

# International Metropolis Conference 2017 – The Hague

18 SEPTEMBER - 22 SEPTEMBER 2017, WORLD FORUM, THE HAGUE, NETHERLANDS

## **Workshop (4.17 and 6.15)**

### **Asylum-Seeker Accommodation in Europe: Considering Scales of Policy and Practice**

*Prof. Steven Vertovec, Max-Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Göttingen*

*Dr. Jeroen Doomernik, University of Amsterdam*

Since the Autumn of 2015, Europe has received over one million asylum-seekers from a variety of origins. Subsequently, receiving societies and states have engaged in numerous tasks of asylum-seeker *accommodation* (providing housing and sustenance, financial support, healthcare, legal services, and language training). The large-scale and relatively rapid creation of institutional arrangements for substantial numbers of asylum-seekers has necessarily entailed complex organizational measures, requiring a range of actors, perspectives, strategies, and resources at various levels and scales.

While broad decisions regarding asylum-seeker accommodation have been made on European and national levels, it has been on the local level that asylum-seeker accommodation has been implemented and engaged. Accommodation measures and practices have been developed and undertaken by, among others, municipal departments, churches, mosques and welfare organizations, schools and universities, sports clubs and volunteer groups.

Increasingly, social scientists have observed local institutional dynamics, public reactions and experiences of asylum-seekers. The specificity of contexts is clear: in order to understand and assess the accommodation of asylum-seekers, there is much to take into account about the local socio-cultural, historical, demographic and political contexts in which it occurs. How, while bearing in mind local contexts of asylum-seeker accommodation, can we also gain insights into comparative and large scale processes and outcomes? In light of European and national policies, how much innovative and alternative practice has been possible in local contexts? Can lessons from local experiences be scaled-up? And how, in understanding local, national, and European scales, can we keep asylum-seekers' own perceptions, needs and aspirations in sight?

## Wednesday 20 September 2017, 16.00-17.30

### Workshop 4.17

**Chairs:** Prof. Steven Vertovec and Dr. Jeroen Doomernik

- Dr. Elisabeth Kirtsoglou, Dept. of Anthropology, Durham University

***From 'humanitarian care' to asylum-seeker accommodation: Experiences from 2015-2016 Greece***

- Dr. Miriam Schader, Dr. Shahd Wari, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Göttingen

***Scaling the "asylum lottery": Asylum-seekers' reception in German municipalities***

### Respondents

Enrico del Castello (Research and Evaluation, Citizenship and Immigration Canada)

Roswitha Weiler (Dutch Refugee Council)

Prof. Jock Collins (University of Technology Sydney)

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## Thursday 21 September 2017, 16.00-17.30

### Workshop 6.15

**Chairs:** Prof. Steven Vertovec and Dr. Jeroen Doomernik

- Alice Engl, Verena Wisthaler, EURAC Research Bozen, I

***Towards a Euro-regional migration polity? Comparing the political debates on refugees and asylum seekers in the European Region Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino***

- Miriam Haselbacher, Dept. of Political Science, University of Vienna

***Negotiating the local: The refugee movements of 2015 as a critical juncture in accommodation politics?***

- Prof. Peter Scholten, Public Policy & Politics, Erasmus University Rotterdam

***Policy innovation in refugee integration***

### Respondent

Prof. Dan Hiebert (University of British Columbia)

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## Abstracts

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Dr. Elisabeth Kirtsoglou, Dept. of Anthropology, Durham University  
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### ***From 'humanitarian care' to asylum-seeker accommodation: Experiences from 2015-2016 Greece***

In 2015-2016, more than one million asylum-seekers crossed the Aegean Sea from Turkey to Greece. The Greek state –in the midst of financial meltdown– was almost entirely unprepared to deal with the number of arrivals that far exceeded the capacity of local NGOs. The international NGOs implicated, often proved inefficient in the co- ordination of 'humanitarian' efforts. The present paper focuses on the provision of housing, sustenance, healthcare and legal services to asylum-seekers under complex circumstances where relations between EU, state and non-state actors resulted in a markedly uneven and asymmetrical landscape and in palpable violations of asylum seekers' human and legal rights. On the basis of original ethnographic data, collected as part of an ESRC/DFID-funded project, the paper discusses how the quality of asylum- seekers' accommodation varied considerably from case to case and depended heavily on socio-historical, demographic and local-political aspects. The deeply hierarchical and asymmetrical character of the provision of basic services will be analysed against two major factors that played a crucial role in the 2015-2016 period: First, the noticeable tendency of the state to 'outsource' almost all services to the third sector, volunteers and the local communities; second, the importance of a local ethos of solidarity underpinned by historical memories of being a refugee from Asia Minor (as a result of the 1919-22 Greco-Turkish war), and by culturally-specific cosmologies of what constitutes 'giving' and 'receiving'. Ethnographic dialogues with refugees, state representatives, NGO actors, volunteers and ordinary members of Greek communities reveal the inefficiency of top-down 'reception systems' that disregarded the needs and aspirations of asylum-seekers. The paper provides examples of grass-roots initiatives that proved to be considerably more effective and symmetrical than larger-scale efforts, calling for radical changes in the current 'humanitarian care' paradigm of asylum-seeker accommodation in Europe.

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### ***Scaling the "asylum lottery": Asylum-seekers' reception in German municipalities***

The distribution of asylum-seekers to different municipalities and accommodation centres within municipalities leads to a stratification of asylum-seekers and refugees. In this paper, we present findings from two projects, which analyse the (politics of) asylum-seekers' reception in Lower-Saxony, Germany. We draw on ethnographic fieldwork and interviews with local actors.

