(NON-)INSTITUTIONAL MANIFESTATIONS OF MIGRANT INFRASTRUCTURES FOR REFUGEES IN RURAL GREECE

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Abstract. The year 2015 was a turning point for the migration and asylum system in the EU and Greece. Almost 900,000 migrants and refugees crossed Turkey's land and sea borders on their way to Europe. The so-called 'migration and refugee crisis' dominated the academic and political discourse and provoked different reactions from local communities, civil society and long-time resident migrants. Especially in rural areas, the newly arriving refugees triggered different reactions from the local population. At the same time, accommodating the refugees and facilitating their integration into rural localities created additional infrastructure needs. Drawing on the theoretical discussion on migrant infrastructures' and 'arrival infrastructures', the main objective of this paper is to discuss the different manifestations of migrant infrastructures in rural communities, in Western Greece in particular. The paper draws on a recent empirical study conducted in the framework of a project that explored territorial inequalities and the links with different forms of mobility in both urban (Attiki Region) and rural areas of Greece (Western Greece Region). While the discussion on arrival infrastructures mainly relates to urban settings, in this paper we argue that the rural context informs and enriches the debate, allowing to be considered in terms of non-fixed assemblages of institutional (formal) and non-institutional (informal) arrangements that fulfil both tangible and less tangible needs and requirements. Forging better links between the migration infrastructures approach and the formulation of imaginaries and characteristics of wellbeing will enable a better understanding of refugee agency, and one more informed by social theory.

Keywords: migration infrastructures, migrant networks, newly arriving populations, rural areas, social inequalities.

Introduction

Migration and asylum are two facets of the migratory phenomenon which have attracted the attention of politicians and receiving societies in recent years. The importance of migration has led to a paradoxical situation in which 'the ability to control migration has shrunk, as the desire to do so has increased' (Bhagwati 2003, p. 99). In the past, governments seeking ways to contain public discontent have failed to acknowledge, or even downplayed, the fact that borders are beyond their control and that little can be done to reduce migration flows. After September 11, 2001, the 'human security' approach, which emphasizes the safety of the domestic population from external threats, and right-wing populism have influenced the EU's migration policy agenda

as well as the national policies of member states (Huysmans, 2000). After the 2008/9 financial crisis, migration and asylum were seen as a problem, as fewer and fewer jobs were available and industrialized countries were allegedly unable to cope with the still significant or even increasing flows of migrants and refugees pouring into Europe (Karyotis, 2012). The 'migration and refugee crisis', characterized by the increasing population flows to Europe, the majority of which passed through Greece in 2015, exacerbated an already worsening economic crisis and created a 'perfect storm' of political and socio-economic turmoil in the country (Papadopoulos, 2017). The COVID-19 pandemic crisis was seen as an opportunity to further tighten border controls and minimise the number of people arriving by sea and land, as they were seen as a potential health risk for Greece and the EU (Freedman, 2021). Similarly, migration and asylum were considered together once again and viewed as part of a new geopolitical narrative of 'weaponizing migration' against Europe and the developed world (Greenhill, 2022).

In the post-2015 period, the overarching narrative of uncontrollable migrants and refugee flows has been reconciled with the urgent issue of managing and meeting the needs of newly arriving populations.[1] In the period 2015-2019, Greece was the most important receiving country for migrant and refugee flows in the EU. Over 80% of all European migratory flows crossed the Greek-Turkish border in 2015, 47% in 2016, 20% in 2017, 36% in 2018 and 60% in 2019.[2] Since newly arriving migrants and refugees could not cross the borders into another EU country, and due to the 'geographical restriction' set out in the declaration between the EU and Turkey,[3] a large part of the newly arriving populations was stranded on the islands and faced significant obstacles reaching mainland Greece. Large numbers had to stay in Greece, despite wanting to move on to other EU countries such as Germany, the Netherlands and the Scandinavian countries for personal or family reasons. There are currently 24 refugee camps on the mainland, 9 on seven islands (Chios, Kalymnos, Kos, Leros, Lesbos, Rhodes, Samos) and 2 detention centres (Amygdaleza and Corinth). However, 54 other reception centres/camps were gradually emptied/closed as the number of asylum seekers decreased or the required standards for the provision of services were not met.[4] These reception centres provided accommodation, food, medical care and other services. In addition, from November 2015 to December 2022, there was an accommodation system for asylum seekers called ESTIA, which housed 22,769 people in 4,597 units (rooms/apartments) when it was fully operational (2020). This large-scale accommodation system stopped at the end of 2022 due to a government decision.

In this context, migration and asylum have ushered in a new era of economic and social development in Greece, presenting new challenges and opportunities in the cities, but also in rural areas. Migrants and refugees are perceived primarily as a workforce and their presence has been- -or is--largely justified by their contribution to the labour market and the economy. Otherwise, they are viewed by the local population as temporary residents or people who exploit resources and services that should actually be benefitting the local population. Indeed, migrants and refugees are part of a new situation for host communities, whether they be urban or rural.

