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Governing the inclusion and exclusion of refugees in
European member states.

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Introduction

Legal and political shifts in the aftermath of 2015 have shown that accommodation practices and the space of collective reception centres for refugees¹ are highly contested places. Collective reception is the most common way to accommodate refugees in Europe (EMN, 2004) but is also the most dehumanizing form (Kreichauf, 2018). People who are not familiar with each other are accommodated collectively in specially designated, often reused or defunct buildings. Collective reception practices are marked by legal exceptionalism that segregates and excludes refugees from partaking in the host society. In the scholarly literature, they have been analysed as ambivalent spaces that oscillate between support (inclusionary practices and access to basic care) and marginalization (exclusionary practices). Although reception ensures basic care and provides access to material reception in the form of housing, food and other resources, it is also a way of controlling and disenfranchising refugees, excluding them from participating in large segments of societal life and depriving them of decision-making options (Pieper, 2008).

In the context of a crisis of liberal democracy that sees rising populist parties, and illiberal visions that reject immigration, multiculturalism and human rights (Sajó, Uitz and Holmes, 2022), this PhD thesis analyses collective reception practices in four European member states of the European Union through the analytical lens of bordering. As Yuval-Davis et al (2019) note, bordering is an interdisciplinary concept that allows us to weave together the social, political and economic configurations of different multilevel locations. It is thus possible to establish a multidimensional perspective that acknowledges that reception practices are governed and shaped by different actors on different political levels. Building on this, I have developed an analytical framework that comparatively analyses reception as a site of bordering on two dimensions: the dimension of spatial governance and the dimension of political governance.

The dimension of spatial governance pertains to the analysis of the reception centre as a specific space where bureaucratic measures and spatial arrangements govern the day-to-day inclusion and exclusion of refugees (Täubig, 2009). This dimension is concerned with practices of reception at the micro level, where policies are enacted by operators and staff or sometimes

¹ I use the term ‘refugee’ to refer to all individuals seeking protection in Europe regardless of their legal status. This includes individuals who are in the application process for international protection status, those already granted a status or those whose application was rejected and who are irregularized.

bypassed or even contested and transformed by refugees who navigate inside and outside of reception systems. The dimension of political governance mostly concerns the state, which is responsible for the legal and regulatory framework of reception. On this macro level, the analysis is concerned with policies that govern and shape reception. While the state is by far the most important actor in reception and includes most of the legal and regulatory competences (Brown, 2010), there has been an increased share of competence with the EU since the Lisbon Treaty in 2009. At the same time, the local level has also gained importance in shaping reception practices, either because states disengage from their responsibilities of reception or because actors at the local level have their own interest in shaping and implementing reception to govern the inclusion and exclusion of refugees in municipal space.

I analyse and contrast reception practices in four very different countries, namely, Austria, France, Hungary and Italy. These four countries are differently situated geographically and politically and have taken different positions in EU bargaining about reception and solidarity; they include two large member states (France and Italy) and two small ones (Hungary and Austria) as well as two first-arrival and transit countries (Hungary and Italy) and two destination countries (France² and Austria). This makes it possible to shed light on diverging reception practices that are nested in different (political) approaches to asylum and migration as well as dynamics that unfold in the bargaining over solidarity and responsibility within the Common European Asylum System (CEAS).

To study reception practices and the interdependency of border and asylum policies in these four countries, I developed a qualitative research design that combines the analysis of legal and policy frameworks, ethnographic fieldwork and qualitative semistructured interviews. Through this, I analyse the interplay between actors and policies and the two dimensions. In the spatial dimension, we can find actors that enforce rules and regulations on behalf of the state and those that contest or comply with this enforcement. I will call them *actors in reception*. In the political dimension, we can find the *actors of reception* that govern and enact rules and regulation that shape reception practices. In comparing and contrasting the different reception practices in the four countries, I situate reception practices on a bordering continuum.

The bordering continuum describes the variety of different collective reception practices that emerge in the interplay of different actors and their power relations who act in their own

² I designate France as a destination country with limited prospects as it has continuously high numbers of applications; however, it also has a rather low acceptance rate (Hatton, 2022).

interests and the different policies that shape and govern reception practices. On the bordering continuum, it is possible to situate different reception practices that range from radical exclusion to more inclusive forms of reception. Furthermore, the bordering continuum allows us to account for the dynamic and malleable negotiations of political projects of governance and belonging (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss and Cassidy, 2019) that are realized through changing reception practices. I argue that reception practices become politicized instruments of the securitization of migration, not only questioning liberal values and human rights but also deeply influencing bordering practices in larger society.

In the four publications of this cumulative dissertation, I analyse reception practices with the analytical lens of bordering and address these topics from different perspectives. Two of them focus on the spatial dimension of governance (Paper 1 and Paper 2), and two of them focus on the political dimension of governance (Paper 3 and Paper 4). The first paper, *The Reception of Asylum Seekers in Europe: Exclusion through Accommodation Practices*, published in 2020 in an edited volume by Moritz Jesse, *European Societies, Migration, and the Law: The “Others” Amongst “Us”*, analyses how bureaucratic structures, house rules and regulation in everyday reception and the geographical isolation of reception centres in Austria and Italy lead to othering and exclude refugees from partaking in the host society. The second paper approaches the space of collective reception centres and reception conditions from the perspective of refugees: *Moving, Naming, Narrating. Refugees undoing bordering practices of reception in Italy and France*, submitted to Comparative Migration Studies in 2023. The contribution illustrates how refugees in Italy and France navigate the constraints of reception infrastructure through mobility, the negotiation of social, political and economic belonging and the reworking of reception conditions. The third paper *Politics of Adjustment: Rural Mayors and the Accommodation of Refugees*, with Miriam Haselbacher, published in *Territory, Politics, Governance* in 2022 is a comparative analysis of the role of rural mayors in the process of opening a collective reception centre in four European countries (Austria, France, Germany and Italy). In this paper, we identify the handling strategies of mayors when reception centres are opened in their municipality. Bound by the tight legal framework of national reception policies, they try to defuse conflict by modifying the legal framework of reception policies while steering a sociopolitical process of demarcation and othering. The fourth paper, *Dismantling the Reception of Asylum Seekers: Hungary’s Illiberal Asylum Policies and EU Response*, published in *East European Politics* in 2023, analyses how the Hungarian government dismantled national reception infrastructure, externalizing it and ousting reception standards in favour of

containment and detention. The contribution situates and discusses these developments in the ambiguous field of European externalization efforts, European human rights discourses, and illiberal tendencies in Hungary.

With this thesis, I theoretically and empirically contribute to the concept of bordering as well as the literature on reception infrastructure. I add to the theoretical literature on bordering by conceptualizing reception as a site of bordering and situating different reception practices on a bordering continuum. The concept of the bordering continuum allows us to analytically grasp the inclusionary and exclusionary effects of different reception practices in the European Union while situating them in broader developments of securitization and bordering in society. I thus link the vast literature on bordering practices to the literature that speaks about reception facilities, camps and accommodation centres as sites of governance and control. This broadens the understanding of reception infrastructure not only as physical sites but also as governance instruments for various bordering processes and their contestation (Rygiel, 2012; Mountz *et al.*, 2013). Empirically, I contribute to the literature that studies concrete sites of reception infrastructure in national and local contexts. Through the comparison of reception practices in different member states, I provide insights into national and cross-national dynamics that are relevant to understanding the role of refugee reception in national political contexts. This thesis opens up new perspectives on the entanglement of supra-national, national and local reception practices as well as their governance and contestation and contributes to the scarce literature that takes a comparative stance on reception practices in European member states.

In the following chapter, I discuss the literature on reception practices and the role of multilevel governance in reception. Chapter three introduces the research question, followed by the theoretical chapter in which I elaborate on the theoretical approach to reception infrastructure as a bordering site. Chapter five describes the overall methodological approach and the research process. Chapter six presents the four papers in the previously described order. Each paper is included in the final published version or, as in the case of paper two, in the version last submitted to the journal. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of the four papers, provide answers to the research questions and develop further avenues for research.

Literature review: The governance of inclusion and exclusion in refugee reception

In the literature review, I first introduce the scholarly debates on collective reception centres and continue with the literature on the multilevel governance of reception in the framework of the specificities of the European Union. These two strands of literature serve to develop a theoretical perspective and situate my research questions in the thriving scholarly research on asylum and reception practices in the multilevel governance of the EU. The first strand of literature is concerned with the analysis of reception centres and reception infrastructure through micro and macro perspectives on the reception and daily living experiences of refugees. The second strand of literature speaks about the multilevel governance of asylum, focusing on responsibilities, competence-sharing and power relations between different actors of reception who shape and implement policies related to reception practices.

Historical research shows that the collective accommodation of refugees and displaced persons has a long tradition in the European context (Kotek, Rigoulot and Heinemann, 2001; Greiner and Kramer, 2013; Jahr and Thiel, 2013; Anderl, Erker and Reinprecht, 2022). In the 19th century, the development of the modern state led to the institutionalization of refugee camps. At the end of World War II, refugees were considered a military responsibility; consequently, management and accommodation were modelled on characteristic military techniques (Malkki, 1995). Through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the Geneva Refugee Convention (GRC) in 1952, and its protocol in 1967, the right to asylum and the handling of refugees obtained a humanitarian dimension. The development of this legal body must be situated in its historical context post-World War 2 and in the colonial context in which it emerged, which still has an impact on the treatment of refugees from the Global South (Bhambra, 2017; Mayblin, 2017). Although legal and administrative competences shifted either to humanitarian actors (as is often the case in the Global South) or to national governments (as is the case in Europe), spatial and administrative continuity in the collective reception of refugees can be observed in three ways: 1) the multiple reuse of military infrastructure in the context of collective accommodation until today (Jahr and Thiel, 2013), 2) the focus on control and containment (Anderl, Erker and Reinprecht, 2022), and 3) structuring elements that are based on the differentiation between “us” and “them” (Pieper, 2008; Mayblin, 2017).

Refugee camps, especially in the Global South, have been theorized as exceptional spaces along spatial and temporal dimensions (Malkki, 1995; Agier, 2011; Martin, 2015; Turner, 2016). The

spatial dimension confers the (material) boundaries of the camp, which are trespassed by economic and social ties. Scholars have noted that refugee camps have become cities or ecosystems within nation states, turning into economic and social hubs in the region (Agier, 2011; Ramadan, 2013). The temporal dimension refers to their conceptualization as temporary spaces; however, they often become permanent places, and inhabitants become permanent refugees in protracted situations (Peteet, 2005; Hyndman and Giles, 2017). In Europe, the reception of refugees has often been studied under different terms, such as reception systems, reception facilities (Boccagni, 2020) or centres (van der Horst, 2004; Hubbard, 2005; Szczepanikova, 2013; Marek *et al.*, 2018; Thorshaug and Brun, 2019; Göler, 2020), mirroring the technical and bureaucratic language of (European) regulations and discourses (Witteborn, 2011). Kreichauf (2018) proposed the term ‘campization’ to theorize the increased use of collective accommodation with low living standards in Europe as a consequence of the historically racist underpinning of asylum law and institutional racism that frames reception infrastructure (Kreichauf, 2018, p. 14). For example, the use of military barracks, containers, defunct office buildings and other run-down premises reinforces processes of racialization and territorial stigmatization (Wacquant, 2007). Degrees of openness and closedness as well as geographical emplacement are important factors that determine the possible interaction between inhabitants and the host society (Minca, 2015; Kreichauf, 2018; Martin, Minca and Katz, 2020; Zill *et al.*, 2020).

Scholars have used Agamben’s state of exception (Agamben, 2003, 2005), Foucault’s heterotopias and biopolitics (Foucault, 2005) and Augé’s nonplaces (Augé, 1992) to theorize reception centres and camps as places in relation to the social order of modern societies and to highlight their power to govern and discipline those who live inside (Diken and Laustsen, 2005; Martin, 2015; McConnachie, 2016; Turner, 2016). Some common denominators relate these different theories together; reception centres separate populations since their objective is to contain and immobilize a specific category of people (Kreichauf, 2018, p. 4). Reception is regulated by different legal instruments than the world around it, and this applies to both the space and the people who live in it (White, 2002). In this vein, White (2002) has pointed out that reception centres are highly regulated spaces of legal exceptionalism, which makes them strong analytical cases to study how law materializes in enclosed spaces through its everyday enactment. This everyday enactment of rules and regulations and its effect on inhabitants has been analysed prominently through the use of Goffmann’s concept of total institution (Täubig,

2009; Grønseth *et al.*, 2016; Marek *et al.*, 2018; Lochner and Täubig, 2019) and Foucault's concept of governmentality (Pieper, 2008).

Spaces of collective reception are thus ambivalent spaces as they are strongly regulated and confine and disenfranchise refugees while at the same time fulfilling basic needs and providing support structures at the moment of arrival. Immediate access to housing, food and health care is important, especially for refugees with inherent vulnerabilities. Inherent vulnerabilities are those vulnerabilities that are intrinsic to the person, such as childhood, disability, and sickness (Mackenzie, Rogers and Dodds, 2013). However, reception conditions are also of fundamental importance to mitigate external vulnerabilities in the asylum system. External vulnerabilities are external factors (e.g., the lack of legal documents, language barriers, lack of access to health care and social welfare) that put refugees at risk during the migratory project and in the host country (La Spina, 2021). Often, however, state practices and policies render refugees vulnerable when these external factors are not addressed correctly or states amplify these external factors through their own practices. Atak *et al.* (2018) suggest a differentiation between inherent vulnerability and precariousness. The term 'precariousness' "detaches the qualification from the person of the migrant and ascribes it to the social environment" (Atak *et al.*, 2018, p. 4). This also allows us to avoid the term 'vulnerability', which is often connected to victimization in public discourse (Ibid). Narratives of victimization, deservingness and charity impose the idea that refugees must accept every type of reception everywhere and thus ignore individual needs and actual challenges refugees may be confronted with during their asylum procedure (Mainwaring, 2016; Smith and Waite, 2019; Darling, 2022).

