said that our Valley would host an immigrant reception project. As for myself, I was about to become social operator and teacher within the two reception centres that were about to be open shortly after that announcement.

The reaction of the population was very strong. There were people shouting: *«I won't be able to leave my children on the street to play anymore!»*

There were women who said: *«We can't go out at night anymore!»*

The panic spread and the message was very clear: "we don't want them". This reply was especially from young people. Old people lived the war, emigration and the time of after-war and they were not scared by immigrants. They tried to persuade young people to be sensible, but without success.

The building for men reception has been located in the little village of Casanova, about 2km from Fontanigorda. Before immigrants' arrival, that house was seriously damaged by unknown people, who came in the night and broke all the water pipes.

Problems arose also for us operators, despite living in the villages of the Valley and knowing all people and the social context quite well.

Therefore, the challenge was very ambitious and the solution we have thought in that period was articulated in five points:

1. Don't forget that the first job to do was *"to prepare the ground"*.

2. Accept people's fear of *"unknown"*, which is not an easy feeling to manage.

3. Leave time to people, an element that was important because, after the first moment of aggression, a moment of curiosity appeared.

4. Start answering people's questions and reassuring them, also starting from our personal experiences.

5. Try to play down, to go out of the *"collective drama"*.

I would like to tell you a funny little episode. One afternoon, before the first beneficiaries arrived, some men called me and said they wanted to offer me a coffee. I accepted and I already knew they wanted to ask me something. Indeed they asked me some questions about immigrants and I answered.

Italy still has a strong patriarchal tradition and culture: women at home and men at work. This does not happen everywhere, but in our small villages in the Ligurian hinterland the situation is often this.

So, when they asked me: *«Claudia, tell us, what can African boys do all the day here?»*

I answered, speaking very seriously: *«African boys will do many things. Among others, they will organise a course only for Italian men, during which they will teach them how to cook, sew, use the iron for clothes, and how to clean home.»*

There was a moment of silence, perhaps ten seconds, the men looked at each other, then one begin to laugh and they all understood that I was joking.

Thus, one day the first two Nigerian boys arrived, and then other very young boys, from Senegal, Ghana, Gambia, Mali, Guinea Bissau, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Sudan and families too, from Somalia and Nigeria.

The contact among people solved the situation. Our work was to facilitate meeting and integration. As soon as the stranger began to speak or smile at someone, it was as if a giant iceberg had melted in an instant.

Now our guests have friends and the native people of village are part of their lives. During last years many friendships were born between Italians and non-Italians. SAI beneficiaries find work and often they choose to live in the Valley, where they can look for a house to live in, that is not so expensive as in the city.

Problems arise when the beneficiaries decide to go and live in cities. It is very difficult to find a house in Genova. People don't trust foreigners, even if they have a good employment contract. In some cases it has been necessary that we personally guaranteed for the rental of a house. It is a great problem, we think the most serious critical issue.

In a little community the problems can be solved because of the power of relationships, because day by day people have time to build meaningful social relations.

In cities, it is different, especially in this moment.

1. The context

1.1 The geographic context

The living testimony in the introduction, offered by Claudia Priano, social operator and teacher in the reception centre of the municipalities of Fontanigorda and Rovegno, well represents the difficulties encountered when starting asylum seekers and refugees' reception, also partly due to the geographical and social context.

Fontanigorda and Rovegno are two small towns within the Liguria Region in North-Western Italy.

These small tows are located in the mountain context of the Trebbia Valley, situated around 800m above sea level, and 50 km far from Genova, the closest city offering essential services, such as hospitals, railway stations and high schools. It takes 1 hour and 30 minutes by car, and more than 2 hours with public transport to reach the centre of Genova from the Trebbia Valley.