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[1] The Dublin Regulation determines which EU member state is responsible for the examination of an application for asylum and in the initial regulation it was the first European country of arrival. Currently, the Dublin III Regulation aims to ensure quick access to the asylum procedures and the examination of an application on the merits by a single, clearly determined EU country.

[2] These are UNHCR data. See https://data2.unhcr.org/en.

[3] The 'geographical restriction' was introduced in Greece by means of the Asylum Law 4375/2016 (Article 60) and was intended to facilitate the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement. The Law stipulated that asylum seekers arriving on the islands had to wait for the outcome of their application on the island they arrived on before being granted the right to move to the mainland.

[4] For spatial distribution of refugee camps in Greece see www.bit.ly/greececamps.

The aim of this article is to illustrate and problematize the challenges and opportunities that newly-arrived migrants and refugees experience when settling in rural areas. Special emphasis will be paid to the various manifestations of 'arrival infrastructures' which are considered necessary for the reception and accommodation of migrants and refugees in rural areas. In our opinion, this discussion needs to be enriched by the 'migrant infrastructures' approach and other important contributions to this topic. Overall, the concept needs to be further elaborated to reflect the conditions, constraints and dynamics of wellbeing and development in rural areas. Especially in rural areas, the newly arriving refugees triggered different reactions from the local population. At the same time, accommodating the refugees and facilitating their integration into rural localities creates additional infrastructure needs. In addition, local and regional conditions influence the reception of refugees by rural communities, which easily classify them as foreign workers, especially if they have previously received hundreds of migrants working in the local/rural labour market. In rural areas, a 'utilitarian' perception of refugees dominates over the 'humanitarian' approach of urban-based institutional actors involved in the implementation of asylum and migration policies. In this paper, rural areas are not simply treated as different types of territory, but as places where socio-economic and spatial arrangements and processes have different effects on how migrants and refugees are perceived and received.

The paper is structured as follows: first, a brief discussion provides a theoretical framework in order to highlight the barriers to and facilitators of the settlement of migrants and refugees in rural areas. Secondly, the methodological design is briefly introduced and the empirical results are presented and critically discussed. Finally, some concluding remarks and insights are highlighted that contribute to a more nuanced understanding of migrants and refugee integration in rural areas.

Theoretical framework

Growing global economic inequalities and a lack of human security in the South are leading to increasing flows of migrants and refugees. In the context of the restrictive global migration order, states can differentiate between those who are allowed to move in safe and decent conditions and those who are forced to risk their lives and exploitation to find better living conditions in another place or country (Castles, 2014). This acknowledges the existence of 'regimes of mobility' around the world that involve numerous relationships between mobility and immobility, localization and transnational connections, experiences and imaginaries of migration, and rootedness and cosmopolitan openness (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013). In this context, migration can be understood in the context of a multi-scalar approach that considers the interconnectedness and complexity of processes that take place in different places at different levels and involve multiple social actors (Williamson, 2015; Glick Schiller, 2018). It is therefore important to examine the links between local changes and processes at the national, regional and city level, such as government investment in infrastructure, urban regeneration policies and national migration policies (Williamson et al., 2022).

Human mobility (or mobilities) should be understood as a complex assemblage of movement, social imaginaries and the experiences of those who are (non)mobile. However, mobility cannot be equated with freedom, as it can lead to new restrictions and forms of exploitation; mobility can therefore also lead to entrapments (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013). It is important to keep in mind that migration networks, whose agency and structure make better objects of study when examining migrants' experiences, also perpetuate social and economic inequalities and are therefore

considered a 'mixed blessing' for migrants (Gold, 2005). Overall, mobilities and socio-spatial inequalities are closely interwoven (Manderscheid, 2009; Manderscheid & Richardson, 2011), even though their entanglements are not easily deciphered by social scientists. Furthermore, those who control migrant networks are able to manipulate or exploit migrants. Employers often use migrant networks to recruit people from abroad which gives them greater control over migrant workers, allowing for greater exploitation (Krissman, 2005). However, despite their inherent limitations, 'migrant networks shape the lives and the outlooks of their members in a wide variety of ways' (Gold, 2005, p. 277).

We recognize that the dynamics that emerge between settlement and mobility situations in the context of unequal power relations mutually constitutes mobility, place and subjectivity (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013). Mobility cannot be understood without considering space, which encompasses multiple aspects such as scale, borders and territories (Kwan & Schwanen, 2016; Miller & Ponto, 2016). Furthermore, imagined places or territorial imaginaries are important components of people's mobilities and actions in relation to their (non)movement. More specifically, human mobility may be seen as a strategy for producing or seeking justice of the societies and spaces, even if its characteristics are not well understood or theorized due to its multi-scalar and cross-locational implications (Sheller, 2018). In this way, mobility is understood as both an analytical lens and a practice; what people do when they migrate is negotiate, create and enter into social places and arrangements based on power relations (Thimm & Chaudhuri, 2021).