Following up on a recent study on decision-making in German asylum procedures (Schneider and Riedel 2017), which demonstrates that asylum decisions differ within Germany from state to state - although the same Federal Office is responsible for all decisions - , we argue that the "asylum lottery" cannot only be observed in the federal *asylum procedures*, but also in local *asylum-seekers' reception*. While the discriminating asylum lottery as described by Riedel and Schneider refers to the decisions that employees and civil servants take on the legal status of asylum-

seekers, this paper is concerned with the consequences of the distribution of asylum-seekers to and within municipalities.

Due to the openness, and sometimes deliberate vagueness, of German asylum and foreigners laws, municipalities often experience the need to develop their own policies in dealing with refugee migration and have considerable scope for doing so. At the same time, as we know from this and other policy fields, local policies and administrative acts are not necessarily coherent in themselves, either. Especially the local foreigners' offices as well as some other central municipal departments (social affairs, finances, urban planning/building etc.) shape the legal, material and immaterial conditions of refugee reception.

Similar processes take place, when the asylum seekers are allocated to different housing (centres) within municipalities. Different accommodation centres are equipped with very different spatial arrangements, services and people. For instance, living in an accommodation centre in a middle class area with multilingual staff members and middle class volunteers gives those asylum seekers access to a wide range of resources like the social, cultural and economic capital of the volunteers or social workers. At the same time living in an accommodation centre in an industrial area with only a few volunteers and limited access to public transport cut people off from many of the above mentioned resources.

Consequently, we argue that the local level decisively contributes to the stratification of asylum-seekers in Germany.

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***Towards a Euro-regional migration polity? Comparing the political debates on refugees and asylum seekers in the European Region Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino***

The paper analyses and compares the political debates on refugees and asylum seekers between 2015 and 2016 in the sub-state parliaments of two Italian provinces, South Tyrol and Trento, and the Austrian region Tyrol. These three territorial entities constitute the European Region Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino, and are divided by one the border between Austria and Italy, the Brenner Pass, an important gateway in the refugee flow from South to North. The European region is characterized by a unique historical identity and strong transnational cooperation at the sub-state level in a number of policy fields. Furthermore, the political landscape of the three territorial entities reveals political-ideological similarities across governing and opposition parties.

Thus we assume that the euro-regional framework of cooperation and the political-ideological similarities of governing and opposition parties lead to similar interpretations of the refugee flow in the three sub-state parliaments and provides the basis for a common Euro-regional polity and strategy bypassing the state border. However, our analysis reveals significant differences in the political discourses, whereas in South Tyrol and Trentino the refugee flow is interpreted and approached as state of emergency requiring humanitarian aid, whereas in Tyrol it is perceived as movement of people requiring integration measures. Thus, the national context manifests itself prominently onto political debates at the regional level, impeding the development of a euro-regional polity on refugees and asylum seekers.

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***Negotiating the local. The refugee movements 2015 as a critical juncture in accommodation politics?***

Rising asylum applications, the question of allocation and the provision of housing have been subject of political conflicts across Europe. The reception and accommodation of asylum seekers is highly contested and European countries have struggled to find solutions for the numerous tasks they are facing. In this multilevel structure it is the local level that is directly confronted with the outcomes of European and national policies and that is in charge of their implementation. This paper focuses on the position of Austrian accommodation policies, a country, that has been particularly affected by refugee movements of the past years. Investigating the tasks, competences and obligations of municipalities in this policy field, the impact of the summer of 2015 will be analysed.

Although it is the local level where practical tasks are executed, it is not considered in the legal framework and political decisions regarding this policy field are taken at the national level. This results in a gap between the level of decision making and the level of implementation. In this paper, the summer of 2015, a period when the system of basic care temporarily collapsed, will be conceptualized as a critical juncture. Based on political reactions towards this “reception crisis” two hypothesis are formulated and investigated: a) with the opening of a large number of new shelters a re-distribution of tasks towards the local level took place. b) The national level became increasingly reliant on the local level, resulting in a durably increased importance of municipalities.

Methodologically, this paper builds on qualitative interviews and a document analysis of legislative text as well as policy papers. On the basis of this comprehensive data, the agency and demands of various actors from all political levels will be identified and their actions will be traced down. Furthermore, changes in this policy field will be analysed and I ask how the position of the local level has changed in times of crisis. This paper contributes to one of the most pressing questions of our time, which is the organization of asylum-seeker accommodation and its implications for the political systems of receiving societies.

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***Policy innovation in refugee integration***

The arrival of refugees has posed a serious challenge in terms of refugee integration in countries throughout Europe. This raises practical questions as well as theoretical questions. On a practical level, what policy strategies have been pursued throughout Europe, and what lessons can be drawn? This involves policy strategies on socio-economic areas as labour, education and housing, as well as socio-cultural areas such as the promotion of contact. On a theoretical level, to what extent does refugee integration challenge or add to existing theories on migrant integration processes and policies? Is the current refugee challenge really different from earlier refugee challenges, and to what extent does it challenge existing notions of ‘integration’ and the ‘mainstreaming’ of government policies and institutions in the face of immigration? Based on recent research in 10 European countries, this presentation outlines key findings as for what innovations have taken place and what migration scholars as well as policymakers can learn from these innovations.