Increasingly, migration studies focus on the agency of refugees to question these narratives, demonstrating how refugees make homes in reception infrastructure (van der Horst, 2004; Boccagni, 2020; Steigemann and Misselwitz, 2020; Grønseth and Thorshaug, 2022) or outside regular reception systems, in temporary makeshift camps and self-organized informal housing (Rygiel, 2012; Bolzoni, Gargiulo and Manocchi, 2015). Other scholarship has focused on the agency of refugees and migrants to navigate the reception system. Vicky Squire has proposed analytics of acts, interventions and effects to examine the dynamic and ambiguous relation between power and resistance (Squire, 2017). Triandafyllidou (2019) and Borelli *et al.* (2022) define the agency of refugees as a co-constitutive phenomenon where forms of governance are interwoven with the capacity to act, while this capacity, the agency of migrants, also affects state policies, society and state relations (Triandafyllidou, 2019; Borelli *et al.*, 2022). Finally,

the perspectives and actions of refugees themselves are also relevant to understanding the way reception infrastructure and reception policies work or fail (Bendel, 2018).

Having summarized the scholarly debates on collective reception, its historical emergence and common denominators identified in the literature, I now turn to the scholarship dealing with the multilevel dynamics that frame reception practices. Multilevel dynamics pertain to the interplay between the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), national governments and the local level. Each of these levels plays a decisive, albeit different, role in shaping and framing reception practices. This scholarship thus helps to identify the different actors of reception situated in the multilevel dynamics of the EU.

The CEAS, first conceived at the Tampere conference in 1999 *inter alia*, establishes the framework of refugees' reception in the European Union. The three principal instruments that are most relevant for the reception of refugees are the Dublin Regulation, a mechanism that determines the responsible state for examining an asylum claim; the Reception Condition Directive, which sets out common standards of material reception, such as housing, food, health care and employment; and the Asylum Procedure Directive, which clarifies the procedures for processing asylum claims (Geddes, Hadj Abdou and Brumat, 2020, p. 117). Lilian Tsourdi and Vincent Chetail (2016) note that the main goal of the Reception Condition Directive and the harmonization of reception standards is to combat and reduce secondary movement of refugees within the European Union. Furthermore, it is imbued by member states' policy interests in the field of asylum, and it would thus be misleading to conceive of it as a purely protection-oriented system (Bauloz *et al.*, 2015; Chetail, 2016; Tsourdi, 2016). Moreover, scholars have pointed to the ambiguity of asylum and refugee protection at the EU level due to its complex organization, the diverging interests between EU institutions and member states (Trauner, 2016; Lavenex, 2018; Zaun, 2018; Geddes, Hadj Abdou and Brumat, 2020; Doomernik and Glorius, 2022) and the ethical dilemmas that arise for policy-makers concerning bordering practices or membership claims of irregularized migrants (Bauböck, Mourão Permoser and Ruhs, 2022). Especially after 2016, when asylum, reception and distribution became a highly politicized topic in the European Union and in the member states, reforms to enhance protective standards came to a halt (Zaun, 2018; Caponio and Ponzio, 2022).

Member states have considerable leeway in implementing dignified reception conditions (Doomernik and Glorius, 2016; Minderhoud *et al.*, 2016; Nagy, 2016; Ribémont, 2018; Lendaro *et al.*, 2019; Toska, Reiter and Töller, 2022). Legal scholars and the securitization

literature have studied the emergence of new collective reception infrastructure that lacks a concrete legal framework in the context of the CEAS, such as the hotspot approach of the European Agenda on Migration (EAM) from 2015 and the EU Migration Pact from 2022. This infrastructure seeks to externalize, extraterritorialize and increase containment at European external borders (Mountz *et al.*, 2013; Lemberg-Pedersen, 2019; Piguet, 2021). This has incited various studies on the relationship between reception, detention and bordering practices (Campesi, 2018a; Kourachanis, 2018; Papoutsi *et al.*, 2019; Tazzioli and Garelli, 2020), which are increasingly linked with the securitization and criminalization of refugees (Huysmans, 2000; Léonard and Kaunert, 2019; Mitsilegas, Moreno-Lax and Vavoula, 2020).

Against this backdrop, scholars have studied exclusionary and restrictive policies in national contexts that shape housing and access to material reception (Witteborn, 2011; Szczepanikova, 2013; Darling, 2016, 2022; Ataç and Rosenberger, 2019; Mayblin, 2020). Others have focused on the emergence of national reception policies (Pieper, 2008; Rosenberger and König, 2012; Kreichauf, 2017; Novak, 2019). Member state governments have engaged in different strategies to govern and discipline refugees as well as illegalized migrants. For example, dispersal is a coercive way of managing and distributing refugees over national territory, which makes it nearly impossible to develop social ties and access support networks (Campesi, 2018a; Darling, 2022). It inscribes a neo-liberal logic that understands reception as a question of good logistics to reduce costs (Novak, 2019; Darling, 2022). Aru has used the term ‘active abandonment’ to describe the strategic impoverishment of refugees through the recurrent reduction of financial or material allowance, a systematic shortage of reception infrastructure or the withdrawal or nongranteeing of material reception (Leshem, 2017; Mayblin, 2020; Aru, 2021). These technologies of (non)-governance lead to the development of makeshift camps and increased homelessness. Formal and informal reception practices are thus co-constitutive in an ambivalent interplay between the presence and absence of state support (Martin, Minca and Katz, 2020).

Where national governments disengage in the support of refugees, it is often the local level or other civil society actors that take action, as has been studied under the terms ‘sanctuary cities’ or ‘cities of refuge’ (Bauder, 2017; Doomernik and Ardon, 2018; Agustín and Jørgensen, 2019; Driel and Lubbers, 2023). The literature on local asylum policies analyses the role of local actors in and outside government in forging inclusionary and exclusionary approaches to asylum and reception (Hinger, Schäfer and Pott, 2016; Hinger, 2020). Here, reception infrastructure has mainly been studied in relation to national asylum policies or with a focus on

inclusionary and exclusionary mechanisms in local-level policy-making (Ambrosini, 2013; Doomernik and Ardon, 2018; Agustín and Jørgensen, 2019). This literature addresses the multilevel government dynamics that unfold through uneven policy-making competences between the national and local levels (Caponio, Borkert and IMISCOE, 2010; Scholten and Penninx, 2016; Zapata-Barrero, Caponio and Scholten, 2017; Scholten, 2019, 2019). In particular, cities have been studied as actors in refugee integration (Oomen, Davis and Grigolo, 2016; Darling, 2017; Blank, 2021; Kreichauf and Glorius, 2021) and less so rural municipalities (Larsen, 2011; Schammann, 2017; Haselbacher, 2019; Miellet, 2019). Except for a few studies (Doomernik and Glorius, 2016; Kreichauf, 2017, 2018), comparative approaches to reception infrastructure in different national contexts are still scarce.

The research discussed in this chapter provides valuable and highly important insights into conceptualizations of reception policies and practices and identifies the relevant actors in and of reception in the multilevel governance system of the European Union. The literature presented here serves as contextual background and the bigger picture. My PhD project contributes a piece of the puzzle that is connected to the scholarly debates outlined above.

While reception practices have been studied in the context of inclusionary and exclusionary practices, they have not been studied through the lens of bordering. The bordering lens allows us to analyse the interplay between actors and policies at the spatial and political dimensions, thus combining micro and macro perspectives in an all-encompassing approach. By situating the various practices on a bordering continuum, I am able to connect bordering practices in reception to wider societal developments that take reception practices and their contestation as a point of departure. Furthermore, the contrasting approach to reception practices in different member states adds to the scarce literature that takes a comparative approach to reception and asylum policies. While the above-cited literature either describes aspects of bordering and othering within reception or analyses reception policies and legal changes of reception systems in the national context and in relation to the European Union, there is no comprehensive conceptualization of reception infrastructure as sites of bordering that encompass a diversity of geographic sites and a variety of analytical scales between the European Union, member states, the local level and the day-to-day governance of reception centres. To put this expansive approach into research practice, I provide new and in-depth empirical material from four different countries. Furthermore, I contribute to methodological reflections on how to contrast reception policies in different member states in the complex policy field of asylum. In the

following chapter, I introduce my research question before elaborating my theoretical approach to reception practices as sites of bordering.

Research questions and research goals

Based on these rich and various studies on reception infrastructure in Europe, my initial research interest was to better understand what shapes and governs collective reception in different European member states. I thus examine different member states to grasp how reception practices diverge or converge. To do so, I use the analytical lens of bordering. Conceptualizing reception as a site of bordering shifts the focus to the processual doing and undoing of reception, encompassing the enactment and the contestation of these processes. Bordering here contains two dimensions: spatial governance and political governance. Both dimensions are embedded in different forms of power relationships, logics and interests that cumulate in reception practices. The two dimensions do not operate separately from each other but mutually constitute each other. However, these two dimensions make it possible to analytically grasp similarities and differences in member states and reflect on tendencies of development in the way asylum policies change in the member states within the European legal framework. Similarities and differences pertain to reception as a spatial phenomenon that describes a material place and reception as a political and legal construct that governs people inside the reception system. Both dimensions thus constitute instances of bordering in the way they shape the inclusion and exclusion of refugees in European societies. I formulated research questions that were broad enough to examine different geographical and national sites and focus on different actors to analytically grasp the functioning of reception infrastructure and the driving political dynamics that shape it:

How do reception practices constitute sites of bordering? How do they govern the inclusion and exclusion of refugees in European member states?

Actors:

Who are the actors in reception? How do they enact or contest reception practices?

Who are the actors of reception? How do they govern reception practices?

How do these actors do or undo bordering practices in reception?

Policies:

How do local, national, and European legal frameworks shape reception policies?

How do policies diverge or converge in different member states, and why?

How do they constitute reception as a site of bordering?

Through the analytical lens of bordering, it is possible to analyse reception at the dimension of spatial governance and the dimension of political governance and consolidate the two dimensions to develop a holistic understanding of the way reception practices work. The strength of this approach is that it allows me to make sense of diversity in difference while analysing these dimensions along a common analytical framework. The dissertation thus pursues an all-encompassing comparative and contrasting approach to the reception of refugees that considers space, policies and actors as relevant factors of analysis. The research goal is to better understand differences in reception practices and to grasp different forms of inclusion and exclusion that arise from using reception as a site of bordering.

Conceptual framework: Reception as a site of bordering

In recent years, the phenomenon of borders has made its way to the centre of attention in scientific and social discourse (Balibar, 2009; Yuval-Davis, Wemyss and Cassidy, 2019). “The border is a little everywhere”, as the well-known quotation by Etienne Balibar puts it, indicating the centrality of the concept and the centrality of borders in the making of states, communities and citizens. Borders are epistemological and material sites. They constitute a unity by excluding something else. In that sense, borders are not only found on territorial margins but also occur within society as complex institutions that govern rights, movements and access (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013). In 2002, Henk van Houtum and Ton van Naerssen conceptualized bordering as a practice of ordering in line with a (discursive) differentiation between us and them, called othering (Van Houtum and Van Naerssen, 2002, p. 125). This processual shift in border studies recognizes that border practices are constantly evolving, as are borders. From this perspective, borders are not lines but rather sets of ideas, imaginations and relations; they become mobile, volatile and multidimensional, taking on different symbolic material forms, functions, and locations (Laine, 2016). The concept of bordering is particularly useful in the context of migration because it theorizes conflicting positions between control and

freedom as well as movement and immobility. Regardless of the context, the migrant condition is always embedded in a broader framework of bordering-ordering and othering mechanisms (Walters, 2002; Jones, 2016).

According to Henk van Houtum and Ton van Naerssen (2002), the triad of bordering, ordering and othering makes it possible to look at geographical sites as well as political and social phenomena. Ordering is the process by which borders provide territorial demarcations of difference that result in the “categorization and classification of places in space” (Van Houtum and Van Naerssen, 2002, p. 128). Collective reception practices contain a strong ordering aspect as they order refugees in relation to their legal status and in relation to society at large. Othering means constituting someone or a group as the “Other”. Othering is therefore an important element of ordering that is used socially, culturally and legally to draw lines between those who are inside and those who are outside. The dialectical creation of “us” and “them” serves to legitimize the political, temporal and historical condition in which we find ourselves (Walker, 2016; Paasi, 2021). Othering is thus a practice that is ingrained in the way a society imagines itself while being intrinsically related to space as a structuring principle. Arguably, bordering practices are not only confined to state practices but are produced and reproduced through power relations, spatial practices, and political and public discourses. For example, discursive frames portray refugees solely as “users” of social services or mark them as “undeserving” and thus seek to exclude them from regular welfare schemes (Grove and Zwi, 2006; Nielsen, Frederiksen and Larsen, 2020).

I use inclusion and exclusion not as binary terms but rather as constitutive of two poles of a continuum. Especially in migration and border studies, it is important to point to the multiplicity of subjectivities that are neither fully included nor excluded (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2012; Ataç and Rosenberger, 2013). “Irregular migrants” are an illustration of this condition. They are included in the labour market and contribute to the production and reproduction of those spaces, although they do not have access to the whole set of rights that corresponds to this, i.e., they are excluded from belonging (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2012, p. 63). Inclusion or exclusion can thus take place concomitantly through processes of filtering and selecting through state technologies that can take the form of inclusionary or exclusionary policies (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2012).

Bordering processes “crystallize relations of domination and exploitation, subjection and subjectivation, power and resistance” (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2012, p. 60). Power relations and

interests are thus inherent aspects of bordering processes. According to Painter (2008), power cannot be understood as an object that is possessed or held, for example, by an institution, nor is it a medium that flows between networks. Rather, it works through different modalities that arise from social relations embedded in the configuration of space, proximity and distance and can thus be a concrete as well as diffuse force (Painter, 2008). For Foucault, power relations can only be exercised in a certain space as space is “fundamental to any exercise of power” (Foucault and Rabinow, 1984, p. 252), and it is the presence of power that defines the territory of the nation state; however, power relations do not confine themselves to national borders. Nevertheless, it is primarily the state that uses the techniques of government to systematize and stabilize power relations. This is what Foucault terms governmentality. Governmentality “refers to those power relations that rely on calculated and rational programs or forms of knowledge and are accompanied by techniques of directing and regulating behaviour” (Lemke, 2016, p. 18). Governmentality thus mediates between power and subjectivity and makes it possible to analyse how domination unfolds and constitutes practices of self-government (Lemke, 2016, p. 3).