The aspirations of migrants and refugees are constantly (re)constructed on the basis of resources and capabilities, social comparisons and the migration process, while viewed through the lens of 'imagined' destination regions/countries (Creighton, 2013; Carling & Collins, 2018; de Haas, 2021; Papadopoulos & Fratsea, 2022). Moreover, there is exchange (between sending, transit and receiving countries) and simultaneity (of rootedness and cosmopolitanism) that conceive the wellbeing of migrants and natives as a co-produced process, while there is a politics of 'rescaling' that needs to be addressed for explanatory reasons and considered as a path towards socio-spatial justice (Bauder, 2014; Papadopoulos, 2019). The dynamics of migrants and refugee wellbeing are reflected not only in their aspirations, but also in the way they negotiate their presence, commit to places and acquire multiple homes (Papadopoulos & Fratsea, 2021).

In this context, it is important to be able to answer the question: 'How do people migrate?' (Düvell & Preiss, 2022), or rather: 'How is migration fostered, constrained, shaped and assisted?' (Cranston et al., 2018). In this framework, the term 'migration industry' has evolved to understand how a variety of actors shape migration and mobility patterns through the services they offer (Schapendonk & Cranston, 2020). It is important to note that the migration industry connects all the stages of the migration process. Cranston et al. (2018) recognise that the migration industry concept approaches this issue in different ways: (a) the *structuralist perspective*, which focuses on the commodification of migration and its facilitation by businesses such as brokers, security companies, transporters and recruitment agencies; (b) *labour market intermediaries* and their role in facilitating migration processes and helping migrants navigate or manage the process of crossing borders; and (c) the *mobility approaches* that view migration as a journey that takes place *en route* and is not necessarily tied to specific beginnings and end points, as identities, aspirations and travel needs may change along the path of movement.

The notion of a migration industry not only has its own legacy, it is also linked to migration infrastructure, which helps to decode the process of mediation and is more concerned with broader societal transformation (Xiang & Lindquist, 2014). Migration infrastructure applies primarily to labour migration and encompasses five dimensions: a) *commercial* (labour brokers), b) *regulatory*

(government mechanisms and procedures, etc.), c) *technological* (communication and transport), d) *humanitarian* (NGOs and international organisations), and e) *social* (migrant networks). These five aspects conflict with and contradict each other, and their interconnectedness is key to understanding migration infrastructure (Xiang & Lindquist, 2014, p. 124). The main difference between migration infrastructure and the migration industry is that the latter focuses on the services that facilitate migration and pays scant attention to the migrants themselves. Migration infrastructure, on the other hand, conceptualises migration as a social process (Xiang & Lindquist, 2014, p. 132) and reminds us that the institutional aspect of migration (or the institutionalisation of migration) is important (Goss & Lindquist, 1995, p. 336). Finally, migration infrastructure includes material and less material aspects, as well as spatial and regional manifestations, that need to be taken into account.

In recent years, the notion of infrastructure has remained central to anthropologists, as they have tended to focus on both the tangible and less tangible facets of people's activities. As Simone (2004) argues African inner cities offer the opportunity to consider 'people as infrastructure' that serves as a platform for, and reproduces life in, the city. As people connect complex combinations of objects, spaces, people and practices, they are simultaneously characterized by regularity and temporality. The overall outcome is unpredictable, while a careful and often precarious process of reconfiguration is set in motion. In such a context, infrastructure is both relational and ecological, as it is a way of spreading out from ethnographic sites; it may also be considered as an information system. Infrastructure has several properties: it includes embeddedness, transparency and reach (or scope); it is learned as part of membership; it is linked to conventions of practice and serves to embody standards; it is built on an installed base, becomes visible when it breaks down, and is fixed in modular steps (Star, 1999, p. 381–382). Overall, infrastructure can be elevated into an 'apparatus of governmentality' (Foucault, 2010), even if it consists of technological and political elements. Despite their politics and poetics, 'infrastructures are material forms that allow for the possibility of exchange over space' (Larkin, 2013, p. 327).

From the point of view of facilitating or enabling human movements, infrastructures can be understood in the broadest sense as socio-technical platforms of mobility (Larkin, 2013), without neglecting their role as anchors and fixed points that help to organize and give form to movements. In this way, from the infrastructures perspective, migration becomes much more than just a question of who moves and who does not and the emergent and less fixed elements come into focus. It therefore seems that infrastructures frame migration as an ecological outcome (Lin et al., 2017, p. 169). Lindquist and Xiang (2017) have researched the organization of transnational migration in Asia and the Middle East and argue that there has been an infrastructural turn which involves a shift in migration patterns, policies and academic thinking about migration. In the European context, the EU institutions and policies that support the externalization of migration control can certainly be seen as a global mobility infrastructure (Spijkerboer, 2018).