Figure 1. Location of Fontanigorda and Rovegno and journey from Fontanigorda to Genoa with public transport
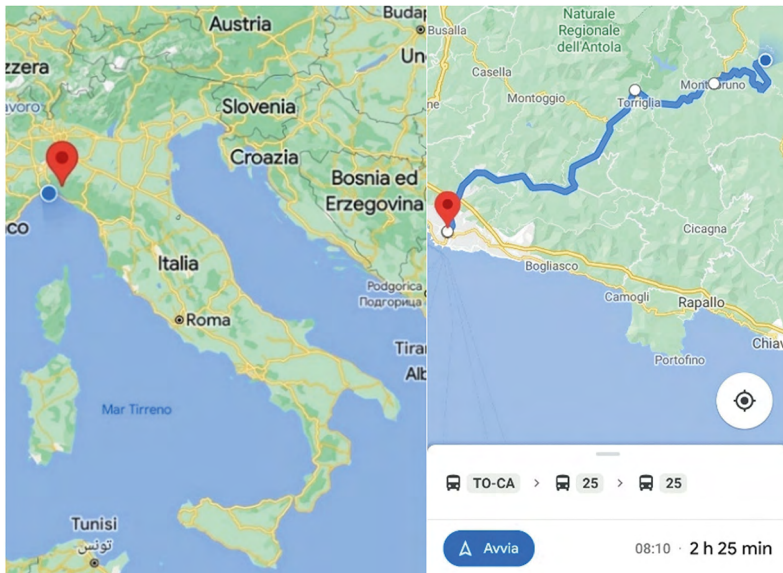

Source: Google maps

Over the last 100 years, people resident in the valley have migrated to large cities and also to other countries, due to the distance from services and to the lack of job opportunities.

The populations of Fontanigorda and Rovegno have drastically decreased and now are reduced to 244 and 492 residents respectively.

Population loss caused the abandonment of the territory, the creation of a stock of unused buildings and, above all, the progressive reduction of public services: many little local schools have been closed, public transport rides has been drastically reduced, and the same happened to healthcare from general practitioners in small outpatient clinics.

The perception of citizens is that they have been progressively abandoned by the institutions and the news of the establishment of a migrant reception centre has been experienced as yet another lack of attention towards them.

Figure 2. Population decline in Fontanigorda
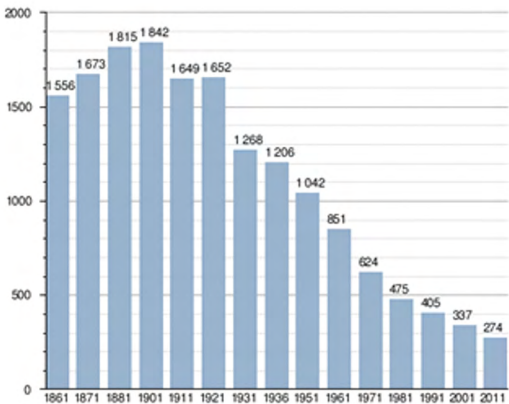
Source: Wikipedia

1.2 Involvement in the National Inner Areas Strategy

As a consequence of the described territorial and demographic characteristics, since 2015, the Trebbia Valley has been included in one of the first «Project Areas» of the Italian National Strategy

for "Inner Areas" (SNAI) - an innovative policy for development and territorial cohesion to counteract marginalisation and demographic decline within "Inner Areas".

Inner areas are in fact defined as territories characterised by a not adequate offer of and access to essential services to ensure a certain level of active citizenship among population, substantially far from urban centres able to supply adequate health, educational and transport services.

Nevertheless, these areas are rich of history, tradition, art, beautiful landscapes and biodiversity, and are strategically relevant to foster a more sustainable and inclusive national growth.

The Inner Areas National Strategy (SNAI) has a national dimension, but also follows a multilevel governance framework (State – Regions – municipalities). It is declined through selected project areas, including different municipalities. For each selected area a local strategy is implemented.

Each local strategy foresees the implementation of services (through national policy) and investments in development factors (regional policy), with a multi-fund attitude (EAFRD, ERDF, ESF and national funding) and a participatory approach to local development.

Figure 3. The 72 selected project areas of the national inner areas strategy

Fontanigorda and Rovegno have been included in the project area named "Valli dell'Antola e del Tigullio". During the construction of the strategy several focus groups were held, with the involvement of local actors and entities providing services for citizens. It has been an excellent opportunity to imagine new ways of developing these mountain territories starting from a new model of sustainable tourism, focused on outdoor sports (especially mountain biking and sport fishing).

The focus was also the construction of new services for citizens, calibrated on the real needs of these territories consistent with the idea of sustainable development designed for the area and foreseeing the use of new technologies to overcome the distances from distribution centres (e.g.: substantial investments for the elimination of the digital divide, provisions of distance learning for local schools, telemedicine and remote referral etc.).

1.3 Involvement in SAI, the Italian public system for the reception of the asylum seekers and refugees

In the above-described socio-spatial context, made up of fragility but also new stimuli and opportunities derived from the implementation of SNAI, the activity of the reception centre of Fontanigorda and Rovegno started in January 2018, as a part of SAI (System of Reception and Integration), the Italian public system for the reception of the asylum seekers and refugees.