Michel de Certeau (2003 [1984]) provides a conceptual framework that understands power as embedded in territory, boundaries, delineation and division. For him, power is the possibility to govern. This hints at considering actors. Who is in a position to create and govern borders? Who benefits from enclosing others, and who loses from being enclosed? (Rumford, 2008, p. 2). Questions such as this put actors at the centre of investigation based on the recognition that bordering practices are shaped by different interests and that borders are experienced differently by different people. This holds true for the crossing of territorial borders, which is for some a mere formality and for others a risk of life, as well as for the way people experience bordering practices in everyday life. Bordering practices are thus shaped by interests of so-called bordering actors who create and govern borders (such as governments and state institutions) or who enforce or contest them in everyday interactions. For example, states delegate borders to nonstate actors in the reception system to control and contain refugees (Lahav and Guiraudon, 2002). Here, bordering is performed on behalf of the state. Indeed, bordering practices and migration management are increasingly framed and conceptualized through governance, where different actors play a role in decision-making and in the implementation of bordering practices. The term ‘governance’ points to the collaboration of a complex set of institutions and actors that are from and beyond government (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013, p. 177).

Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson (2013) theorize the relation between governmentality and governance in relation to border and migration regimes. They note that both concepts are prone to foreground entrepreneurial liberal subjects, blurring the power relations that lie within these concepts (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013). However, they also see an analytical advantage in both concepts as they point to the entanglement between governmental practices of bordering and market technology as well as to the link between power and knowledge that is increasingly mobilized through consulting and implementing bodies active in migration management (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013, p. 179). Governments continue to be the main stakeholder in migration management, of which reception is a part; however, they are also increasingly confronted with an elusive environment of governance where multiple actors and interests play a crucial role. In this sense I understand reception practices as one part of border and migration management.

By bringing together the literature on governmentality and governance, two relevant dimensions emerge that help to further conceptualize reception practices. As discussed above, reception is itself a form of bordering that is characterized by unequal power relations. These unequal power relations become especially visible in the sociospatial dimension, where these power relations materialize in different forms of governmentality. In the spatial dimension, we can find actors in reception that enforce rules and regulations on behalf of the state and those that contest this enforcement or comply with it. The political dimension refers to the negotiation processes of the framework conditions of reception practices that are embedded in multilevel dynamics and the mobilization of different actors in the management of reception.

a) The dimension of spatial governance

Space is often conceptualized as relational and relative. Relative space means that it is always in a process of becoming and intrinsically related to social action (Massey, 2004). Space is “at the same time both shaped by and shaping social practices, processes, and outcomes” (Venter and Kusenbach, 2020, p. 3). This means that space is the place, the tool and the object of social ordering and serves as a medium to represent differences of power and status (Gregory, Meusburger and Suarsana, 2015, p. 5). Here, the focus lies on the social production of space. A social production lens can be useful to reveal how space and place come into existence and emphasizes the material aspect of space and place-making (Low, 2016, p. 34): “Place [...] denotes a location characterized by specific configurations, facilities, and resources that enable

or impede certain actions” (Gregory, Meusburger and Sursana, 2015, p. 5). Place is a lived space that is made up of spatial practices. A reception centre is such a living space that functions as a border in the landscape (Antonsich, 2010).

Through positioning in space, roles and status are constructed and made visible, and through the performance of space, power and sovereignty are enacted. The study of social control through the structuring and making of space is based on Foucault’s concept of governmentality. He situates architecture as a political technology that ensures “a certain allocation of people in space” and canalizes “their circulation” (Foucault and Rabinow, 1984, p. 253). Architectural features, such as prison or military architecture, have a distinct connotation that reinforces stigmatization and mistrust. Architectural features and the built environment have a function of representation, and architectural settings emotionally affect those who live inside and those that live around (Wacquant, 2007; Blokland, 2008). The collective reception centre in its materialization is thus a physical and social signifier that constructs boundaries and racializes the “Other” (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss and Cassidy, 2019). Spatial tactics of shifting reception to territorial borders or situating reception infrastructure in isolated places are strategies to establish and enact hierarchies between citizens (who have rights) and those who do not have these rights. Collective reception is foreseen for people who deviate from a norm. The norm here is the nation state and, accordingly, citizenship. Asylum accommodations, as heterotopian places,³ construct their inhabitants as deviant from the norm of being a citizen (Foucault and Miskowiec, 1986; Witteborn, 2011). Decoding these different spatial practices of power related to the political dimension of bordering helps to reveal spatial strategies and interests and to “clarify the underlying mechanisms of the force of those who dominate, and the weakness of those who are dominated” (Brabant, 2016, p. 26).

However, actors in reception also contest state structures and government techniques of domination. De Certeau conceptualizes this contestation of spatial domination as spatial tactics that consist of mobility and detachment from spaces of domination. People reappropriate or contest space by techniques of sociocultural reproduction such as moving, walking, naming and narrating (Low, 2016, p. 19). Groups and individuals caught in a web of discipline make use of these practices in everyday life (Certeau, 2003). In reception, this web of discipline converges in the space of reception that is made of everyday boundaries and practices of governmentality

³ Heterotopian spaces describe cultural, institutional or discursive spaces that deviate from societal norms in various ways. Deviant heterotopia designates spaces where people who are perceived or constructed outside the norm are placed, e.g., in prisons or psychiatric institutions (Foucault and Miskowiec, 1986).

as a result of legal and living arrangements that often happen to be a strict set of rules enforced by social workers and staff. This heteronomous power affects place feelings and feelings of belonging and renders the appropriation of the place difficult but not impossible.

b) The dimension of political governance

The state is a relevant and powerful actor in bordering processes because of its ability to shape policies. Territorial borders and their control are essential for their constitution and must be constantly enacted and continually maintained (Cox, 2008; Kuus and Agnew, 2008). This enactment fetishizes the state in a nonhistorical and naturalized way, as if borders and state territories are everlasting and fixed units. John Agnew has referred to this as the “territorial trap” (Agnew 1994, p.51). The territorial trap describes the perspective that state sovereignty requires clearly bounded territorial space (Agnew 2003). The control of mobility and the control of borders are considered core elements of national sovereignty based on its premise. In research on asylum and reception, it is also necessary to bear in mind that the state is the result of a historical and political process and must deal with change and loss of sovereignty.

Especially in the Global North, nation states play the sovereignty card in often violent attempts to control migration to protect the privileges of citizens of the Global North (Georgi, 2019; Bauder, 2022). This reveals the entanglement of modern territorial statehood with racism, colonialism and modern capitalism (Mongia, 2007; Bauder, 2022). In the context of European integration, particularly the partial transfer of competences in the area of Justice and Home Affairs that includes the CEAS, readjustment between governance, political space and bordering has unsettled traditional concepts of borders, territory and sovereignty. Functions of law, security and mobility no longer cluster exclusively around (national) borders, and their scale and function become somewhat disaggregated (Walters, 2006, p. 142). This has become relevant in the interplay between EU institutions, their border(ing) policies and member state cooperation (and their refusal to cooperate) with the EU and with other member states, effecting the way reception policies and reception practices are conceptualised and realised.

Furthermore, the notion of the nation state is used to attach biographical legitimacy to people while cutting sociospatial relations between them and others (Paasi, 2021, p. 21). One way to do so is legal practices that distinguish “citizens” from “aliens” or “legal” from “illegal” entry (Delaney, 2001). In this, the state and its central government are the agents who regulate and restrict the movements of people in and outside national territory (Cox, 2002) and push

national(istic) projects of belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2011). These projects of belonging are based on an imaginary of a homogenous population that it claims to represent. Bordering processes can thus go so far as to marginalize or even eliminate those who are perceived as strangers to this imagined community, as this is often the case for asylum seekers and refugees.

Borders are erected to obliterate ambivalent identities or territorial ambiguities, which paradoxically leads to the visibilization of those intended to be rendered invisible in the first place (Van Houtum and Van Naerssen, 2002, p. 126). For example, when governments favour large collective reception facilities such as hotspots in Italy and Greece, initial reception centres in Austria or transit zones in Hungary, the inhabitants of these places are marginalized because they are assigned a highly regulated space with specific architectural characteristics, while at the same time, as a homogenous group of “others”, they become highly visible. Alternatively, when governments make the crossing of a particular part of a country’s territorial border a legal offence, this increases the number of migrants in detention. The state constitutes practices of bordering and othering that operate before anything else. The local level can, to a certain extent and if the political system allows it, negotiate these practices. Looking at the local level sheds light on the decentralization of responsibility from the national to the local level; at the same time, it acknowledges that space (in this case, the reception centre) is produced and reproduced not only by states but also through local negotiation processes (Low, 2016). Investigating national and local actors of reception allows us to grasp the complexity of reception practices in the multilevel governance system in which these practices unfold.

Border practices are composed of a configuration of space, power and political governance. The two dimensions allow for a specific focus on the actors and structures embedded in this configuration, taking either a more micro-oriented or a more macro-oriented perspective. Furthermore, the analytical approach of bordering allows us to create analytical links between the two dimensions. Reception conceptualized as the site of bordering highlights the entanglement between space and power and makes it possible to investigate the interconnectedness between the national, the local and the institutional level as well as the actors and policies that are present on each of these levels, going beyond the making of (reception) spaces by the nation state.

Methodology and research design

The focus of this thesis is the study of how reception practices constitute bordering practices and the analysis of the policies and actors that shape, enact and contest these infrastructures. Accordingly, I began this research project by studying different reception sites in four European countries to understand who the relevant actors are, how reception is embedded in national and local policy-making and how this policy-making shapes everyday bordering practices through social, political and legal borders. Studying reception infrastructure in four European member states made it possible not only to study specific national reception systems but also to relate them to the broader European context in which they are legally and politically embedded.

Epistemologically, this research project is grounded in an interpretivist approach based on the idea that reality as such is constructed in a sociohistorical process (Berger and Luckmann, 1999; Pfadenhauer and Knoblauch, 2018). This means that this project is interested in questions of meaning in a broader sense, turning a reflexive eye not only on the topic but also on the scientist constructing knowledge. The subject of scientific inquiry is not understood as merely being “out there”; subjects and ideas have a context, a history, and a vocabulary that gives them a certain reality and presence in the world (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2007, p. 7). Scholars who follow an interpretivist approach seek to uncover the meaning that motivates actors and generates action (Porta and Keating, 2008). This entails the use of methods that focus on lived experiences such as ethnographic research, which includes participant observation and open-ended, discursive and semistructured interviews (Bray, 2008).

Ethnography in political science provides a normative grounding because it keeps the researcher in contact with those people who are affected by power relations and who are traditionally studied in political science. It allows us to study social structures and processes by “seeing” causal complexity, dynamism and informality on a macrolevel that is entrenched in human agency (Schatz, 2009). Ethnography as a method, although not necessarily labelled as such, has been used to map out the multiple layers of power within complex bureaucratic structures (Lipsky, 1980; Dubois, 2009; Ticktin, 2011). In the field of asylum and reception, these bureaucratic structures not only shape the lived experiences of refugees but also guide related actors and the public in their understanding of asylum as a salient issue.

In line with the interpretive approach, the researcher also needs to reflect her own position in the research field and her self-awareness and cultural make-up, which also influence the way

she interprets an environment that is foreign to her (Bray, 2008, p. 203). This reflexivity means acknowledging fieldwork as a personal and epistemological activity that generates a form of situated knowledge where the researcher finds her place as a “positioned subject” with ideas, emotions and agendas (Shehata, 2015). In my case, this meant reflecting my positioning as a white European woman in the research process in contact with different people and in different countries. In this respect, my position as a researcher, my age, my skin colour and my gender influenced the contacts I could make in the research process. For example, it was very easy to connect with social workers and members of NGOs who worked in reception because I had myself worked for one year in a reception centre, and many of these workers were young women whom I would assess as similar to me. However, it was more complicated to develop good and meaningful contact with certain mayors and other political actors who were male, much older and displayed a condescending attitude or with some refugees who did not feel comfortable speaking to me as a young woman. A challenge was to show empathy with every position that I encountered in the research process and to describe phenomena with the words and perspectives of the people without reproducing categories and attitudes that are scientifically problematic (Dow, 2015). Another challenge was conducting research in foreign languages. To generate my data, I used French, Italian and English, none of which were my first language. According to scholarship on qualitative research in foreign languages, the aim of social scientific translation is to understand the contexts that make up the meaning of an action and an utterance (Kruse *et al.*, 2012). Especially for the interviews in French and Italian, it was important for me to prepare particularly well and intensively in terms of the legal, social and political contexts to better understand certain statements in the interviews.

a) Comparative approach

While ethnography and intensive field research in political science is still often conceptualized as a method to produce in-depth knowledge on single-case studies, comparative approaches in political ethnography can shed light on fundamental questions in (comparative) political science. Following Simmons and Smith (2019), comparative ethnography means “ethnographic research that explicitly and intentionally builds an argument through the analysis of two or more cases by tacking back and forth between two or more cases to identify either similarities or differences in the processes, meanings, concepts or events across them in the service of broader theoretical arguments” (Simmons and Smith, 2019, p. 341). For example, Autesserre compares the daily work of international peacekeepers in different geographical sites by studying their

everyday practices (Autesserre, 2014). Through her insights into the everyday work and action of peacekeepers, she analyses why peacekeeping missions so often fail, proposing new theories in this respect. The approach of going back and forth between different sites demarcates another ethnographic approach, that of multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 1995). Multi-sited ethnography examines “the circulation of cultural meanings, objects and identities in diffuse time-space” (Marcus, 1995, p. 96). It grasps translocal processes such as migration and their relation through global capital, time and space. Both comparative and multi-sited ethnography have been useful in my thesis as I have studied people and places by going back and forth between them while acknowledging and accompanying processes of onward migration that are inherently translocal. In going back and forth between places, I have been able to analyse the differences and similarities of collective reception practices in each national context. However, when following people on their trajectories from Italy to France, I focused on the circulation of people and legal arrangements between states and how they influence and constrain movement (Marcus, 1995).

In this comparative endeavour, I examined reception practices in different national contexts to analyse differences and similarities in the dimensions of the spatial governance of reception and the political governance of reception. My aim was to grasp whether different national contexts lead to different forms of spatial and/or political governance of reception. In contrasting different reception practices in different countries, I established a continuum of bordering practices that manifest in reception (Jahn, 2011, p. 97). To respond to the research questions and handle country-specific and case-specific differences, I developed a case-oriented approach that allows for the consideration of context-specific settings while studying reception practices in different case studies. The contextual information allowed me to go back and forth between cases in analysing processes and events that occurred in reception practices over the period of investigation (Simmons and Smith, 2019).