Recent research on the Australian context argues that migration infrastructure as a 'space(s) of mediation' seems to produce different kinds of spatio-temporal uncertainty, just as it mediates mobility (Robertson, 2017). The examples of language tests and housing markets are used to show how migration infrastructure filters the mobilities of migrants in a settlement context. The functioning of the infrastructure can thus be narrowed down to analyse specific processes within the host society. Such analysis could focus on the local and transnational aspects of the function of migration infrastructures as mediating spaces (Robertson, 2017; Jones & Sha, 2020).

Another line of research focused on the arrival of new migrant groups in Europe has developed the concept of 'arrival infrastructures' by combining two aspects: a) the focus on the arrival processes associated with the new needs of, and arrangements for, the migrant groups,

and b) the infrastructural perspective on the arriving populations in terms of state management of migration (Meeus et al., 2019). This approach focuses on the continuous 'infrastructural practises' of different actors in the urban environment and on the so-called 'arrival cities' by taking a closer look at the 'politics of arrival' and city-related infrastructures (Meeus et al., 2019; Bovo, 2020; Hanhoester & Wessendorf, 2020; Wessendorf, 2021). This line of research remains anchored in the recent 'migration and refugee crisis', which has had a major impact in the EU post 2015, and in the view that urban environments provide an appropriate context for engaging with infrastructures.

Drawing on discussions of 'migration infrastructure' and 'arrival infrastructure', the infrastructural approach emphasises the need to consider the (im)mobility of migrants and refugees in the context of different migration patterns, institutional complexity and the multi-scalarity of formal/informal and tangible/less tangible aspects of settlement. Previous research has argued that the politics and poetics of infrastructure (Larkin, 2013), the mediating role of infrastructure (Robertson, 2017) and the role of recruitment agencies in both shaping the imaginaries of migrants and refugees and producing perceptions of 'good' or 'ideal' migrants (Findlay et al., 2013) play an important role in reproducing divisions and inequalities among migrants and refugees.

Overall, the existing research on 'migration infrastructures' and 'arrival infrastructures' is context-specific and needs to expand its consideration of the following (Kleist & Bjarnesen, 2019): (a) social infrastructures in relation to the formulation of migrant workers' imaginaries; (b) the temporality of migrants' and refugees' (non)movements; and (c) the apparent dysfunctionality of formal infrastructures in the context of migrants' agency and the development of migrant networks.

Managing migration flows has been a fundamental objective of the Greek government since the early 2000s, albeit in the form of a National Action Plan for the Management of Migration and Asylum, which the Greek Ministry of Citizen Protection submitted to the European Commission in 2010. This plan was revised twice (2012 and 2013) before it expired in 2014. The plan included specific components such as an effective asylum system, detention, preventing the abuse of asylum seekers, improved border management and a functioning return and repatriation policy. In 2015, a Road Map for Asylum was developed to ensure adequate first reception conditions for newly arriving migrants, create a fair and effective asylum procedure and make more open accommodation available for asylum seekers (Papadopoulos & Fratsea, 2019).

An important policy development which had a major impact on the migration and refugee crisis was the so-called EU-Turkey Statement of March 18, 2016, which was based on the EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan (2015). This declaration was a legal document that contained a series of agreements on irregular crossings from Turkey to the Greek islands, the return of non-refugees to Turkey, making land or sea routes unavailable for irregular migration, the provision of financial support to Turkey, etc. and was a response to the closure of the Balkan route, which had resulted in more and more migrants and refugees being stuck in Greece. At the same time, the Turkish authorities demonstrated a limited capacity to respond to and manage the Syrian refugee crisis, which brought large numbers of Syrians to Europe in 2015-2016 (Icduygu, 2015). In 2020, the EU announced a New Migration and Asylum Pact (EC, 2020), which built on the lessons learned from the 2015 crisis and addressed the new challenges posed by the pandemic and changing socio-economic and geopolitical conditions. This document emphasised the role of third countries in migration and asylum management and announced an action plan for the integration and inclusion of migrants and refugees (Papadopoulos et al., 2023).

Based on the previous analysis, the discussion on migration infrastructures needs to be informed by the literature on labour migration and mobilities to enhance its analytical

capacity by considering different socio-economic and spatial contexts, such as rural areas, to strengthen the operational aspect by examining the settlement/integration of migrants and refugees in receiving areas, and to consider the changing context of migrants' and refugees' wellbeing by looking at the politicisation of migration.