SAI has been funded 20 years ago by public bodies as Ministry of the Interior and ANCI ("National Association of Italian Municipalities") and it is voluntarily activated and managed by local authorities - municipalities either individually or in association among them or with other institutions exercising public functions of local interest - with the implementation of local reception projects.

The primary objective of SAI is to provide support for each individual in the reception system, through a personalised programme designed to enable that person to regain a sense of independence and thus enjoy effective involvement in the life in Italy in terms of employment, housing, and access to local services, social interaction and scholastic integration.

Figure 4. Project logo of the local reception centre and a view of the dismissed school of Fontanigorda

The reception project of the associated municipalities of Fontanigorda and Rovegno provides for a total of 12 places, divided into two residential structures. The two residential structures are both hosted in public-owned properties: the abandoned school of Casanova di Rovegno and the teacher's home at the second floor in the building of the abandoned school of Fontanigorda. Both have been dismissed after the closing of local primary schools about thirty years ago, as a result of depopulation. Now both of them have been restored thanks to SAI funds and have found a new destination.

1.4 New challenges arise from the geographical and social context

As clearly emerged from the story about the beginning of the project and the distrust of the inhabitants, it was not easy to imagine how to combine the fragility of the people welcomed with the fragility of a left-behind territory which is far from the city, subjected to depopulation and in which services are progressively cut off as the population decreases.

For the reception project the first challenge was to ensure access to services as requested in the SAI manual (health, public

transport, education) for the received people in a territory in which indigenous people have often no access to many services. Some significant, but not exhaustive, examples are the following:

- Public transport, connecting the villages of the valley with each other and with the centre of Genova is limited to few bus rides;

- Health services are inadequate and the closest hospital is located in Genova;

- Education is limited to one multi-class primary school and lower secondary education; both are located in Rovegno. Secondary schools are all located in Genova.

The next challenge, once the first has been resolved giving services to the beneficiaries, was and is to avoid creating inequalities between the services that are provided to the beneficiaries of the reception project and those the native residents have access to.

This potential inequality in access to services, in fact is unfair and, in addiction, can cause a deep resentment and rejection towards the hosted beneficiaries in resident citizens, who cannot use the same services.

Therefore, our constant attention was to ensure that the services gradually created for the beneficiaries could be made available to the entire local community and this was present in each single challenge we had to deal with. In the following chapters some of them are described.

2. Challenges and solutions

2.1 Challenge: how to ensure adult education in Fontanigorda and Rovegno?

Adult education is one of the services that have to be granted to all the beneficiaries in the SAI system, according to the Operative Manual.

In Italy, the Provincial Centres for Adult Education and training (CPIA) are responsible for this service: they provide literacy and Italian language courses as well as primary and lower secondary education (compulsory education).

The closest CPIA to the municipalities of Fontanigorda and Rovegno is located in the city of Genova, and offers only afternoon and night classes. It's not possible to reach CPIA in Genova from the Trebbia Valley with public transport. In fact the bus ride takes more than 2 hours and it is not possible to come back home after the lesson, as there is no bus service late in the evening.

The solution found to guarantee the service is the so called "AULA AGORA'", a mixed online/in-presence education programme to ensure adult basic educational opportunities at the local level.

The operation can be described as follows: students remain in the territory in the so called "Aula Agorà", which has been created in the hall of the municipal council in Fontanigorda, while teachers are connected from the CPIA, located in Genova and a tutor is present in the classroom to help students to interact with teachers online. Students' attendance is regularly registered.

This method was firstly presented during the Inner Areas Strategy implementation in 2015, but has been used for the first time in the SAI project in Fontanigorda during 2020-2021 school year.