Drawing on the liberal intergovernmentalist approach developed by Moravcsik (1993) and adopted by Zaun (2018) specifically for bargaining over European asylum policies, I consider state-society relations as an important driver of national and EU policy-making (Moravcsik, 1993). Howard (2010) argues that if right-wing parties gain electoral ground in fostering anti-immigration sentiment, governments are likely to respond with more restrictive migration policies to please voters and maintain office (Howard, 2010). In the same vein, some countries and their electorates are more likely to be tolerant towards immigrants, either because they have traditionally understood themselves as countries of refuge and have a strong humanitarian

commitment (Thielemann, 2003) or because increased personal contact has made them more open towards foreigners (Berg, 2009). However, if asylum applications increase significantly, electorates are likely to demand more restrictive policies (Zaun, 2018).

In terms of bargaining positions in asylum-related policies on the level of the European Union, following Tanja Börzel (2002) and Natascha Zaun (2016, 2018, 2022), all four countries have become foot-draggers in the post-2016 politicization of the CEAS. In the classification of Börzel (2002), there are three types of bargaining strategies: pace-setters, who actively push policies at the European level to obtain their own policy preference and minimize implementation costs; foot-draggers, who block or delay costly policies to prevent them altogether or achieve at least some compensation for implementation costs; and fence-sitters, who neither systematically push policies nor try to block them but rather build tactical coalitions with both pace-setters and foot-draggers (Börzel, 2002, p. 194).

	Austria	Hungary	Italy	France
Geographic Position	No external border	External land border	External sea border	External transit border ⁴
Role	Destination Country	Nonhost country	First arrival country	Destination country with limited prospects
Bargaining Position in the EU after 2016 (Zaun, 2022)	Foot-dragger	Foot-dragger	Pace-setter and Foot-dragger	Foot-dragger

Table 1 Contextual information of the country sample. Source: The Author

France is a core member state and is considered a strong regulator and a pace-setter in European asylum policies (Ette, 2018). However, from 2015 onwards, it has taken a rather cautious position in negotiations over the reforms of the CEAS, not least due to pressure from the right-wing opposition against Emmanuel Macron, and has become a foot-dragger (Zaun, 2018). France increased reception capacities in the years between 2016 and 2020; however, this increase in reception capacities was accompanied by a decrease in quality in the service provided as capacities were repurposed, reducing daily allowances per person (Slama, 2018). France has at least eight different types of reception facilities with different target groups and objectives. Some of these centres aim to preselect persons who are likely to be eligible for asylum and those who are more likely to be deported. There are also specific centres whose

⁴ With the English Channel, France has an external Schengen border that has become a prominent site of transit migration towards the UK. Especially since 2000, following an Anglo-French agreement, there have been increased controls, and apprehended refugees are systematically taken to other parts of France (Guenebeaud and Lendaro, 2020).

main aim is to monitor people before they are about to be deported.⁵ French reception practices are thus strongly dominated by ordering mechanisms that disperse refugees over national territory and according to their legal status (and the perceived prospect of the application).

Italy has been pace-setter and a foot-dragger at different times (Zaun, 2022). In terms of responsibility sharing and capacity building, Italy has blocked the adoption of different proposals, but it has been pace-setter in the proposition of further solidarity mechanisms (Zaun, 2022). Italy was not particularly affected by the refugee governance crisis of 2015 but has been continuously exposed to high numbers of arrivals since 2013 and the Arab Spring (Marchetti, 2014). Italy has also increased reception capacities in its three-phase reception system, where most refugees are accommodated in the so-called CAS⁶ structures. In 2018, the right-wing Minister of the Interior Matteo Salvini reduced the daily per capita amount and removed various services from the contracts in Decree Law 113/2018. As a result, many smaller CAS structures had to close because accommodation was no longer profitable for them. In this way, Salvini has pursued a strategy of increasing the politicization and visibility of refugees to exploit this as a domestic political issue (Avallone, 2021). Concomitantly, the hotspot approach, which is realized in cooperation with European agencies (the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), Europol and Eurojust), has led to an increased link between reception and detention because the hotspot approach bypasses the Reception Condition Directive by linking the reception standards to the rules of accelerated asylum procedures and the return directive.⁷

According to Zaun (2018), Austria had no particularly strong bargaining incentives concerning asylum policies until 2016; however, this changed in 2015 as Austria took in a large share of refugees and thus faced strong domestic pressure to engage other member states in burden-sharing (Zaun, 2018). After the 2016 elections and a political shift to the right, Austria became a so-called foot-dragger, did not promote any form of solidarity mechanisms and adopted a more restrictive approach to asylum (Zaun, 2018). Austria closed reception centres in 2018 due to vacancies in occupation. The Austrian reception system is characterized by complexity through the division of competences between the federal and regional levels. The federal level is responsible for initial reception and orientation, while the federal provinces are responsible

⁵ https://www.lacimade.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Typologie_hebergement_migrants_Cimade.pdf

⁶ Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria (Extraordinary Reception Centres)

⁷ The Return Directive 2008/115/EU lays down common standards and procedures in member states for returning illegally staying third-country nationals.

for basic care in reception. In 2018, the right-wing Minister of the Interior Herbert Kickl bundled competence on the national level by shifting state-organized accommodation and legal counselling for refugees into one agency (Bundesagentur für Betreuungs- und Unterstützungsleistungen, short BBU), which is subordinate to the Ministry of the Interior. This weakened NGOs and civil society organizations that were invested in the fields of independent legal counselling, and it complicated external supervision and quality controls of proposed services of the BBU (Frik, 2021).

Hungary, which has taken the strategy of a foot-dragger, has largely blocked any reforms of the CEAS since 2015. Even though Hungary would have largely benefited from the reforms of the CEAS, particularly the relocation scheme, the Eurosceptic government would not have benefited from agreeing with the EU policies in general (Zaun, 2018). From 2015 onwards, Hungary adopted extremely restrictive and at times unlawful asylum policies, following the successful politicization and securitization of the issue in domestic politics (Szalai and Göbl, 2015; Nagy, 2016) and connected asylum policies to bordering practices (Scott, 2020). In 2015 and 2016, Hungary closed two relatively well-established reception centres and opened tent and container camps as well as the transit zone. In this respect, Hungary is an outlier or a forerunner as it has extraterritorialized the whole national reception system and transformed it into a system of de facto detention. In this process, the local level, specifically civil society organizations, have been excluded and criminalized (Carrera *et al.*, 2018).

Considering asylum applications, the countries can be divided into four types. Hungary is a nonhost country as it managed to reduce asylum applications to a minimum in 2015, with a particularly low acceptance rate. Italy is a first-arrival country with a high number of applications, a low acceptance rate and a high number of withdrawn asylum applications (Finotelli, 2018). Austria is a destination country with a relatively high number of asylum applications and acceptance rates. France could be designated as a destination country with limited prospects, with high numbers of asylum applications but a lower acceptance rate (for acceptance rates, see, for example, Hatton, 2022). Table 1 shows asylum applications, acceptance rates and withdrawals in the four countries between 2015 and 2020.

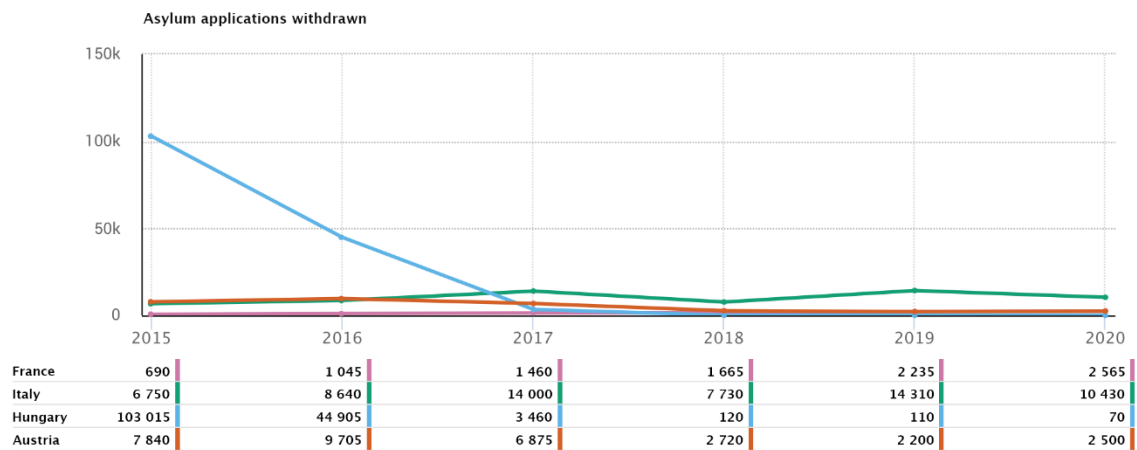
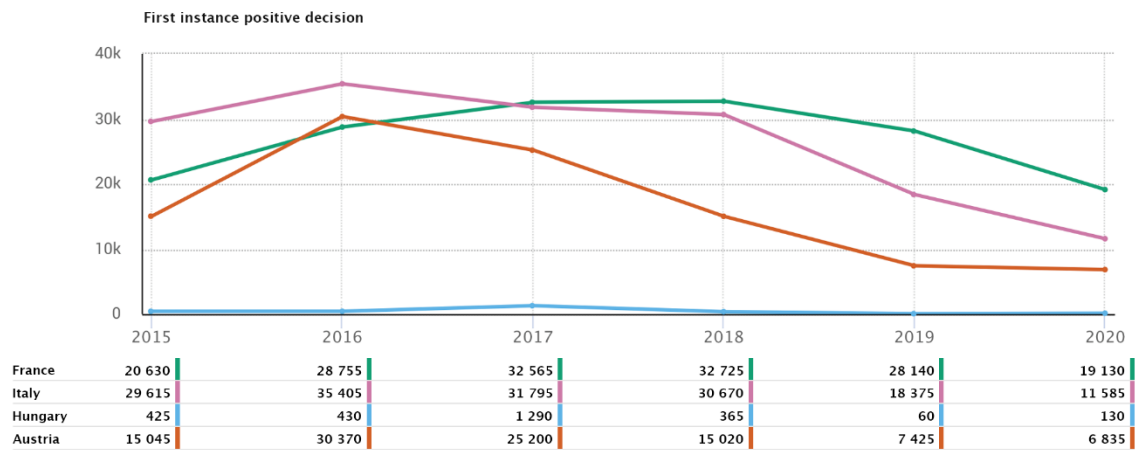
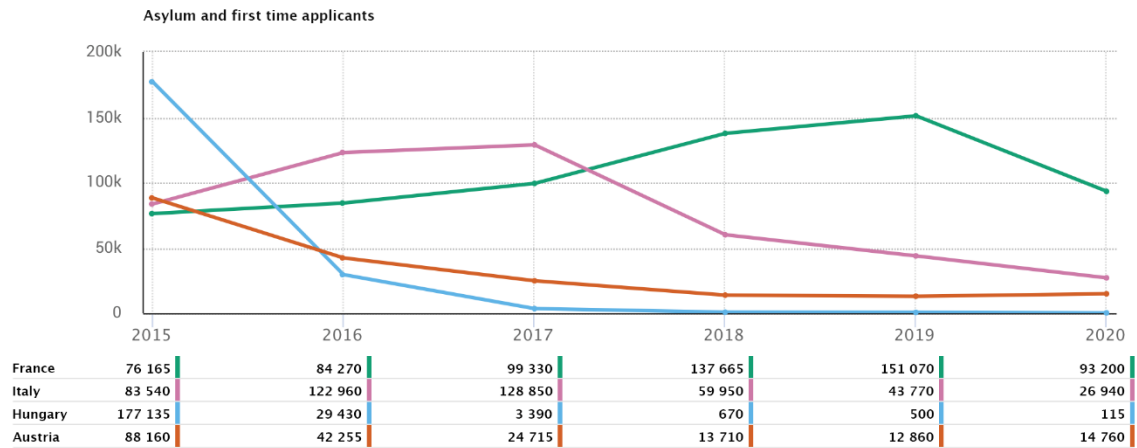
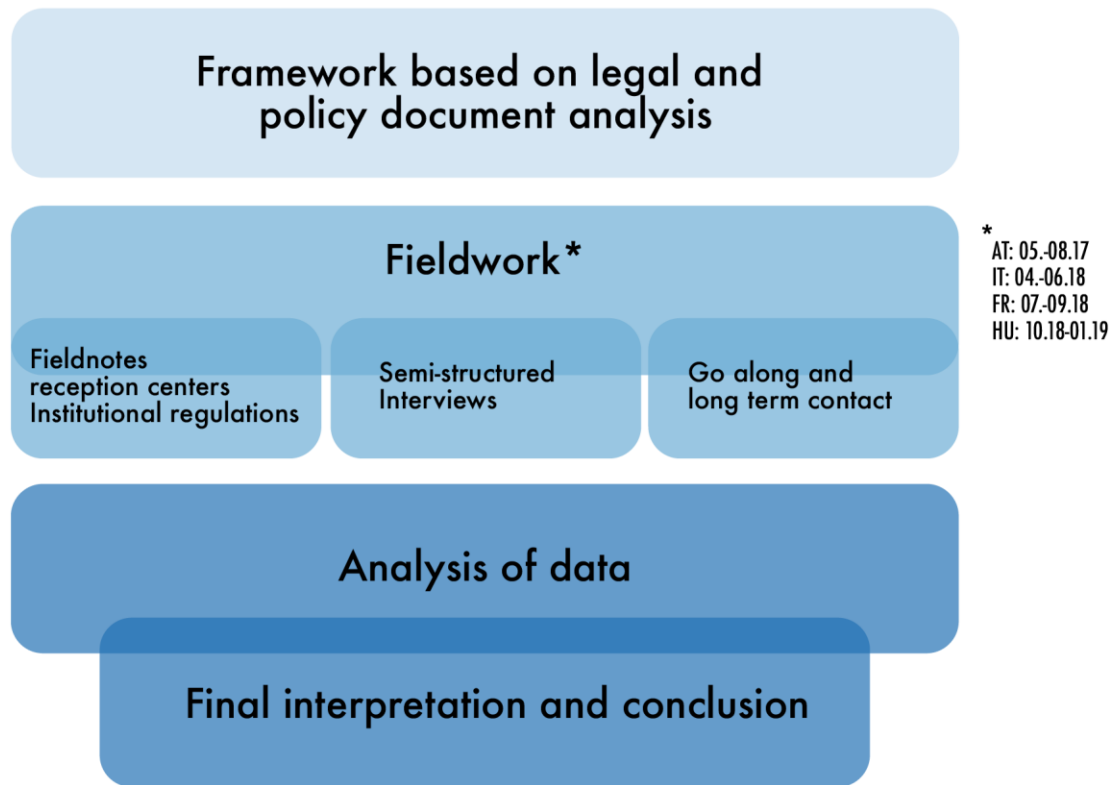