Methodology

The following analysis is based on research carried out as part of an H2020 project with the acronym IMAJINE. The aim was to explore the multiple mobilities and their links with the social and spatial inequalities that can be observed in both urban (Attiki Region) and rural areas of Greece (Region of Western Greece). In this context, qualitative, semi-structured interviews were conducted between 2017 and 2022 with Syrian refugees, internal migrants, Romanian migrants and the local population, while ethnographic observations, focus groups in both research areas, interviews with stakeholders and key informants (i.e. policy makers, NGO representatives, farmers and local authorities) at national and local levels were used to triangulate the information obtained from the interviews. The interviews were conducted in Greek, Romanian, English and Arabic – as the members of the research team spoke these languages – and were recorded, where possible, with the consent of the participants; alternatively, extensive notes were taken. Based on interviews with Syrian refugees and various key informants in Western Greece, we can delineate various aspects of arrival infrastructures in Western Greece that have emerged with a focus on the post-2015 period and include both formal/informal and (non-)material aspects (Fig. 1). The names of the respondents mentioned in the sections on the empirical results are anonymized, while the typical names per country of origin are used.
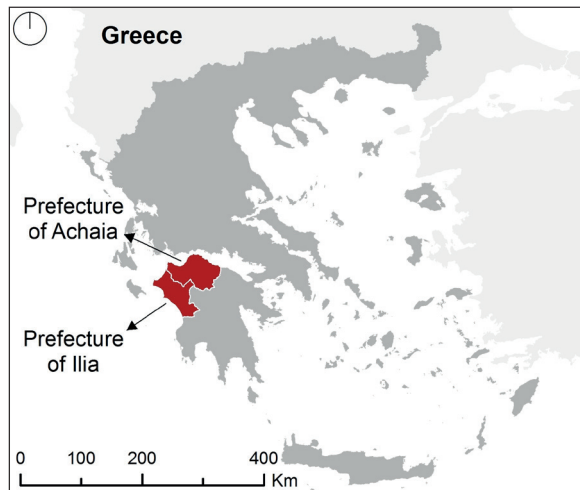

Figure 1. The Case Study areas in Western Greece
Source: authors' elaboration.

Before proceeding, two points are essential here for our analysis. First, while the distinction between forced and economic migration is important, the ongoing debate on the 'migration-asylum nexus' reminds us how difficult it is to distinguish between voluntary (economic) and involuntary

(forced) movements in empirical reality (Castles, 2007; Crawley & Skleparis, 2018; Cabot & Ramsay, 2021; Abdelaaty & Hamlin, 2022). As a result, the boundaries between arrival infrastructures and migration infrastructures are blurred. Second, the different aspects or types of migrant and arrival infrastructures often coexist and intertwine in the course of the migration process, obscuring the analytical distinction between the different manifestations of arrival or migrant infrastructures (see Xiang & Lindquist, 2014). In this context, we refer to migrant infrastructures in a broader sense than arrival infrastructures in order to create an overarching framework by referring to institutional (formal) and non-institutional (informal) migrant infrastructures.

The Case Study areas in Western Greece

The Region of Western Greece, and in particular the regional units of Achaia and Ilia in the Peloponnese, have been the focus of our research for more than a decade. Our long-term presence in the region has enabled us to observe and critically assess socio-economic developments as well as general political and economic developments at the national level. In terms of economic activities, agriculture, livestock farming and food processing have long been the most important economic sectors for the local population, alongside tourism. Horticulture and greenhouse cultivation have expanded and, more recently, strawberry cultivation has boomed; currently, more than 90% of Greece's strawberries are grown in Western Greece, in the villages of Manolada and Nea Manolada (Papadopoulos & Fratsea, 2017).

The plains of the Regional Unit of Ilia in Western Greece are the largest in the Peloponnese, but the region is also known for the coastal wetlands of Kotichi and Kaïafa, which are areas of rare natural beauty and ecological value. The area includes small villages, towns, coastal areas, environmentally-protected areas and remote places, all of which have been affected over the years, and in different periods, by various forms of mobility, depopulation and internal and international migration. Significant changes have been enacted in recent decades to ensure that certain support mechanisms are available for the 'newcomers', so that a (re)construction of 'arrival infrastructures' for migrants and refugees is taking place in Western Greece. In this respect, the 'infrastructures' are mechanisms that can facilitate the integration of migrants and refugees into the local rural society, but also show how the local society perceives and reacts to the newcomers.

Empirical findings

The presentation of the empirical results follows the division into institutional (formal) and non-institutional (informal) manifestations of migration infrastructures. Despite this analytical separation, we believe that both aspects interact and need to be considered together when it comes to the reception, provision of services and integration of migrants and refugees.

Institutionalised migrant infrastructures in Western Greece

Broadly, we may identify two types of institutional arrival and migrant infrastructures in Western Greece. First, the Migrant Integration Centres (MIC), which were established in Greece by Law 4368 (Official Gazette 21 A', 2016) and function as branches of the community centres in the municipalities. The Migrant Integration Centre (MIC) in Western Greece was established in 2018 and acts as a local focal point for the provision of specialised services to migrants and refugees working

and living in rural areas. It provides psychosocial support, legal advice and information on the social rights of migrants to improve their livelihoods and facilitate their access to the labour market and social integration. The main task of the MIC is to reach out to the local migrant and refugee population, irrespective of their regular or irregular status, and encourage them to participate in the centre's activities. In this way, a relationship of trust is established between local authorities, locals and migrants working in the local economy, and social cohesion is strengthened. The centre provides support and information on family reunification and helps migrant families with schooling and other needs in the villages. In principle, MIC acts as a focal point to bring locals, migrants and refugees together to actively participate in the local community and to increase the sense of belonging.