Figure 5. Lesson in the municipal council hall of Fontanigorda during Aula Agorà activity, 2021
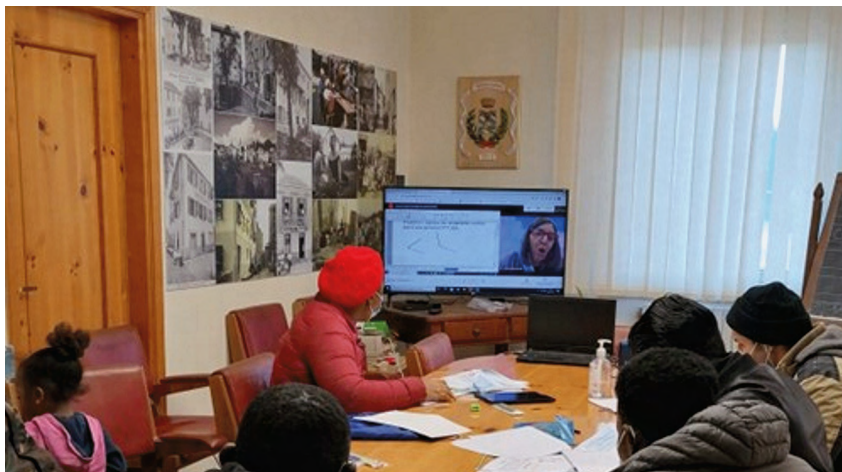
Source: Own illustration

The results obtained during the first year of experimentation (school year 2020-2021) were consistent:

- 5 beneficiaries obtained the diploma of lower secondary education in June 2021;

- a social operator, who worked as a tutor in Aula Agorà decided to study and obtained an important Certification for Didactics of Italian as a foreign language "DILS-PG II level" in December 2022;

- CPIA teachers in Genova have acquired skills in distance learning, since none of them had similar experiences of teaching before collaborating with our reception centre.

During the following school year (2021-2022), the focus was on consolidating the activity and opening it up to the local community The opportunity to attend CPIA lessons in Fontanigorda was thus offered to local adults, who attended lessons together with beneficiaries of the reception centre.

AULA AGORA' has now become a stable service for citizens who live in Fontanigorda and, more in general, in the Trebbia Valley, as it has been recognised by the regional superintendency for studies, the local branch of the National Ministry of Education.

2.2: Challenge: how to ensure professional training?

Given the lack of education services in the Val Trebbia area, guaranteeing on-site vocational training is also a problem. No training institutions are present in the valley, since they are all in Genova.

In this case, the solution we found came through the use of a local resource: a professional forest operator living in Fontanigorda, who has a forest instructor license.

It was thus possible to organise a theoretical and practical course for the safe use of the chainsaw. The surrounding area, in fact, is particularly suitable for forestry.

Figure 6. a moment of the practical lesson on the use of the chainsaw

Source: Own illustration

Thanks to a certification by the Liguria Region, this activity has been recognised as the first didactic module (F1) of the professional training course for forest operator. Furthermore, this training is also valid as specific training for safety in the workplace, which is mandatory.

This qualification was subsequently useful to some of the beneficiaries in their job search and it was very appreciated by employers.

The beneficiaries of the reception project found themselves having a qualification that the local forestry operators do not yet have.

Also for this reason, then, this training has been subsequently opened to local participants, as done for the school activities.

2.3 Challenge: how to grant support for job placement?

Job placement support is another of the services that must be guaranteed to beneficiaries of SAI reception. This is particularly complicated in the Val Trebbia area, due to the total absence of large production activities and other economic realities.

In fact, due to depopulation and abandonment, the local production realities are few and fragile, mainly family-run.

In addition, in the local context there is not an unitary organisation (like in Genova) for the coordination of extra-curricular internships and other work experiences that can be offered to beneficiaries of reception as paths to approach the job market.

It was therefore necessary to create from the beginning personalised work inclusion paths with local small companies (in agriculture, hydroponic fish farming, restaurants, building, etc.) located in the valley, but also and with centres of expertise in the city, such as Genova Acquarium, previously contacted during the co-planning activity carried out as part of the National Strategy for Inner Areas.

The reuse of abandoned tanks for trout breeding was in fact an action included in the local inner area strategy, as a support to sport fishing. A start-up company of hydroponic fish farming, that reused the abandoned tanks in Fontanigorda, hosted a training of a beneficiary, who also had the opportunity of a work experience at the Genova Aquarium.

Some beneficiaries were able to carry out work inclusion courses in agriculture, for example in an apple production farm with the recovery of local species and an eco-sustainable cultivation system.

Other personalised work inclusion paths were hold in landscaping and cleaning thanks to a social cooperative based in Genova, but

already operating in the territory of Trebbia Valley This is a social cooperative that carries out an important inclusion activity in favour of people with different fragility and at the same time has achieved great professionalism in the care of green areas.