Table 1 shows first-time asylum application, first-instance positive decisions and withdrawal of asylum applications in the four member states. Data source: Eurostat. Presentation: The Author

The selection of these four countries was motivated by an interest in the diverging positionalities of the member states within the negotiation of EU asylum policies and their different experiences with refugee reception in the years between 2015 and 2020. Austria and Hungary have been strongly affected by the refugee governance crisis, which has, inter alia, led to a restrictive shift in national asylum policy-making. Furthermore, both countries have largely engaged unilateral measures, refusing to cooperate with the European Union (Zaun, 2022, Scott, 2022, Josipovic, Rosenberger, Segarra, forthcoming). Italy and France, on the other hand, have been confronted with steadily rising asylum applications. The post-2016 politicization of the CEAS on the national level has been relevant in all four countries. In Austria, Italy and Hungary, the radical right has been at least temporarily part of the government,⁸ while the liberal government of Emanuel Macron is continuously put under pressure by strong right-wing opposition. In addition to factual exposure to asylum applications, domestic issues have largely influenced the bargaining positions of these member states in blocking or reforming the CEAS (Zaun, 2022). Overall, there is a tendency to adopt more restrictive asylum policies, not only in terms of acceptance rates and procedures but also in terms of material reception conditions, which have been continuously reduced in the aftermath of 2015 (Nagy, 2016; Ribémont, 2018; Geddes, Hadj Abdou and Brumat, 2020).

⁸ In Austria, the right-wing Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) as in the government as small coalition partner from 2017 to 2019. In Italy, the right-wing Lega Party was in government between 2018 and 2019 and from 2021 onwards. In Hungary, the right-wing Fidesz Party under Viktor Orbán is in the government since 2010.

b) Research design and research process



Research framework

Based on the literature and the comparative approach I started to study policy papers from each country, national laws and regulations concerning reception, accommodation and allocation of refugees and European directives related to reception conditions: Asylum Procedure Directive 2005/85/EC, Recast Reception Condition Directive 2013/33/EU and the Dublin Regulation as well as policy documents relating the European institutions and the member states, reports from NGOs and international organisations in relation to reception. Policy documents were evaluated according to the guiding questions: who address, which message to whom and why? (Westle, 2018). Relevant policy documents were analysed to collect information about actors, institutions, and structures to better understand (institutional) processes relevant in the accommodation of refugees. In the following it was possible to access and interpret relevant documents that directly relate to the research questions (Westle, 2018).

In the following I developed a case-oriented approach for comparative analysis. A small number of cases is contextualized with various variables to allow for a thick description. In developing each case specifically, I understand diversity and divergence through the analysis of difference (Porta and Keating, 2008). To decide upon the cases, I additionally studied national and local

newspaper articles and asylum reports of the four countries to identify relevant places and accommodation centres. Based on the research questions and research framework I chose collective reception centres with a minimum of 80 inhabitants. Furthermore, all the reception centres were operated by non-governmental or non-profit organisations co-opted by the state or the region. To minimize interregional difference, especially relevant in Austria and Italy, where reception is organized in regionally (Campomori and Caponio, 2017), I focused on one region where I spent time in one reception centre located at the countryside and one reception centre located in a city. For practical reasons I chose two centres that were not too far away from each other in order to be able to move easily between them. Besides the generated data that represent the core material in line with the research design of the PhD thesis, I have generated additional or different data, when this was necessary due to the focus of the article or unexpected situations in the research process. For example, for the article with Miriam Haselbacher on rural mayors, I have additionally collected phone interviews with mayors of small municipalities in the regions of Veneto and Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes. For the article on the Hungarian reception system, I turned to expert interviews instead because access to social workers and the reception centres was denied.

Ethnographic fieldwork

For fieldwork, I spent three months in each country. Due to formal constraints that laid within my contract with the university each fieldwork period could not exceed three months continuously. The fieldwork in Hungary presented itself a little bit different, due to the geographical closeness and the denied access to the reception centres, fieldwork was more a hop on, hop off in the field with less ethnographic observation and more focus on interviews and conversations.

Throughout these three fieldwork trips one thing was particularly striking. The way how seasons influence the perception and the exposure of the research object. While the fieldwork in spring and summer in Italy and France was accompanied mostly by good weather conditions, fieldwork in Hungary was somewhat uncomfortable, with cold, snowy, and rainy weather. This might sound mundane in the first place but actually isn't. While in summer it was possible to spend hours outside the accommodation centres in Italy, observing what was happening, waiting for people to come outside, going for walks to be able to talk with refugees or activists was no problem. It was significantly more difficult to do so in the cold winter weather in Hungary.

Field access: Gate keepers and closed settings

	Number of Inhabitants	Type of Building	Researcher's Access - Data
Austria	Site 1 Lower Austria: ~90 Site 2 Vienna: ~250 Site 3 Vienna: ~90	Former Hotel Former Hospital Complex Former Office Building	Complete Access - Interviews, go-along, field notes
Hungary	No access		No access - Expert interviews, policy papers, press releases
Italy	Site 1 Veneto: ~500 Site 2 Padua: ~80	Former Military Base Residential Building	Relative access - Interviews, go-along, field notes
France	Site 1 Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes: ~150 Site 2 Lyon : ~100	Former School Building Former Hotel	Complete access - Interviews, go-along, field notes

In Austria the three reception centres were regular reception centre in the Basic Care Agreement.⁹ In Italy the two centres were extraordinary reception centres (CAS)¹⁰ and in France the two reception centres were regular reception centres (CADA).¹¹ In Hungary all access to reception centres were denied. While in France and Austria it was not particularly difficult to enter the accommodation centres as long as someone (a worker or an inhabitant) could be found to let me in, the situation in Italy was more complex. To enter the centres in Italy, I had to engage with informal gatekeepers, who were the administrative heads of the reception centres (Reeves, 2010). Officially, entrance to reception centres is only granted by the prefect of the region. However, through the use of informal gatekeepers, it was possible to enter the centre without this permission. In Hungary, the situation was completely different. In 2017, the Hungarian government terminated all monitoring agreements with NGOs (except the UNHCR) and denied access to independent researchers. Consequently, numerous inquiries to access the transit zone (and other camps) were left unaddressed by the Hungarian authorities. These limitations forced me to adjust to the field's possibilities (and restrictions). However, this

⁹ Basic Care Agreement Art 15a B-VG (*Grundversorgungsvereinbarung*) regulates dispersal mechanisms and material reception conditions. It was introduced in 2004 with the adoption of Directive 2003/9/EC. Each region (Bundesland) has its own Basic Care Agreement, which leads to differences in provision.

¹⁰ CAS (*Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria*) Extraordinary Reception Centres also termed temporary structures. Despite being conceptualized as emergency measure and designated only for time "strictly necessary", almost 70% of refugees are accommodated in CAS structures in 2020 (AIDA, 2021)

¹¹ CADA (*Centre d'accueil de demandeurs d'asile*) Regular reception center for asylum seekers, accommodating people in the normal asylum procedure and vulnerable people. With 11 different types of reception centres the French reception system is characterized high complexity, diversifying procedures and reception practices. Regular reception in the CADA represents around 40 % of available reception places in 2020 (Slama, 2018)

strengthened my attempts to investigate the “closed context” (Koch, 2013) by shifting to other methods, such as expert interviews.

Go-along and semistructured interviews

Particularly for conversations with refugees, I used the go-along method (Kusenbach, 2016) to avoid formal interview settings. The go-along method exists between participant observation and interviewing. With the go-along method, ethnographers take an active stance in capturing the informant’s interpretations and actions while at the same time moving with them through their habitual physical and social environment (Kusenbach, 2016). Conversations with refugees of the reception centre thus never took place in the centres themselves but in places outside the centre where they gathered and felt comfortable. Notes about conversations were taken in retrospect once the conversation was finished. Contrary to formal interviews, these go-along conversations occurred regularly, which allowed me to develop closer contact with some of the inhabitants of the centre. In Hungary, it was not possible to establish connections to people living in the transit zone since access was denied, and people were not allowed to leave the zone. However, in Austria, I was able to speak to refugees who had stayed in the transit zone and had moved on to Austria.

In combination with field-intensive ethnography and go-alongs, I conducted in-depth semistructured interviews in one-on-one settings with different actors involved in the process of accommodation (Flick, 2017). Interviews were conducted with three types of actors: social workers and operators working in the reception centre, administrative heads of the reception centre or the NGO and local politicians (mayors and local counsellors). Using interviews in field research provides an understanding of how subjects interpret their own actions and circumstances and how they are embedded in social, institutional and power relations (Bogner *et al.*, 2009; Mosley, 2013). It is also possible to address critical questions that arise through ethnographic observation and gain informal knowledge about political and administrative processes (Kapiszewski, MacLean and Read, 2015). The interviews were guided by three to four thematic blocks according to the role of the interviewee in the reception process. Most of them were conducted on site, and a few of them (especially with local mayors) were conducted via phone. Interviews were recorded and transcribed (except for four interviews in Hungary that were not recorded but were written down during the conversation). Based on a case-study logic, semistructured interviews were conducted until a certain saturation was reached (Small, 2009; Flick, 2017).

Ethical reflections and consent

All participants were asked for consent via a signed form. One copy was left with the participant, and one copy I kept for myself. The participants were informed about their right to withdraw at any moment during the interview. For interviews conducted by phone, the first step was to explain the research project and ask for consent to record. Interviews conducted by phone were organized through e-mail contact, and the participants were already informed about the research project and their rights as interviewees. The choice not to conduct interviews with refugees was guided by the consideration that interviews have a decisive place in the asylum procedure. Nevertheless, everyone was informed about my presence as a researcher, and I clarified that my presence in the facility, which was also their “temporary” living space, had a scientific purpose. It was important to reflect on the power imbalance between the researcher and the refugees as (involuntary) inhabitants of collective accommodation centres. That also meant reflecting critically on situations in which voluntary consent was possible in addition to critical reflection of my own position as a researcher and the integrity of the research project. I therefore chose to converse with people outside the centre in places where they gathered and felt comfortable navigating the environment.

The publications

A cumulative thesis has advantages and disadvantages. The individual articles allow for engagement with one specific aspect of the research interest in depth, to develop standalone research questions and analysis. Through the peer-review process, all the articles were critically assessed, which considerably improved their quality. As part of special issues and edited volumes, the articles contributed to scientific debates in their respective fields. As stand-alone publications, they are self-contained and represent a piece of larger research puzzles and debates. However, individual publications do not allow for an in-depth examination of the main topic of the dissertation as research articles follow their own logic and respond to the specific thematic requirements of journals and volumes. This also means that much of the generated data did not find their way into the articles. Furthermore, in the co-authored article with Miriam Haselbacher, we combined our data and gathered missing data collaboratively to improve the quality and validity of the data.

Before presenting the four publications in turn, I briefly introduce them and situate them in the context of their genesis. Paper 1, *The reception of asylum seekers in Europe: exclusion through accommodation practices*, was published in the edited volume *European Societies, Migration, and the Law: The 'Others' Amongst 'Us'* by Moritz Jesse in 2021. The edited volume's central themes are mechanisms, strategies and philosophies that lead to "othering" in the field of immigration and asylum law (Jesse, 2021). Accordingly, the focus of the paper was on othering practices and othering processes in Austrian and Italian collective reception centres.

Paper 2, *Moving, Naming, Narrating. Refugees undoing bordering practices of reception in Italy and France*, is thematically linked to paper one while taking the perspective of refugees who navigate reception practices in Italy and France. It is a stand-alone article that has been submitted to *Comparative Migration Studies*. The data used for this article are long-term observations based on continued relationships with three refugees from the time of the fieldwork to the present. I trace their itineraries between the two countries, showing how refugees undo bordering practices of reception through different strategies such as mobility and the negotiation of social, economic and political belonging.

Papers 3 and 4 focus on the dimension of political governance and on actors of reception that shape and implement reception practices through law-making and the negotiation of belonging and bordering practices. Paper 3, *Politics of Adjustment: Rural Mayors and the Reception of Asylum Seekers*, is part of the special issue *Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Mayors, Migration Challenges and Multilevel Political Dynamics* by Raffaele Bazurli, Tiziana Caponio and Else de Graauw. The focus of the special issue is mayoral leadership on migration issues in US and European municipalities. In line with this thematic focus, the publication focuses on mayors who negotiate the inclusion and exclusion of refugees in the process of the opening of reception centres in rural areas through the use of strategies geared towards horizontal and vertical governance structures. Finally, Paper 4, *Dismantling the Reception of Asylum Seekers: Hungary's Illiberal Asylum Policies and EU Responses*, published as a standalone publication in the journal *East European Politics*, demonstrates how the Hungarian government successfully securitized migration, using reception as an instrument of securitization to extraterritorialize it while dissolving reception standards.

Below are the four publications in the presented order, followed by a common discussion and final concluding remarks.

Paper I) The Reception of Asylum Seekers in Europe: Exclusion through Accommodation Practices

Status: Published (peer-reviewed)

Helena Segarra. 2020. The Reception of Asylum Seekers in Europe. Exclusion through Accommodation Practices. In: Moritz Jesse (Ed.). *European Societies, Migration, and the Law. The 'Others' amongst 'Us'*. Cambridge University Press. PP. 213 – 229. doi: 10.1017/9781108767637.012

Abstract

The reception of asylum seekers in Europe is a highly debated topic: while national governments oversee the implementation of reception conditions, European member states are bound by European directives on minimum standards. Asylum seekers in collective reception facilities should be provided with at least a minimum of reception standards, including housing, food, material reception standards, and legal assistance. However, reception practices not only largely differ across member states but also constantly draw boundaries between asylum seekers and the host society through geographical, architectural, and bureaucratic measures. Using case studies from Austria and Italy, this contribution investigates how, on the one hand, certain (minimum) standards are applied in relation to restrictive integration claims and discourses and how, on the other hand, resources (e.g. for integration measures or housing) are strictly bound to exclusive structures that complicate the inclusive partaking of refugees in host societies. It highlights the mechanisms whereby national reception practices amplify the 'othering' of migrants in the context of asylum seeking.