Second, there are the temporary accommodation facilities for third-country nationals or stateless persons who have applied for international protection on Greek territory. These also accommodate the family members of applicants, minors – unaccompanied or not – and vulnerable persons. Generally, the temporary accommodation centres on the mainland aim to provide a stable living environment that meets the essential material, social and educational needs of the residents. Residents live freely and without restrictions in the facilities, but are obliged to follow rules that ensure peaceful and efficient living conditions. In addition to accommodation, these facilities provide residents with a range of services including meals, education on the rights and obligations of applicants for international protection, psychological support, medical care, personal hygiene items, clothing, Greek language lessons and training to develop skills and competences.

Following the migration and refugee crisis in 2015, the first and only open temporary reception facility (refugee camp) in Western Greece was set up in 2016 in the village of Myrsini in a former holiday resort called 'LM Village'.[5] The former resort includes 32 bungalows, spaces for restaurants, doctor's offices, playgrounds, two swimming pools (empty for safety reasons), and parking spaces. In 2016, around 350 asylum seekers from Syria, the vast majority families with children, were relocated from the Aegean islands to the facility, which is now known as the 'The Kyllini reception facility for refugees', where they were to wait for their asylum applications to be processed. There are contradictory statements from informants as to why this former holiday resort, far from the main route between Athens and Thessaloniki, was turned into an open reception camp in the western part of the Peloponnese. It seems that certain local and political criteria (e.g. the mayor at the time was of Syrian descent) compensated for the lack of rational planning for the accommodation of 'refugee camps'.

The establishment of the facility provoked different initial reactions from the local population. Some were of the opinion that the local population had not been involved in the decision to set up an open camp in their village. Similarly, some residents expressed concern about the impact that housing the refugees in their village would have on the local economy and about a possible increase in crime in the area. Others, including the majority of the local authorities at that time, viewed the initiative favourably, arguing that the facility would provide shelter and reception services for the most vulnerable population stranded in the country. In fact, the local population and various civil society organisations mobilised to collect essential food and items to ensure the refugees' wellbeing.

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[5] At the height of the "migration and refugee crisis", there were 36 reception facilities scattered across the country for the accommodation and/or detention of asylum seekers. Due to the lack of planning in accordance with rational criteria (e.g. geographical location, transport links, social infrastructure, security, connection to local society), most of these "refugee camps" were built in unsuitable locations (Tsakiridi et al., 2020). The Myrsini camp is one of the few that meets some of these criteria.

Like the other facilities on the mainland, this 'arrival infrastructure' in Western Greece offers psychological support and non-formal education services for refugees, in addition to accommodation. The facility was financially supported by the the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and initially managed by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), while its services are mainly provided by various NGOs and other civil society organisations operating on its premises, thus linking different dimensions of the migration infrastructure in the region. Similarly, qualified staff come to work in the open camp from Athens and Patras, the nearest major city. It should be mentioned, however, that the focus of the activities offered in the facility was more on humanitarian protection and less on a long-term vision of the refugees integrating economically and socially into the rural locality. A key informant (Interview 54) explained:

We have English and Greek courses (…). The English courses are full, the Greek courses not so much (…) The refugees in this camp have the aspiration of getting the refugee passport and then go to Germany. They do not want to learn Greek because they say, 'why should I learn Greek if I am going to go?' We explain to them that it is difficult for them to go to Germany, but hope dies last. The successful story of another refugee who has managed to reach Germany and lives there is much more powerful than what we tell them. These stories are important, that's how the majority arrived here [in Greece]. That they will go to Germany.

During fieldwork, it became evident that institutional arrival infrastructures in Western Greece change over time depending on the needs of the local society and of refugees. Since 2016, in co-operation with the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum, local authorities have initiated 'compensatory measures', meaning financial support provided to the region for the development of measures and infrastructures in return for hosting refugees in the region. This move overrode some of the residents' negative feelings, at least temporarily, as the existence of the facility was linked to the wider economic development of the region. These compensatory measures, which included the employment of unemployed young people living in the community, were integrated into local politics and were seen as part of what the official state provided in return for taking in refugees in its rural community.

Tensions increased around 2021, during the Covid-19 pandemic, when the IOM and the Greek government took measures to increase the camp's capacity, adding a further 150 asylum seekers from other Arab countries, while the refugees originally housed in the camp were mainly from Syria. This move triggered a reaction from the local community, who argued that this would put a strain on the local infrastructure (e.g. water supply, drainage) while lowering the standard of living and living conditions of asylum seekers in the camp to the level of other hotspots in the country.