Figure 7. Work inclusion paths in apple production, in fish breeding (Genova Acquarium), landscaping

Source: Own illustration

The creation of various work inclusion pathways, bringing together subjects who did not know each other, also trying to accommodate the vocation and aspirations of each individual beneficiary and the needs of the host subjects, was a huge effort but it produced several positive results.

The first result achieved was, of course, the training in action of the beneficiaries, who were able to test their skills, acquire new skills and establish personal relationships with employers, who, in several cases, subsequently hired them.

On several occasions, for example in construction, catering and landscaping, the beneficiaries of the hospitality project have had the opportunity to work together with people living in the valley. Working together has been a powerful means of inclusion and a stimulus to improve and helped erase the distrust of the local population.

In some cases, the presence of the beneficiary in small, sometimes family-owned businesses helped to support the activity and stimulate growth projects.

Finally, thanks to the involvement of the beneficiaries in the social cooperative that carries out green cleaning activities, they have carried out activities of public utility for the local community.

2.4 Challenge: underused public library

The involvement of beneficiaries in public utility activities for the local community was even more significant in the revitalisation of the small municipal library of Fontanigorda. This was substantially underutilised due to lack of human resources, and it also needed to be made more welcoming and usable. At the same time, there is a need for meeting spaces and cultural stimuli especially in the winter months, when few people remain in the village.

The revitalisation of the library began in 2020 thanks to a group of volunteers, including some members of the city council and with the involvement of residents and tourists.

The opening was initially guaranteed thanks to the collective utility project of a citizen receiving Citizenship Income – a welfare measure provided by the State, - but soon the presence of this person and other volunteers was joined by the work inclusion path of a beneficiary of the reception project.

Even in this case, there were many results and benefits for the community: the library opens to the public for consultation and loan, but also for homework, drawing, playing and meeting. The loan service increased (almost 200 in 2022) and, thanks to the work of the beneficiary, also a digital book database was created with more than 2200 books included.

At the same time, the beneficiary acquired digital skills in uploading data and improved her level of Italian.

Even more important was the network of relationships that grew up around the library: many activities, such as reading workshops for children, reading groups for adults, an active cooperation with the local school, but also the simple daily work together, helped to build meaningful personal relationships.

Figure 8. A beneficiary uploading data in the library during a work inclusion paths

Source: Own illustration

2.5 Challenge: a CULTURAL HUB in an abandoned school?

A similar case of a public property to be reused concerns the old classrooms of the primary school, located on the first floor of the building that houses the reception centre of Fontanigorda.

This abandoned space met the need of a place for smart-working for people who want to stay in the valley in search of a more sustainable life, but also the need of a space for temporary exhibitions and activities for fruition of digital contents.

The result was the creation of two new collective spaces for the community in the old abandoned school classrooms:

- FontaLAB: A digital museum-educational laboratory, promoted by a doctoral student in digital humanities from the University of Genova;

- FontaWORK: A shared space for work and study.

Figure 9. FontaLAB and FontaWORK during summer 2022

Source: Own illustration

This reconversion was possible thanks to a set of combined actions:

- The renovation and furnishing of the spaces was financed by the National Operational Programme on Legality ;

- Internet connection has been granted by the «Banda Ultra Larga» national programme (BUL) that was included in the local Strategy for inner Areas (SNAI);

- Know how and networking for the coworking space were provided by Southworking Association, that promotes

new ways of working starting from the territories and enabling a new balance between personal and professional life;

- Coworking space management was guaranteed by Fontamici APS: an association of young people who aim to promote social innovation and growth in Fontanigorda and its territory;

- Daily opening and on site assistance was guaranteed again with a personalised work inclusion path for a beneficiary of SAI;

- FontaLAB design was realised by a doctoral student in digital humanities from the University of Genova.

Some first important results during the first year of opening (2022) were reached.

FontaLAB hosted educational activities for children within the European project LIFECLAW for the protection of native crayfish but also activities of summer camps.

It hosted also a Hypermedia temporary exhibition on ancient local production made with the contributions of local school students and designed by the doctoral student in digital humanities.

FontaWORK opened to the public of the new coworking space in July 2022. More than 100 presences were reached during summer 2022. Many university students and workers extended their stay in Fontanigorda thanks to the possibility of using this space.