Keywords: Asylum; Collective Reception; Othering; Camps; Europe; Italy; Austria; Bureaucracy; Space

11.1 Introduction

The governance crisis that followed the so-called summer of migration in 2015 caused many European member states to increase the use of collective accommodation. Forms of collective accommodation in larger reception facilities have been a part of the European asylum framework for a long time. This chapter deals with the ‘othering’ of asylum seekers through these accommodation practices. It showcases the exclusion and ‘othering’ of asylum seekers that is inherent in the way individuals are received in camps. I will show that through collective accommodation in remote areas and bureaucratic practices, asylum seekers are hindered from taking part in the society and are perceived as ‘others’ by the host society. To develop these arguments, the chapter will have the following structure: First, after a short introduction, I describe the methodology and case selection. Second, I discuss the question of reception at the European level as well as the implementation of reception directives within the respective national contexts of Austria and Italy. Third, I exemplify some concrete practices of boundary drawing and ‘othering’ drawn from my fieldwork in the two countries. Fourth, I conclude with a discussion of how collective reception and material reception conditions produce exclusion and isolation through ‘othering’.

Mountz defines the verb ‘other’ as a way to ‘distinguish, label, categorize, name, identify, place and exclude those who do not fit a societal norm’.¹ In a geographic sense, this means to place a person or a group on the margin or periphery.² ‘Othering’ can be described as a discursive practice that forms subjects, either in hegemonic and powerful positions or in positions in which they are subjugated to power dynamics. Most of the time verbal and non-verbal acts produce this differentiation and place the respective subjects in an ‘in’ or ‘out’ group.³ This dichotomy can be found not only in legal practices and national discourses but also in daily life practices. It can be a conscious drawing of boundaries, but it can also be an unconscious practice, and the intent may not be to exclude people from taking part in society. In that sense, it can be understood as a structural mode of oppression and not as a consequence of one person’s individual decision.⁴ In the context of collective reception of asylum seekers, this is often the case. The two forms overlap, since reception is, on the one hand, structured by laws and rules

¹ C. Gallaher, C. Dahlman, M. Gilmartin, A. Mountz, and P. Shirlow (eds.), *Key Concepts in Political Geography* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2009) p. 328.

² Ibid., p. 328.

³ N. J. Grove and A. B. Zwi, ‘Our Health and Theirs: Forced Migration, Othering, and Public Health’ (2006) 62(8) *Social Science & Medicine*, p. 1934.

⁴ H. Nagl-Docekal (ed.), *Politische Theorie: Differenz und Lebensqualität*, Dt. Erstaussg., 1. Aufl ed. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1996), p. 102.

that frame the daily life of asylum seekers; on the other hand, these rules are often implemented by social organisations and social workers who sympathise with the fate of the inhabitants of the centres but are not always free from everyday racism.

To analyse the forms of ‘othering’ and drawing of boundaries in the context of collective accommodation in Italy and Austria, I rely on two theoretical frameworks. First, I use the framework of Grove and Zwi developed in research on public health and forced migration in Australia.⁵ They have distinguished four frames to analyse the ‘othering’ of refugees and asylum seekers. Two of these frames are particularly interesting in the European cases discussed here. The frame ‘charity and choice’ suggests, by analogy to burden sharing discourses present in the European Union, that asylum seekers are needy and dependent and that they are ‘users’ of resources in the social system.⁶ The second frame is ‘overload’, which in short refers to the public perception that receiving countries are overburdened due to the high influx of asylum seekers in recent years. This goes hand in hand with a steady reduction in material reception conditions⁷ and the argument that ‘we can offer *them* only the bare minimum in terms of assistance...’.⁸ Secondly, I refer to concepts of legal geography that analyse the mutual constitution of legal and social worlds. Rules and regulations in the realm of asylum seeking operate as systems of power, not only deciding who can stay ‘legally’ but also exercising control over everyday life circumstances, e.g. who is to live where and how.⁹ In that sense, it is important to investigate how rules and regulations in collective reception facilities shape social relations inside and outside the institution. Considering both legal and social practices in reception allows us to understand how structural boundaries are drawn and redrawn in symbolic and physical ways.¹⁰

11.2 Methodological Approach

The data used for this chapter are interviews, laws, and regulations concerning reception conditions in Austria and Italy as well as documents related to reception, such as house rules. The interviews stem from two periods of ethnographic fieldwork, each carried out over a period of six weeks. The first period was in Austria from May to June 2017, and the second period was

⁵ Grove and Zwi, ‘Our Health and Theirs’.

⁶ Ibid., p. 1935.

⁷ For example, see the country reports of Austria and Italy in the Asylum Information Database.

⁸ Grove and Zwi, ‘Our Health and Theirs’, p. 1936 (emphasis in the original).

⁹ A. White, ‘Geographies of Asylum, Legal Knowledge and Legal Practices’ (2002) 21(8) Political Geography, p. 1056.

¹⁰ Ibid.

in northern Italy from May to June 2018. During these times, I was present in two collective reception facilities in Vienna and one other region in Austria and two large reception centres in northern Italy. Other smaller centres in the cities of Padova and Treviso were included through interviews with operators and social workers. I conducted 15 interviews, 6 in Austria and 9 in Italy, with social workers, workers in reception facilities, and administrative heads of the reception centres whenever possible (see Table 11.1). The interviews represent three layers of administrative levels, and they can therefore be related to each other to understand how policies are transformed in the process of their implementation and what impact they have on day-to-day bureaucratic practice.¹¹

	Administrative heads of the asylum seekers reception unit	Social workers	Reception facility workers	Conversations with asylum seekers
Austria	2 (IA1, IA2)	1 (IA3)	3 (IA4, IA5, IA6)	4
Italy	1 (II1)	3 (II2, II3, II4)	5 (II5, II6, II7, II8)	3

Table 11.1 *Interviews at reception centres*

There were no formal interviews conducted with asylum seekers. I established contact with inhabitants of the centres outside the camps and most often with support groups that work directly with asylum seekers. In the environment of the support groups, my position as a researcher was clearly distinguishable and distinguished, and I was introduced to people as a researcher interested in reception conditions in the respective facilities. Conversations with asylum seekers who were interested in talking to me were not recorded, but I took notes and wrote a report from memory. The choice not to conduct formal interviews with asylum seekers was made because classic interview settings are heavily prestressed by the asylum procedure. First, during the period of asylum requesting, asylum seekers must tell their stories in often hostile settings and detail intimate experiences. Second, the interview, and in consequence the history, plays a strong decision part in the asylum procedure.¹²

Additional materials include laws and regulations on reception conditions in the two countries at the national, regional, and local levels as well as an analysis of internal house rules and other

¹¹ M. Lipsky, *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1980).

¹² U. Krause, *Researching Forced Migration: Critical Reflections on Research Ethics during Fieldwork* (Working Paper Series No. 123, Refugee Studies Center, Oxford University, 2017).

material from the reception centres. The interviews as well as other collected materials elucidate how rules and regulations translate into social practice in the operation of daily life organisation of the reception facilities.

The terms reception facilities/collective facilities/transit facilities are used in the context of European Union policy making to describe the different types of accommodation centres that have different functions. The term ‘camp’ as a category of practice allows grasping a field of contested and temporary space that produces exclusion through accommodation practices and the repartition of space.¹³ Depending on my interlocutor, workers and administrative staff often used the word facility, which reflects the technocratic and ‘neutral’ language of their professional practice, whereas the support groups and asylum seekers I talked to more often referred to camps. I will therefore use the term ‘facility’ when I write about the legal aspects of reception and the term ‘camp’ when I refer to the political meaning, being aware that they refer to different perspectives that are both present in the field.

11.3 Reception Practices in the EU, Austria, and Italy

11.3.1 Reception in the EU

Since 1990, the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) has aimed to establish a unified reception system for asylum seekers throughout member states. Two directives¹⁴ particularly influenced the European understanding of the reception of asylum seekers in the context of the CEAS. As different studies have proposed, the directive on reception conditions is tightly linked to other measures and goals that the European Union has elaborated, for example, the overall goal to delimit secondary movement of refugees among European member states.¹⁵

Two aspects have informed the development of the directives concerning reception, procedure, and qualification. On the one hand, the prior legal human rights obligations found in the Geneva

¹³ S. Turner, ‘What Is a Refugee Camp? Explorations of the Limits and Effects of the Camp’ (2016) 29(2) *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 139–148.

¹⁴ Council Directive 2003/9/EC of 27 January 2003 laying down minimum standards for the reception of asylum seekers, OJ 2003 No. L3118, 6 February 2003 and Directive 2013/33/ EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection, OJ 2013 No. L180/96, 29 June 2013.

¹⁵ E. (Lilian) Tsourdi, ‘EU Reception Conditions: A Dignified Standard of Living for Asylum Seekers?’, in V. Chetail, P. De Bruycker, and F. Maiani (eds.), *Reforming the Common European Asylum System* (Boston: Brill, 2016), p. 273.

Refugee Convention¹⁶ and the European Convention on Human Rights¹⁷ and, on the other hand, the basic assumption of mutual trust between member states and their respective asylum systems, which is one of the foundational aspects of EU harmonisation in the areas of freedom, security, and justice.¹⁸ Within these aspects lies an inherent dichotomy that Lavenex terms *organised hypocrisy*.¹⁹ It describes the growing difficulty of normative gaps in principles and the actual reality of their practical limits. This can be understood as a conflict between the search for *protective norms* that are rights-enhancing, e.g. common standards in reception, and the compromise on common *protectionist policies*, e.g. the closure of borders that are rights-reducing.²⁰ Protective norms in the current asylum policies have been largely left to the discretion of member states. Even where member states have agreed on common measures, such as relocation schemes, tools remained ineffective due to a lack of implementation.²¹

Reception conditions that entail housing, material reception conditions, health, and education are one part of these protective norms that have been left to the discretion of member states. Furthermore, reception conditions, particularly housing, have been a highly politicised topic at the national and local levels in a variety of member states.²² The European Migration Network (EMN) has found that most member states use collective facilities to host asylum seekers and that only half of them use the possibility of private housing in urgent cases or as an additional option.²³ The EMN differentiates between collective facilities and initial/ transit facilities. The latter are used for admissibility procedures that normally take weeks. Once people are admitted to the asylum procedure, they are allocated to follow-up reception facilities. Sixteen countries

¹⁶ Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, Geneva, 28 July 1951, in force 22 April 1954, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 189, p. 137, available at: www.refworld.org/docid/3be01b964.html, last accessed 11 May 2019.

¹⁷ European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, as amended by Protocols Nos. 11 and 14, Rome, 4 November 1950, in force 3 September 1953, ETS 5, available at: www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b3b04.html, last accessed 11 May 2019.

¹⁸ J. Vedsted-Hansen, 'Reception Conditions as Human Rights: Pan-European Standard or Systemic Deficiencies?', in V. Chetail, P. De Bruycker, and F. Maiani (eds.), *Reforming the Common European Asylum System* (Boston: Brill, 2016), p. 317.

¹⁹ S. Lavenex, "'Failing Forward" towards Which Europe? Organized Hypocrisy in the Common European Asylum System: "Failing Forward" towards Which Europe?' (2018) 56(5) *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 1196.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ F. Trauner, 'Asylum Policy: The EU's "Crises" and the Looming Policy Regime Failure' (2016) 38(3) *Journal of European Integration*, 322.

²² S. Rosenberger, V. Stern, and N. Merhaut (eds.), *Protest Movements in Asylum and Deportation* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018).

²³ European Migration Network, *The Organisation of Reception Facilities for Asylum Seekers in different Member States* (2004) http://emn.ie/files/p_20140207073231EMN%20Organisation%20of%20Reception%20Facilities%20Synthesis%20Report.pdf, last accessed 11 May 2019.

out of the member states use these initial and transit facilities upon arrival.²⁴ This shows that the accommodation of asylum seekers in collective facilities is the most common choice throughout the European member states.

The reception directives as well as their national implementation allow a tightly controlled and supervised organisation of reception facilities and show how they are addressed in a certain way that represents the collective reception facility as the norm of accommodation. Although the main task of these camps is certainly to control, administer, and foreclose the arriving refugees, the way that they are organised and structured differ sharply from one another, suggesting that they also aim for and follow different regulations and political discourses and perceptions.²⁵ This, on the one hand, has its basis in the very different histories and development of national legislations on asylum matters and is, on the other hand, linked to the transposition process of the European directive to national legislation and the interpretation of national legislation in regional and local contexts in a constant process of contestation and negotiation. Austria and Italy will figure as vignettes to understand how ‘othering’ is embedded in collective reception not only through housing but also through bureaucratic measures concerning material reception. While Italy has a long tradition of asylum seekers arriving at its shores,²⁶ Austria in general has a low number of asylum demands but has been particularly affected by the summer of migration in 2015/2016, when it took in a high share of asylum seekers. Despite these two very different situations on the ground, both countries have primarily opted for a system of collective accommodation. Using data from two different European countries gives the possibility to see structural differences in the organisation of reception and, at the same time, it allows us to understand how different systems still lead to ‘othering’ and exclusion if the policies are intended to do so. For instance, freedom of movement is particularly restricted for asylum seekers in both countries. Reception facilities are organised through a straightforward system of control and supervision, and material reception can be limited or withdrawn when asylum seekers are absent for more than three days.²⁷

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ T. Pieper, ‘Lager als variables Instrument der Migrationskontrolle’, in Sabine Hess and Bernd Kasperek (eds.), *Grenzregime. Diskurse, Praktiken, Institutionen in Europa* (Berlin: Assoziation A, 2010), pp. 219–228.

²⁶ C. Marchetti, ‘Rifugiati e migranti forzati in Itália: il pendolo tra “emergenza” e “sistema”’ (2014) 22(43) *REMHU: Revista Interdisciplinar da Mobilidade Humana*, 53–70.