Informal migrant infrastructures in Western Greece

Social relations and networks are another aspect of arrival infrastructures in rural areas. These can be networks of mutual support and cooperation that facilitate everyday life in the facility, or refugee-led initiatives organised on the basis of solidarity networks with refugees and volunteers and staff members in the camp. Most of these activities were initiated by the refugees themselves, and some were subsequently supported by the management and civil society organisations working on the site. It is clear from the interviews that the creation of these forms of infrastructure helps to remove the sense of temporariness and insecurity by providing a goal, a sense of daily life and self-realisation, which points to the role of agency and social networks in forced migration (Castles, 2003). At the same time, it helps members of the network develop a sense of belonging,

and is also an expression of their feeling that they have the means to change their living conditions and wellbeing for the better.

One example is the case of Elias. He was born in 1993 in Aleppo, where he studied at the University of Agriculture and Food. After the bombings, he was forced to move first to a village outside Afrin and then to Turkey, where he stayed, got married, worked and two years later continued his journey to Greece. He travelled with the aspiration of a better future for his children in Europe and of continuing his studies. When he arrived at the camp, the feeling of 'waiting' and the 'state of liminality' (Mzayek, 2019) were very strong and he did not like the fact that he had no specific activities and routines. He thought he should do something, find a job, but the obstacle of not speaking Greek was significant. 'I think that people, real people, cannot stay any more like we are in the camp. So, you know, we have very long free time, we don't know what to do. The humans must do something, if it's his job or anything else, so it is a bit boring here, yes' (Interview 25). He started to grow vegetables on the small plot of land in front of his bungalow to supplement the family's table, an activity that other refugees in the facility also engage in, in an attempt to make a different constellation of 'home' during the waiting period (Brun & Fabos, 2015). This initiative was also supported by the facility's managers, who provided space and a plot of land to build a greenhouse in the camp. 'Some of the refugees grow their own plants inside the camp. That's a good thing. And we [the camp leaders] have said that they should cultivate the land near the camp so that they have something to do' (Interview 56).

In many conversations with Syrian asylum seekers soon to be granted refugee status, it became clear that they were in 'limbo' during their stay in the Myrsini camp, while at the same time being offered some (limited) opportunities to acquire skills and somehow connect with the host country. The inherent contradiction was that their access to the local society and economy was restricted by the fact that they had very limited or no knowledge of Greek. In the cases where they had the opportunity to learn the language, they avoided investing in learning it. Even when they received the so-called 'Ausweis' (identification card) after their refugee status was recognised, they felt as if they had no future in the respective region. They saw themselves trapped in an 'open prison' and felt ostracized from the goods, services and opportunities offered by the developed urban centres. Their stay in Greece, not only in the rural areas, was perceived by many of them as a state of limbo or liminality. At the time, nothing seemed to inspire hope for a better future in the country.

In other cases, they develop mutual aid networks so that one can support the other. Since few Syrian refugees speak Greek, knowledge of English proves to be an advantage that can help members of the network access services in the local community. Those who speak English, for example, buy food and other essentials at the local market or travel to Athens for this purpose and provide their compatriots with the necessary goods. In other cases, especially in emergency situations where the presence of an interpreter is not easy, they accompany more vulnerable members of the facility to local services or to medical facilities, thus remedying in a way the temporary gaps in the formal arrival infrastructure.

Access to the local labour market is an important goal for many Syrians living in the facility, as they argue that this will increase their family income and financial wellbeing. Limited knowledge of the Greek language makes it difficult to access information about possible employment opportunities in the area. In the absence of a formal infrastructure that contributes to the formal recruitment and active inclusion of refugees in local labour markets in rural areas, Syrians turn to informal arrangements to compensate for this deficit. However, this can lead to some refugees being exploited in the local labour market. The following experiences shared by interviewees shed

light on the dark side of arrival infrastructures and social networks (Krissman, 2005) and the difficulties refugees face accessing the formal labour market:

> *Yes, [there are some jobs] here. But not for a long time. Maybe one or two days. But there is work on the farms. No [I haven't worked yet] because I couldn't join, it's very hard. So even if I want to find a job, the language is very difficult (Interview 25).*
>
> *I tried in Kylene [a nearby town], I go to Kylene almost every day and I go there. I talked to people and tried to find work, but I had no luck. Someone offered me work, his name was Nikos. Olive trees. I worked for about 20 days, and he did not give me any money. I pay tomorrow, I pay tomorrow, 20 days and he disappeared (Interview 30).*
>
> *[I found work] in the greenhouses last summer, and I worked for a farmer. He didn't give us water. [I got] 15 euros a day. [For a labour of] nine hours (Interview 34).*

In this context, refugees' job-seeking activities at the local level contribute to our understanding of how they attempt to enter the local labour market by creating their own interpersonal networks. Due to the lack of government measures to provide training, Greek language learning and employment opportunities, Syrian refugees are vulnerable to harsh conditions in rural areas. The welfare of refugees in rural areas is not supported by institutionalised state measures, which seem to primarily oriented towards humanitarian support (FitzGerald & Arar, 2018).