Conclusion

Based on our experiences, which have been widely exposed in the text above, some general conclusions can be drawn to highlight key points that can be useful to make other similar contexts understand the potential value of immigration in small towns. In particular, we want to stress that:

- Small towns in inner areas can be places of experimentation for innovative practices and, in this sense, hospitality is an opportunity for development and innovation, which can involve and enhance a large set of local resources;

- A strong alliance with the city's centres of expertise (CPIA, Regione Liguria, University of Genova, Coop. Il Rastrello, Genova Aquarium) proves to be crucial for the success of our reception project, as well as the complementarity with other projects and funding sources, as in particular PON LEGALITA', LIFE and SNAI;

- Reception of asylum seekers and refugees can allow to put at use abandoned public assets (accommodation for the teacher and classrooms of abandoned schools, library, abandoned tanks for trout breeding...);

- New services calibrated on the real needs of the territory have to be conceived and, within this context, beneficiaries of SAI themselves made available to the local community some of these services, directly participating in their creation and producing a role reversal, so that the beneficiary of the reception becomes the provider of services for and with the local community.

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The impact of migration in small-medium-sized cities and the role of the local authorities in Greece. The Municipality of Trikala.

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ABSTRACT

Knowledge of modern migration processes and dynamics in the Greek context has accumulated since the late eighties. However, the regulatory and policy framework proved inadequate to deal with the recent migration crisis (years two thousand and onwards), resulting in a powerful negative impact on cities and regions. Confronted with an unprecedented human challenge, the recent massive flows of asylum seekers required a renewal of the strategies and the launching of synergies to address needs beyond primary services' access but include integration policies. Said otherwise, the recent migration challenge requires the mobilisation of society as a whole (local, national and European levels) and the deployment of civil society and the local stakeholders. The lack of long-term, locally-adherent integration strategies seems to be the main factor leading to, among others, rising migrants' vulnerabilities and spreading racism and discrimination

in society. Stretched beyond their 'ordinary mandate', some local governance structures (Municipalities of the Central part of Greece such as Karditsa, Larissa, and Trikala) have marked a 'good model' for incorporating migrants into the local communities. The experience of the Municipality of Trikala can contribute to the discussion over the authorities' role in efficiently addressing such migration-related issues.

The impact of migration in small-medium sized cities in Greece

Greece and the EU are facing the biggest refugee crisis since the Second World War. Even if numbers dropped temporarily since 2015, following the EU-Turkey agreement, Greece's capacities to efficiently address the needs of the newcomers were limited due to the concurrent economic crisis. Efforts focused on handling the crisis with national, NGO, and EU funding, establishing around 60,000 places in accommodation centres with access to primary healthcare and basic education with around 12,000 children in the school system.

Even if Greece has a long migration history, the current crisis does not resemble the characteristics of past experiences. In contrast, past integration strategies were dedicated to a different migration segment and were tailored to a different historical moment: Balkan and ex-Soviet Union migrants were particularly advantaged by the then-booming Greek economy, while close historical and cultural bonds would facilitate the identification of common grounds on which to build integration paths. The challenges of the current migration strategies must address different vulnerabilities. At the same time, they should go beyond the reception conditions and extend to the integration of refugees in different spatial and temporal clusters, both in the short and long run.

The current National Strategy for Integration (the first dating 2013) introduces guiding principles and overall critical questions, such as what kind of society we wish for, the need to balance short- and long-term measures, and the need to see migration as an opportunity, not a threat. Nevertheless, it still lacks detailed, locally suitable approaches that consider balancing assets for migrant and indigenous populations adequately.

In the experience of some Municipalities of Central Greece, effective integration requires multilevel and multi-tier policies and long-term strategies. Accurate knowledge on the causes of movement and the 'model' of migration is a precondition to designing the policies. The approach to integration is undoubtedly different in terms of time-space and needs assessment, while in some instances, it may even aim at achieving different goals. In that perspective, the case of Greece may be different from other (mostly central or northern) EU migration destinations, representing a transiting destination or only a temporary settlement for most asylum seekers. Internal to Greece settlements and formal-informal communities of migrants, from the other hand, may also significantly differ from place to place. 'Transitional migration' needs a separate plan for integration and supportive strategies. In contrast, those who will choose to reside stably need proper housing, accommodation, and employment strategies at a local level to integrate.