²⁷ Documents on house rules in Italy and Austria.

11.3.2. Reception in Austria

With Austria's entry to the European Union in 1995, the Asylum Act (Asylgesetz) was introduced in 1997,²⁸ taking into account the Schengen Agreement and the Dublin Procedure and replacing a hazardous programme of minimum reception that included basic healthcare, housing, and subsistence. The Asylum Act underwent another severe change, when in 2003 the Reception Condition Directive²⁹ had to be implemented by Austrian national law.³⁰ This changed the Asylum Act 2005³¹ and introduced the Basic Welfare Support Agreement (Grundversorgungsvereinbarung).³² After long and complicated negotiations with the regions' (Bundesländer) authorities, the centre-right-wing government adopted the transposition that 'was accompanied by the introduction of more restrictive asylum acts'.³³ In particular, the question of reception conditions, especially compulsory dispersal and the decision on formal competences, was the subject of contestation. The division of competences led to nine different Basic Welfare Support Agreements (one for each province) and one for the federal government, which defines admission rules and expense rates. This reflected a power struggle over fair distribution and burden sharing between the provinces, rather than an interest in providing dignified standards.³⁴ This can be underscored by the fact that the substandard emergency reception centres that had opened in 2015 as a response to the higher number of incoming asylum requests have been systematically kept for long-term reception purposes, exposing asylum seekers to substandard reception standards.³⁵ By the Federal Government Basic Welfare Support Act and the Asylum Act 2005, Austrian reception centres are organised differently in every province. Since 2005, the Asylum Act has been regularly restricted, last in October 2017 and March 2019, whereby the law has been considerably tightened.

²⁸ Asylgesetz 1997 BGBl. I Nr. 76/1997.

²⁹ Council Directive 2003/9/EC.

³⁰ European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 'Navigating the Maze: Structural Barriers to Accessing Protection in Austria' (2015) www.asylumineurope.org/sites/default/files/resources/structural_barriers_to_accessing_protection_in_austria.pdf, last accessed 11 May 2019.

³¹ Asylgesetz 2005 BGBl. I Nr. 100/2005 idF (latest) BGBl. I Nr. 56/2018.

³² Grundversorgungsvereinbarung - Art. 15a B-VG 2004 BGBl. I Nr. 80/2004.

³³ S. Rosenberger and A. König, 'Welcoming the Unwelcome: The Politics of Minimum Reception Standards for Asylum Seekers in Austria' (2012) 25(4) *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 537–554.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 544.

³⁵ Asylum Information Database, 'Wrong Counts and Closing Doors. The Reception of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Europe' (2016), www.asylumineurope.org/sites/default/files/shadowreports/aida_wrong_counts_and_closing_doors.pdf, last accessed 11 May 2019.

11.3.3. Reception in Italy

Similar to Austria, but even more so, the regions in Italy are independent in terms of shaping the organisation of reception and reception conditions.³⁶ The Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees (SPRAR) introduced in 2002 is a small-scale reception system that is based on voluntary cooperation between municipalities and the state. Since the participation in SPRAR was voluntary, dispersal and burden sharing between provinces was unequal, and the Emergency Reception Centres (CAS) were introduced in 2013 to compensate for shortcomings in the SPRAR reception system. Although they were conceived as an emergency measure, they have been completely absorbed into the regular reception system. In December 2016, CAS hosted 75 per cent of asylum seekers in Italy. The CAS system is centrally organised and directly subordinated to the Ministry of the Interior through regional prefects. This means that in practice a region can open CAS structures without seeking agreement from the relevant municipality.³⁷ Contrary to the small-scale reception that is organised by municipalities, the direction of services in CAS structures is outsourced to private companies who ensure the provision of services. This has had the effect of deteriorating reception conditions in some cases due to a lack of state control, which has led to some publicly known scandals of fraud and evasion.³⁸

Until 2018, reception conditions were laid down in the national law LD 142/2015,³⁹ which is the actual version that replaced the reception decree LD 140/2005 without substantially modifying it.⁴⁰ This system foresaw a two-phase reception system: a phase of first aid and assistance in which people were either placed in hot spots in Sicily, Lampedusa, or other southern regions of Italy or were brought further north into so-called regional hubs. The large initial and transit facilities were used to register the arriving persons and regulate asylum demand. The second phase was characterised by small accommodation centres (SPRAR) for some asylum seekers and large reception facilities (CAS) for most of them. The new national

³⁶ F. Campomori and T. Caponio, 'Immigrant Integration Policymaking in Italy: Regional Policies in a Multi-level Governance Perspective' (2017) 83(2) *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 303–321.

³⁷ C. Marchetti, 'Rifugiati e migranti forzati in Italia'; P. Castelli Gattinara, 'The "Refugee Crisis" in Italy As a Crisis of Legitimacy' (2017) 9(3) *Contemporary Italian Politics*, 318–331.

³⁸ M. Liguori, 'Prefetto vicario indagato: «Favoriva gli appalti per i centri migranti»', *Il Gazzettino*, 9 August 2018, p. 5.

³⁹ Legislative Decree 142/2015 'Implementation of Directive 2013/33/EU on minimum standards for the reception of asylum applicants and the Directive 2013/32/EU on common procedures for the recognition and revocation of the status of international protection', GU. N. 214, 15 September 2015.

⁴⁰ Legislative Decree no. 140/2005 'Implementation of Directive 2009/3/EC on minimum standards for the reception of the asylum seekers in Member States', GU N.168, 21 July 2005.

law DL 113/2018⁴¹ has abolished the second-line reception and, in particular, small-scale reception and instead introduced larger reception facilities.⁴² The new degree not only promotes a more spatially exclusionary reception but also reduces material reception conditions such as services and goods and cuts support for integration measures. In particular, the CAS structures in Italy render taking part difficult in the host society. This happens not only through spatial exclusion and complex bureaucratic structures that will be discussed here but also through other measures such as de facto exclusion from the labour market and weak or non-existent integration measures, among others.

11.4. The Camp as a Symbol and Place of Exclusion

In the current literature on migration, the meaning of the camp is conceptualised through lenses of biopolitical control, deceleration of migration flows, and confinement of unwanted subjects.⁴³ The critical literature has conceptualised camps as *heterotopian places*.⁴⁴ All these descriptions attempt to place the camp in the context of political transformation of modern societies. This illustrates that the struggle over the meaning of the camp is part of politics of control or politics of migration.⁴⁵ Camps in a larger, historical context have been justified and used to discipline and politicise bodies to subordinate them to economic principles and transform them into productive subjects.⁴⁶ New patterns of justification have been introduced to argue in favour of the proliferation of collective reception facilities for asylum seekers in Europe. New conceptions of human rights discourses argue that these facilities can save asylum seekers from themselves or from dangerous clashes with border control agencies.⁴⁷ Kreichauf terms these developments *campisation*, in which rising numbers of asylum seekers are placed in collective accommodation with services provided non-transparently, which leads to seclusion and represents them as a seemingly homogeneous group in the ambivalent situation of being

⁴¹ Legislative Decree no. 113/2018 on security and migration, GU N.281, 3 December 2018.

⁴² Asylum Information Database, Country Report Italy (2019), www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/italy, last accessed 11 May 2019.

⁴³ Pieper, 'Lager als variables Instrument der Migrationskontrolle'.

⁴⁴ The Foucauldian term deviant heterotopia designates a place where 'other' people outside the norm are placed, e.g. in prisons, and constitutes a certain type of counter-space; Transit Migration Forschungsgruppe (ed.), *Turbulente Ränder: neue Perspektiven auf Migration an den Grenzen Europas*, 2., unveränd. Aufl. ed. (Bielefeld: Transcript-Verl, 2007).

⁴⁵ K. Rygiel, 'Bordering Solidarities: Migrant Activism and the Politics of Movement and Camps at Calais' (2011) 15(1) *Citizenship Studies*, p. 2.

⁴⁶ M. Foucault and W. Seitter, *Überwachen und Strafen: die Geburt des Gefängnisses*, 19. Aufl. ed. (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2014).

⁴⁷ Pieper, 'Lager als variables Instrument der Migrationskontrolle'.

confined as unwanted or being used as an illegal workforce.⁴⁸ However, it is also a social place where interaction and agency take place and where we can see a constant interaction and negotiation among asylum seekers, claimants, workers, institutions, and governments.

One aspect of ‘othering’ practices and exclusion is space and geography. Seclusion and collectivity enforce processes of ‘othering’ because people are perceived as homogeneous groups. At the same time, they are not able to partake in the host society. This is simply for reasons such as living far away from the city centre but can also be amplified by another aspect of ‘othering’ practices, such as bureaucratic procedures that are linked to material reception conditions. Sometimes they overlap, for example, if there is little money for public transport, people will not go to the nearby village or city to take up offers of language courses. Language courses may be provided in the facility, but the money for the bus is further decreased by the participation fee for the course and so on. In Sections 11.4.1 and 11.4.2, I will give some concrete examples of how ‘othering’ and exclusion works through space and bureaucratic practices in the realm of reception.

11.4.1. ‘Othering’ through Space

The geographical situation of the camps plays an important role in their functioning and (im)possible interaction with the environment. Spaces must be understood as constructions that influence and produce lived realities and create and re-iterate racialised/segregated spaces.⁴⁹ Considerably often, camps are located outside of cities or villages with a clear demarcation, such as fences or walls. When camps are located within cities, the demarcation between the inside and the outside, no matter how invisible this demarcation is, structures inclusion and exclusion in the host society.⁵⁰ In other words, a camp is not only a space or a legal category; rather, it is both at the same time, a set of social-spatial arrangements and policies that need everyday doing.⁵¹

⁴⁸ R. Kreichauf, ‘From Forced Migration to Forced Arrival: The Campization of Refugee Accommodation in European Cities’ (2018) 6(7) *Comparative Migration Studies*; K. Rygiel, ‘Politicizing Camps: Forging Transgressive Citizenships in and through Transit’ (2012) 16(5–6) *Citizenship Studies*, 807–825.

⁴⁹ P. Jackson (ed.), *Race and Racism: Essays in Social Geography* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002); B. Ross (ed.), *Migration, Geschlecht und Staatsbürgerschaft: Perspektiven für eine antirassistische und feministische Politik und Politikwissenschaft*, 1. Aufl. ed. (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2004); T. Pieper, *Die Gegenwart der Lager: zur Mikrophysik der Herrschaft in der deutschen Flüchtlingspolitik*, 1. Aufl. ed. (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2008); Kreichauf, ‘From Forced Migration to Forced Arrival’.

⁵⁰ Turner, ‘What Is a Refugee Camp?’.

⁵¹ N. Blomely, ‘Making Space for Law’, in K. R. Cox, M. Low, and J. Robinson (eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Political Geography* (New York: SAGE Publications, 2008), p. 155.

Often, buildings and structures used for reception are repurposed without necessarily being appropriate.⁵² Unused military barracks, office buildings, or old hospitals are rearranged for ‘temporary’ hosting rather than in a sustainable way. Quick degradation and hygiene problems are the consequences. Austrian regions agreed in 2014 on a minimum space of 8 m² per person and 4 m² for every additional person in the room.⁵³ In the CAS structures that I visited the people only had bunkbeds as their ‘private’ space. This can be strenuous. The tight regulations and strict rules on collective accommodation are juxtaposed with lengthy asylum procedures, for example, the initiation of Dublin procedures even when there is no real prospect of a transfer to another country.⁵⁴

In regard to reception, space is an important factor to consider. The ‘othering’ of a person or a group can be achieved by literally placing the person outside, far away from the centre.⁵⁵ The tendency to create larger facilities on the outskirts of cities or in secluded areas can also be observed in other European countries.⁵⁶ Consequently, neighbours often perceive groups of people living together in a small space as homogeneous groups. They find themselves in a discrepant space, being highly visible due to their perceived homogeneity but having invisible needs claims due to their seclusion.⁵⁷ Particularly in smaller regions, larger collective facilities, i.e. over 50 people strong, are problematic due to the geographical structure, smaller cities, rural areas, and low infrastructure. While in Austria some regions pay public transport fees for asylum seekers, in Italy they have to pay for public transport from their 40 Euros of pocket money. This often represents almost a quarter of the whole amount for one trip to the nearby city. As a social worker in Austria describes the outcome of this seclusion in very peripheral regions:

There are facilities where the public transport is connected to schooling, which means that during the summer and holidays, there are no buses at all. We often criticised this, but the proposed solution was to ask the host to drive them down to the next train station. So, they always had to beg her to go with them. In the end, they didn’t keep their

⁵² Kreichauf, ‘From Forced Migration to Forced Arrival’.

⁵³ Paper from a conference of the regions 2014.

⁵⁴ European Council on Refugees and Exiles, ‘Navigating the Maze’.

⁵⁵ Gallaher et al., Key Concepts in Political Geography, p. 328.

⁵⁶ Kreichauf, ‘From Forced Migration to Forced Arrival’.

⁵⁷ M. Haselbacher and H. Hattmannsdorfer, ‘Desintegration in der Grundversorgung’ (2018) 3 (3) Juridikum. Zeitschrift für kritik | recht | gesellschaft, p. 379.

appointments with the doctors because they didn't want to beg anymore (IA3, L. 151–159)

This means that asylum seekers are made dependent on a person's favour to be able to move around. This reduces their contact with the next city or village to a minimum or even less.

In large reception centres in Italy, the solution was to integrate all services that the state is obliged to deliver, such as medical treatment, Italian classes, food, etc., into the reception centre, so that people no longer had to leave the centre, which is a step further towards structural disintegration.⁵⁸ This allows the cutting away of people from the host society and also renders non-transparent the quality of services, as one operator of a large centre in Italy recalls:

The problem is not only the Cooperativa [the company that organises the services] but also the whole structure, the system should be public and not private, if you leave it to private companies, they calculate everything [...] they say we can save money on the food, because they don't need food that good anyway, it is a business. (II5 L.89–91 and 100–102)

This sheds light on another link that is important to make: through the privatisation and outsourcing of reception to private companies, services have been incorporated into the reception facilities. While one argument of the cooperatives is that this guarantees services, it also raises the issues of rentability by private companies and a limited concern for the actual needs within the structure.⁵⁹ The asylum seekers that I talked to continually report that medical treatment was basically equivalent to receiving painkillers.