Discussion and Conclusion

As a concept, migration infrastructure views migration as a social process that emphasises the institutionalisation of migration and includes material and less material aspects, as well as spatial and regional manifestations that need to be taken into account (Xiang & Lindquist, 2014). The relevant academic debate has recently been enriched with the notion of arrival infrastructures, which primarily considers migration processes upon arrival: i.e. the ways in which individuals are initially anchored in a place before they continue on their journey, but also including the role of the state and politics in the discussion (Meeus et al., 2019).

Following on from the discussion of migration and arrival infrastructures in the migration research, our empirical study shows that there are different forms of institutional and non-institutional reception infrastructures in rural areas. By distinguishing between formal/informal and material/non-material aspects of infrastructures, we point to the interdependencies between migrant and arrival infrastructures, which often coexist and intertwine during the migration process, blurring the analytical distinction between temporary arrival and permanent migrant infrastructures at the empirical level. Looking at migrant infrastructures over time reveals not only the changing geography and dynamics of migration in a rural area, but also how local society perceives and responds to different (non-)migrants.

In addition, we have argued in favour of shifting the discussion on arrival infrastructures beyond the urban framework and offering a more synthetic understanding of the different functions of infrastructures in rural areas. As important as it is to consider the institutional/formal aspects of arrival infrastructures, it is also important to consider the various social arrangements and informal aspects of infrastructures that facilitate or hinder the integration of refugees in rural areas.

The empirical material presented above provides extensive evidence of how formal and informal arrival and migration infrastructures manifest themselves in a rural area of Greece. Similar recent research has shown that there are significant challenges and disputes in the reception and accommodation of refugees at the local and regional level (Schneider, 2022; Wehrhahn

& Hathat, 2022). In our case, the challenges relate to how refugees can be accepted as something other than foreign workers who can be recruited to meet the needs of the local/rural labour market. The 'humanitarian' urban approach of asylum seekers and refugees is transformed into how the new arrivals can benefit the local economy in rural communities. Certainly the compensatory measures associated with housing the refugee camp are not satisfactory to locals who are looking for more tangible individual economic benefits. Recruiting foreign labour is one aspect of the local/rural perception of the presence of refugees in the region, and the sense of security of maintaining one's quality of life is the other. As long as refugees – like migrants – become part of the local economy, as they are 'needed' in the local labour market, they are perceived less as a threat. As refugees have tended to be more integrated into the local labour market in recent years, they are seen as 'essential' workers who contribute to the local economy.

We argue that by using the term 'rural areas' we are not only emphasising the differences between different places or territories. Rural areas are associated with different socio-economic and spatial arrangements and processes that cannot be reduced to special cases compared to urban areas. In rural areas, informal arrangements tend to be more effective than formal ones, but the latter should be strengthened as they are less supported by the central administration. The problem of a lack of infrastructure and services is also often more pronounced in rural areas. For example, the provision of housing for refugees in rural areas of Greece is controversial in the public debate, similar to the provision of housing for migrants, as it is argued that there is already a limited housing stock for non-natives.

This does not mean that arrival and migration infrastructures should be analysed separately. Rather, one should not only focus on arrival infrastructures, but also analyse the links between the (non-)institutional arrival infrastructures and the experiences and practises of the (non-)migrating population in urban and rural areas and during the migration process.

These are important insights which allow us to argue that migration infrastructures must include elements aimed at the reception or integration of migrants and refugees, and not only take into account their needs as new arrivals. Methodological nationalism has somewhat impoverished this approach, which needs to be better informed by various case studies across the world – particularly in rural areas.

Rural areas are relevant to the discussion of migrant infrastructures because they allow the latter to be viewed as non-fixed assemblages of institutional and non-institutional arrangements that take into account both tangible and less tangible needs and demands. The migration infrastructures approach needs to be better linked to formulations of the perceptions and characteristics of (non-)migrants' wellbeing, affording us better insights into their agency, and would also benefit from being more informed by social theory.

Overall, the urban bias of migration and refugee research is also evident in the way arrival infrastructures are conceptualised and described in relation to the urban social fibre (Meeus et al., 2019; Hanhoester & Wessendorf, 2020; Wessendorf, 2021). For various reasons, many rural areas have become superdiverse and their capacity to receive, accommodate and integrate newcomers is limited due to a lack of institutional infrastructures (Wessendorf & Phillimore, 2019; Papadopoulos & Fratsea, 2021; Schneider, 2022). Furthermore, social fibre in rural areas enables informal social arrangements based on employment structure and opportunities, material wellbeing and existing social infrastructures.

Future research should draw more on the experience gained in exploring the dynamics of arrival and migration infrastructures in different contexts, both urban and rural, while seeking to better inform the relevant approach by taking into account the responses of receiving places and spaces (in an interactive way) and avoiding a structuralist understanding of such infrastructures.

Acknowledgement

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