The national Integration Strategy requires an action plan that endorses transferring integration tools and planning from the national to the local level, with more emphasis on horizontal cross-cutting policies, especially needed for valorising and developing skills. An action plan to address locally differentiated needs may also benefit the entire systemic architecture with a ripple effect. Starting by stimulating e-governance capacity may facilitate communication, networking and knowledge sharing, which can ultimately promote better coordination of the resources employed in reception and integration measures and ultimately counteract illegality and combat fraud. Eventually, progressive changes in the perceptions of migrants are underway. At

the same time, implementing such a strategy implies facing other transversal challenges, including the limited resources in addressing the unique needs of vulnerable groups or dealing with relocation schemes in Europe. Integration strategies should foresee actions for enhancing public administration and intercultural management and set the coordination between different policy planning levels.

Dealing with migration during a financial crisis has led to more extreme-right views and a shift towards more conservative values. Therefore, migration policies should also include measures to prevent political radicalisation against migrants and support organised strategies for reducing the burden on southern European countries and Greece. Measures required include a decongestion of the reception centres (i.e. islands) and decent refugee accommodation. Organised educational and recreational activities are needed in the refugee camps, and collaboration with public authorities and civil society actors for efficient reception services cooperating with EU and international organisations.

1. Local models of integration

1.1 Central Greece: Larissa, Karditsa, Trikala. The Municipality of Trikala

The Municipality of Trikala is positioned in the central part of Greece with a registered population of around 57 thousand inhabitants and represents one of the models for successful integration. In 2022, according to estimations, some 2,000 refugees and asylum-seekers coming from many different countries (Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Iraq, Syria) were living in this central part of the country (distributed between the municipalities of Larissa, Karditsa, and Trikala) referred by the Greek Ministry of

Migration and Asylum from reception centres, thus raising the actual number of inhabitants to about 75 thousand.

The cities in the central part of Greece were called to address integration challenges in a challenging context of conditions, essential among them the lack of adequate resources and effectively supportive policy frameworks. Instead of solving, regulations often present procedural complications and administrative barriers in accessing primary services (usually in terms of required documentation), such as postponements and interruptions in reaching primary social care (food, clothing, personal products, but also educational and recreational items like books and toys for the younger refugees) that are inflicted over the already existing vulnerability of the incomers. Such conditions inevitably broaden and deepen the distance of the newly arrived from the local community.

An important initiative has been laid through a tailored strategy between the Municipality of Trikala and the newly established local Integration Council of Migrants and Refugees, the municipal advisory body assigned to identify needs and propose concrete solutions for integration. Furthermore, an Immigrant Integration Centre operates in the Municipality of Trikala (KEM) as a branch of the Community Centre as a complementary structure to the Directorate of Social Care (also supervised by it) to further support the Municipality in the implementation of social protection policies and to develop a local focal point of reference for the reception, service and interconnection of citizens with all Social Programs and Services implemented in its operational area. The KEM offers specialised services emphasising employment, education, health, protection and welfare, social security and intercultural mediation/interpretation. The KEM provides information and advisory support for immigrant integration issues and acts as a referral of requests to other relevant structures, services and agencies (Councils for Integration of Immigrants, Associations of Immigrants/Beneficiaries of International Protection, NGOs, Social Services).

In addition, liaison experts deployed by the ICMC (International-al Catholic Migration Commission) and collaborating with the UN-HCR, the UN Refugee Agency, and the Greek government coordinated the ongoing local integration initiatives (i.e., vocational training and language courses). This collaboration extended to three municipalities' authorities of central Greece (Larissa, Karditsa, and Trikala) and with their respective local integration programmes, bridging other local initiatives to the UN actions and supportive programmes offered by local stakeholders. Various urban working groups were set to establish and coordinate a network of services provided by various agencies locally. With the strategy orientation proposed by the three Municipalities, policy objectives aligned to the various levels of governance and the different spaces of reception, starting actions of capacity-building (i.e., training) for staff and public officials on legal issues and administrative procedures. Therefore, among the overall goals set by the Municipalities of central Greece to meet the recipients' specific needs was to point to innovation and the reconfiguration of the existing local systems.

Ultimately, actions extended to enhancing the networking with national and supranational communities of practice (such as joining the 'Cities Network for Integration') in line with the broader effort to create and consolidate channels of communication between authorities and stakeholders, create spaces where it is possible to share knowledge, practices and models, but also to find resources (fundraising, donations, crowdfunding) to employ in joint projects. Networking often may offer alternative solutions to the local and national authorities and, in the long term, can remove procedural and policy barriers to accessing refugee services.

