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**Title: Between resistance and humanitarianism in local context: Attitudes towards  
Asylum seekers in medium-small size Greek cities**

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**Extensive abstract**

Since 2012, Greece has received a substantial influx of refugees, coming mainly from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. The closure of the so-called Western Balkans route and the European Union (EU)–Turkey Agreement on refugee and migrants in the Spring of 2016 have confined uncontrolled and irregular movements both towards and within the EU (European Council, 2016), leaving around 76,000 refugees and asylum seekers trapped in Greece for an indefinite period (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2019). This situation has given rise to reasonable concerns to both Greek citizens and the State authorities alike, regarding the spatial allocation and settlement of refugees, and the conditions of their living. In order to accommodate these people two kinds of reception places were developed in the mainland, camps and social housing (mainly through the UNHCR’s ESTIA accommodation program), with international institutions and NGOs having major involvement in their provision and the local authorities playing either a minor or, at best, a coordinating role. Furthermore, the HELIOS program is under way (starting in September 2019) to support refugees’ integration through various acts, including help in renting private housing.

In Greek cities, the social practices of local actors have played an important role in the implementation of the immigration policy, where refugees were perceived as a threat to personal and community security, especially when open reception facilities – camps, are sited in close distance at the edge of cities or rural settlements. In addition, the multi-level approach to the so-called refugee crisis has resulted in different housing outcomes and approaches to integration in many cities, corresponding to different levels of engagement and cooperation that the local social actors (civil society, NGOs, religious organisations, etc.) have exhibited. In some cases, innovative ways of social inclusion and acts of solidarity were made prevalent, whereas, in others, instances of social exclusion and marginality have been documented (Arvanitidis, Vergou, Manetos, & Grigoriou, 2020; Vergou, 2019).

In our contribution, we analyse how local communities respond to the presence of refugees in different housing settings-accommodation centers or apartments- and seek to understand the sources of these attitudes through locally conducted surveys, in three medium and small size cities. Each case study represents different examples

of geographical location (a port city-tourist destination and two cities in the mainland in an agricultural area), governance arrangements in refugees' accommodation (camp and rented apartments) and local socio-spatial disparities, in relation to socio-economic characteristics. The study deployed an extensive questionnaire in order to collect data regarding first, the attitudes of the native population towards migrants / refugees and their spatial placement within the urban fabric of the cities under study and second their views concerning the accommodation and integration of refugees.

In our paper, we argue that to understand the full range of urban sociabilities, which includes residents, migrants and non-migrants, we need to explore the ways that city inhabitants build their connections with the community, the existence or the absence of strong community networks and the role of urban institutionals. As Çağlar and Schiller (2019:12) eloquently articulate, it is important not to lay the groundwork for viewing migrants as dangerous strangers by using theories presenting urban spaces as examples of "living with difference" but in contrast, to understand the connections between how city residents respond their differential access to power, their city's position and the ongoing restructuring of their neighborhood places which are important to understand how people can and do form social ties.

Based on these assumptions, we try to develop an analytical framework that traces connections between how the city residents respond to the arrival of the newcomers refugees in connection to the ongoing restructuring of the socio-economic disparities where locals and refugees build their lives. The specific local, social, and material resources (such as support and care networks, community initiatives, social centres) and institutional and organisational resources (municipalities, NGOs, religious organisations), have evolved in specific refugee accommodation and they impact to refugee allocation dynamics (Vergou et al., 2021). In this context the local (political and economic) environment, the conditions of the recent crisis-inflicted Greek welfare regime are important factors in societal division of space (Arbaci, 2019; Mingione & Oberti, 2003).

More specifically, the current article draws on the experiences of three different, yet typical, Greek urban settings all located close to each other in central Greece. The first, Larisa, concerns a medium-size city where local authorities have a centralist and an active, hands-on role in refugee settlement, whereas the second, Volos, a somewhat smaller city, has no active role in refugees' accommodation, although there is a refugee camp and shelters for unaccompanied minors at the outskirts of the city. The municipality of Larisa used the already existing social assistance structures built on previous experiences (a municipal public benefit enterprise), and was better prepared and able to implement smaller changes and adopt a social welfare approach refugee reception and accommodation in the city. In contrast, the municipality of Volos chose a more decoupled governance arrangement where refugees were excluded from the urban fabric (Vergou et al., 2021). The third case study is the city of Trikala, a small

city, where a municipal entrepreneurship company- e-trikala, a municipal development agency of the city of Trikala, coordinates and manages the housing and integration program for refugees. The specific (socio-cultural, political) contexts of the three case-study cities constitute the underlying environment that informs subsequent policies, the process of integration/segregation, and the barriers and challenges that refugees and the local societies face.

The article uses a representative sample of 1.200 residents, whereas relevant information was collected through interviews with key local policy actors (municipality's representatives, agencies, NGOs). Statistical data were also used from the application of Panorama of Greek Census Data (1991–2011) to obtain information on the social-economic profile of the cities at the census tract level (EKKE–ELSTAT, 2015). Further data are acquired through in-depth semi-structured interviews with key actors in housing and accommodation of refugees (municipalities, agents, NGO's). Due to the pandemic situation of COVID-19, the questionnaires were disseminated through a snowball sampling manner, from December 2020 till March 2021. The total responses for the relevant population of adult inhabitants in each city (according to last census) and a 95% confidence level, corresponds to a confidence interval of around 5. The data was analyzed both descriptively and statistically (segmentation and regression analysis) in order to highlight correlations.

The regression analysis shows that although there is largely support for social equity and inclusion, based on the positive answers 45% in questions “Immigrant different race/ethnic group majority: how much you would mind or not mind if someone like this was your boss”, and “a classmate in the school where your children are enrolled”, but this is undermined when questions are posed about economic threat and the idea that immigration threatens the economic situation of existing residents. Especially, in the conversation about the welfare attitudes the egalitarian views are restricted. According to a very substantial percentage of respondents, immigrants receive more than they contribute and make the host country a worse place of live in. Moreover, their social rights should be acquired under strict conditions. In our view, the complexity of the integration and inclusion of refugees in the local context is based on contradictory relation and is very important to understand how the notions of We and Them are constructed and reform in the local level.

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