In conclusion, the above-described actions have a two-fold effect: on one side, they facilitate and finetune the integration programs with the real-local needs, activating the community and creating new patterns of long-term, multilevel collaboration in the governance of migration while valorising the existing resources; on the other side, this combined approach significantly benefits the social cohesion,

brings people and communities closer, highlighting the ways not only the locals but also refugees contribute to their communities.

1.2 The role of the Local Authorities in Small-Medium Towns in Greece

Comprehensive reports on the refugee crisis reception centres in Greece, combined with the images reported by the media in small Greek islands, provide critical information on the implication of infrastructures adequately designed and equipped to receive high numbers of migrant flows that are additionally characterised by extreme vulnerability.

The varied geographic locations, the sizes and the different 'local wealth' of the cities in terms of economic, natural and human resources translate into different capabilities and knowledge of the hosting equips. These are factors essential to the equation that makes the reception and the hosting of migrants possible and dignified.

However, authorities are not free from responsibility for playing an active role in receiving and integrating migrants properly, even if the lack of a clear and effective integration policy framework may play a significant role in the capacity assessment to govern migration of the local authorities. The Municipalities' active role neither culminates with the exact application of the directions provided by the national framework. Local authorities are also called to provide paths for integration and social cohesion, address the concerns for the increased diversity amongst the residents, and provide shared spaces for community life, vital urban infrastructure, and services to meet the needs of the entire local population.

Among local authorities' challenges, good multilevel communication is crucial for effectively and timely addressing the needs, especially in unprecedented emergencies that entail unanticipated requests that cannot be satisfied otherwise. Communication rep-

resents a well-documented problematic aspect in Greece, growing proportionally to dispersed migration directives and policies over various levels of government. Local Authorities, in the guise of 'policymakers', should be dynamically involved in the design of both the reception and the integration policies. The establishment and the operation of the 'Migrants Integration Centres' under the umbrella of the Community Centre structure may represent one step taken in that direction.

The involvement of other local actors is also part of the answer: active engagement of the non-governmental sector and the civil society – including organisations run by migrants is also necessary. Intercepting local stakeholders means mapping new local capacities that may lead to better access to funds (national or EU), facilitating cities and Local Authorities' access to resources in response to the identified integration needs with the necessary flexibility and timeliness. At the same time, better coordination between numerous stakeholders helps increase the effectiveness and efficiency of migration-related activities while setting community goals stimulates civic advocacy and commitment.

1.3 Policies for local actors

Local actors' contribution in the policymaking can progressively become an asset that extends beyond single coordinated integration initiatives. Local actors can impact to the need for a strategy explicitly tailored to the local needs and requirements for the inclusion of migrants into the local labour market.

Policies on labour integration should be looking to a twofold goal: not only fit migrant's needs and enable them to become active members of the local society but also consider how migrants' profiles can help to fill labour market gaps and shortages in crucial sectors of local economies, in order to provide benefit for the local community. This aspect is vital as a countermeasure to fears of

draining market and labour opportunities from the 'newcomers' (the migrant community) while ensuring a common benefit, spendable beyond the specific space and time.

Migrants' incorporation through the labour market requires prior knowledge of the local language: classes for children and adults should be a crucial part of integration practices and policy propriety. Indeed, many migrants may become marginalised even if highly skilled and potentially immediately employable to the local market because of fundamental language barriers.

Language skills, labour permits, and facilitated procedures for the 'nostrification' of their diplomas open the path for migrants to reach their full potential and become a valuable source of society and labour while contributing to the local budget by paying taxes. Local offices are greatly facilitated when permanent communication-information paths exist with the local actors active in the market.

Policy design should also take account of re-urbanisation and related demographic needs that migrants can tackle by reviving the villages, the smaller cities and even entire regions. In the same enriching view, cultural gains may also derive from supportive and well-tailored policies, especially if the culture and traditions of the migrant population vary to a large degree from that of the local population.

Conclusions

All the above considerations bring to the suggestion of perceiving integration as a complex bidirectional process. Integration-incorporation programmes should target not only migrants but also the city's local communities to increase awareness of the benefits related to migration and promote intercultural dialogue.

From a broader perspective, networks of diverse local-sub-local actors countering stereotypes and negative discourses could be promoted by Local Authorities. Municipalities acting as semi-autonomous units can be expected to solve some of the many complex migration issues and can create conditions for better policy development. Reaching the municipal level's full potential means activating the local social fabric and coordinating with all levels of funding and governance.

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