In this case, spatial seclusion and the delivery of services are combined in a way that makes it difficult for inhabitants to enter into contact with host societies and develop an independent relation to the environment in which they live. This seclusion on the one hand and the collective living on the other contributes to processes of 'othering'. People are hindered from creating links with the host society or formulating individual demands, and at the same time they are perceived as a homogeneous group that blends in with public narratives of the needy 'masses' that overburden welfare systems and local ecosystems.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ V. Täubig, *Totale Institution Asyl: empirische Befunde zu alltäglichen Lebensführungen in der organisierten Desintegration* (Weinheim: Juventa, 2009).

⁵⁹ J. Darling, 'Asylum in Austere Times: Instability, Privatization and Experimentation within the UK Asylum Dispersal System' (2016) 29(4) *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 483–505.

⁶⁰ Grove and Zwi, 'Our Health and Theirs'.

11.4.2. *Catch 22 – ‘Othering’ through Bureaucratic Means*

Rules and regulations structure the daily life of asylum seekers in the facilities. Social workers and operators whose job descriptions are often very vaguely defined execute and supervise daily tasks. This includes supervising the cleaning, paying out financial allowances, distributing hygienic articles and solving minor conflicts if they appear. Two examples show the ambiguity of the bureaucratic structure of the basic care system that is juxtaposed with the vague descriptions of the administrator’s task. The director of the reception facility receives additional money from the region for these amenities, which include ‘assistance’, ‘prayer rooms’, or supplementary hygienic articles such as shaving foam that should help ameliorate the life of asylum seekers in the facility. However, nowhere is it defined what this prayer room should look like and neither is there regular control over these amenities. An interviewed social worker from Austria, who acts as an external supervisor, stated the following:

The real problem are the big players, they have amenities in their contract. For example, there is the additional point of ‘assistance’. According to this, they must have a visiting frequency, depending on the amount of people that live in the camp; for example, some of them should be there five times a week to organise appointments at the doctor, help the asylum seekers with orientation and some other activities. Suddenly, many large facilities use this additional point, but they only come once a week to pay out the money. (IA3, L. 306–312)

Financial allowances are another aspect whereby people can be deprived of liberties or possibilities. For every financial allowance paid out, there are specific rules that need to be followed by the applicants; for example, 10 Euros of leisure time money each month is paid out only for a bill that describes the activity or product purchased. This may imply complicated negotiations in shops or entertainment centres to obtain the ‘right’ type of bill. In some regions, for example, in Lower Austria, this money is only available if people join together for a group activity. As the social worker explained in an interview,

That is, the 10 Euros per person per month, they don’t get it paid out directly; it is used for group activities, for example, if there is a German course the volunteer who leads the course will get the money, and if there is no course the money is left over, it’s fictional money. Our clients don’t get it; they can also go to the cinema with it, but they have to be at least three people. (L. 257–263)

Financial allowances are regularly modified to allowances in kind, such as vouchers that allow asylum seekers to buy certain goods only in one particular shop. One of the social workers in Italy first explained this in terms of a preoccupation with health standards:

It's not good to give them money because we can't be sure that they will really spend the money on food and that the quality of the food is good. Because otherwise we are all the time at the doctor [with them] – I know that it has something to do with what they eat and the quality of the food. (II7, L.70–71)

Later, she noted that nothing changed by changing to the voucher system but that it was easier for the Cooperativa because they had to follow new regulations from the regional government.

Vouchers and bills not only limit the possibility of free choice and self-determination but also have a stigmatising function. Having to ask for the 'right' type of bill means having to explain yourself to the shop keeper, so you do not just pass as a tourist. A voucher for one particular group immediately exposes the voucher holder as an asylum seeker and marks him or her as outside the norms of consumer society.

11.5. Conclusion

In the conflict over burden sharing and solidarity in the European Union, protective norms have been left to the discretion of member states.⁶¹ The directive is the smallest common denominator with which the countries must comply, with the goal of delimiting secondary movement. In most member states, collective reception is the most prominent form of accommodation, which often leads to exclusion and seclusion from the host society. As I showed through the examples from Austria and Italy in this chapter, 'othering' strategies that place asylum seekers on the margins by spatial and geographical means further strengthen seclusion and isolation. Groups of people are perceived and 'imagined' as homogeneous 'others' in contrast to a constructed consistent group of inhabitants. This might be more the case in smaller villages than in larger cities. Nevertheless, architectural aspects such as the building that is chosen to collectively host asylum seekers can also contribute to this imagining in city neighbourhoods.

Another aspect of 'othering' happens through bureaucratic practices that mark asylum seekers in the public mind as 'users' of services and goods that the host society offers them. Because

⁶¹ Lavenex, "Failing Forward" towards Which Europe?.

of systems of vouchers or the need to comply with disputable rules on bills and approvals, people cannot simply exercise their rights but become suppliants.

When services and material goods are offered exclusively in camps and facilities, people have no reason to leave the camp and have little opportunity to communicate and connect with the host society. At the same time, the quality of services and goods is at risk of not being evaluated.

As we can also observe in recent legislative changes and media discussions in Italy and Austria, the proliferation of larger facilities and camps is a Europe-wide phenomenon.⁶² As long as asylum claims are not proven ‘valid’, asylum seekers are confronted with claims of being bogus asylum seekers or economic migrants and are therefore cut off from the host society. This makes them an anonymous homogeneous group that can easily be represented as the ‘other’, culturally and economically. While for states and operators, collective accommodation has the advantage of being cheaper and allowing more control, for asylum seekers the disadvantages are high. People are constantly marked as ‘others’ by host societies and do not have the possibility to learn how to navigate the system outside the camps. Furthermore, seclusion and isolation also cut people off from support groups and impede individual relationships with members of the host society.

⁶² Kreichauf, ‘From Forced Migration to Forced Arrival’.

Paper II) Moving, Naming, Narrating. Refugees undoing Bordering Practices of Reception in Italy and France

Status: Submitted to Comparative Migration Studies

Helena Segarra. 2020. Moving, Naming, Narrating. Refugees undoing Bordering Practices of Reception in Italy and France. Submitted to Comparative Migration Studies 2023.

Abstract:

This article describes a line of scholarly work that seeks to shed light on the agency of asylum seekers in coercive reception regimes. Drawing on ethnographic research with refugees in France and Italy from 2018 to 2022, I trace the journey of three people from West Africa and show how they undo the bordering mechanism of reception. Bordering mechanisms in reception pertain to the isolation, segregation and exclusion of refugees from the host society. Refugees react to this exclusion with mobility, the negotiation of social, political and economic belonging, and the reworking of reception conditions. This paper demonstrates how individuals develop and deploy repertoires of action that, although bound/limited by the reception regime, give them agency.

Keywords: Agency; Refugees; Asylum; Italy; France; Reception practices; exclusion; belonging; bordering

Introduction

For many refugees¹ applying for asylum in Europe, it is particularly appalling to see their range of movement restricted through reception practices. Reception practices should contribute essentially to supporting asylum seekers by mitigating the external vulnerabilities, such as language barriers or a lack of legal documents, access to health care and social welfare, that put asylum seekers at risk during the migratory process in the host country (La Spina, 2021). Material reception, as described in the Reception Conditions Directive, comprises “housing, food and clothing provided in kind, or as financial allowances or in vouchers, or a combination of the three, and a daily expenses allowance” (RCD, Article 2(g)). The reception conditions further entail health care, vocational training and access to the labour market. However, structural mechanisms of reception, such as permanent temporality, collective housing in remote and isolated reception centres, in-kind material reception and de facto exclusion from the formal labour market, often reduce the agency and self-determination of asylum seekers, affecting the everyday realities of their lives (Pieper, 2008; Kreichauf, 2018; Boccagni, 2020). The missing self-determination and the alienation that refugees experience in these circumstances have a strong impact on their well-being (Willen, 2007; Grønseth *et al.*, 2016).

While reception practices are conceived to support refugees, prevent homelessness and provide access to health care (La Spina, 2021), the service and infrastructure in reception vary substantially. In particular, the collective reception infrastructure is often characterized by low reception conditions (Kreichauf, 2018). Furthermore, reception practices are conceived as temporary measures, but due to long-lasting asylum procedures, reception often becomes permanent, negatively impacting refugees’ access to economic, social and cultural rights. Scholars thus have analysed reception practices as an extended form of social, political and economic bordering mechanisms (Pieper, 2008; Kreichauf, 2018; Zill *et al.*, 2020; Segarra, 2023). The reception centre functions as a border that manifests itself spatially and on political and social levels. Reception thus can be analysed as a form and a part of bordering processes that structure the inclusion and exclusion of refugees.

Recently, scholarly work has shifted the focus to individual refugees’ narratives and experiences to better conceptualize the role of refugees’ agency in the context of asylum (Mainwaring, 2016; Squire, 2017; Strange, Squire and Lundberg, 2017) and to better

¹ I use the term ‘refugee’ referring to all individuals seeking protection in Europe regardless of their legal status. This includes individuals who are in the application process for international protection status, those already granted a status or those whose application was rejected and who are irregularized.

understand why reception and asylum policies work or fail (Bendel). Empirical studies have analysed the relationship between political struggles and the agency of (irregularized) migrants and refugees (Rygiel, 2012; Ataç, Rygiel and Stierl, 2016; Mainwaring, 2016). Others have outlined how irregularized migrants and refugees navigate different contexts and situations at the beginning of their migratory journey (Koikkalainen and Kyle, 2016; Safouane, 2019; Triandafyllidou, 2019) or when crossing borders (Rygiel, 2012; Aru, 2021).

The empirical material that informs this article is a corpus of field notes and conversations with three refugees from West Africa collected in Italy and France from 2018 to 2022. During this period, I have been in regular contact with them, following their journeys between Italy and France. Shifting the analytical focus to the experiences and agency of asylum seekers allows understanding “refugees as a social actor whose life, when traced, illuminates the interconnections of colonization, war, and global social change” (Espiritu, 2014, p. 11). The three people have been subject to Dublin procedures between Italy and France or have lost the right to material reception and thus were moving autonomously inside the country. During their trajectories, they have been subject to different legal categories that are the product of the interplay between European and national asylum policies. Labels such as “asylum seeker”, “illegal”, “sans papiers” and “Dublin returnee” also govern access to and the quality of the reception conditions to which refugees are legally entitled. These labels are underpinned by a normative judgement of the “good” refugee and “bad” economic migrant (Erdal and Oeppen, 2018), pointing to a much deeper underlying problem. For many citizens of the Global South, it is almost impossible to seek legal authorization to enter countries in the Global North. Refugee status, as one way to go about it, is an exceptionalist status that solidifies the exclusion of other migrants (Achiume, 2019; Dinbabo, Badewa and Yeboah, 2021). In reality, this often leads to fragmented and uprooted trajectories, and precarious housing and living situations, for those who do not qualify as “good” refugees. Refugees from the African continent in particular are often suspected of being “economic” migrants and thus refused refugee status. These forms of othering and exclusion, as Mayblin (2017) and Bhabra (2017) argue, are “embedded in the hegemonic epistemology of colonial modernity” (Mayblin, 2014, p. 439), deliberately ignoring the interconnectedness of Africa and Europe that is still dominated by the subordination of the former for the benefit of the latter (Achiume, 2019).

Building on these critical approaches to migration, this article describes a line of scholarly work that seeks to shed light on the agency of asylum seekers in coercive reception regimes and develops innovative research perspectives, while critically considering the colonial legacy that

underpins access to asylum in Europe. Based on the empirical material, I describe the struggle of refugees to address or reject given reception conditions through three strategies that Michel de Certeau (2003 [1984]) terms spatial tactics of resistance. These are 1) moving (as onward mobility), 2) naming (in the form of political and social engagement) and 3) narrating (speaking about their experiences). With this, they challenge the political projects of belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2006) that constitute reception practices while further negotiating their own belonging in different ways. These three strategies are embedded in exclusionary reception practices that refugees seek to address and change, individually or collectively. Furthermore, they also are framed by the legal framework, which collocates a specific idea of who is a refugee. Aspirations of self-determination are situated in this multilayered interconnectedness of law and practice. This article contributes to the academic debate on the relationship between structure and agency in the field of asylum whilst critically investigating the incompatibility of asylum regulations with the actual migration movements that situate outside “regular” migration possibilities.

The article proceeds as follows. The next section sets out the theoretical framework for analysis based on concepts drawn from border studies, literature on reception and agency. Section three outlines my methodology, followed by the three empirical accounts of Noah, Jackson and David. The fifth—and most substantive—section discusses the empirical accounts in light of the literature. I then offer some concluding remarks highlighting on collective reception practices and the precariousness that they produce.

Theorizing bordering and agency in reception

Bordering is a useful concept to study specific projects of political governance and belonging (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss and Cassidy, 2019, p. 2). Following Yuval-Davis et al. (2019), bordering is situated at the intersection of these two projects. Political governance refers here to the double meaning that bordering processes entail. They relate to the territorial borders of the state, but they also contain symbolic social and cultural lines that govern inclusionary and exclusionary practices in society. Political projects of belonging are concerned with the construction and maintenance of boundaries of a political community of belonging, separating the population into ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Yuval-Davis, 2011, p. 204). Bordering as a verb shifts the focus to the processual becoming of borders. Van Houtum and Van Naerssen (2002) initiated this “processual turn” in border studies, linking bordering to ordering and othering (Van Houtum and Van Naerssen, 2002). With this, the analytical gaze of bordering processes shifted

from the margins, the territorial border, to the centre of society and its social and political constituency (Balibar, 2009; Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013).

Reception practices are directly related to (state) borders and bordering, as they are a part of state technologies used to construct and maintain boundaries (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss and Cassidy, 2019). They are connected to specific political projects of belonging and can be analysed as sites of bordering because they carry the three aspects of bordering, ordering and othering. In particular, collective reception centres function as sites of bordering through the segregation and concentration of the refugee population in spaces of legal exceptionalism (Kreichauf, 2018). This ordering mechanism is situated in the spatial division of power and hierarchy to which specific places of reception are subjugated (Certeau, 2003; Gregory, Meusburger and Suarsana, 2015). On the one hand, this fosters the othering of certain groups; on the other hand, this othering process is a prerequisite for the emergence and conceptualization of these places of reception. Othering is a dynamic and malleable phenomenon not based on any specific “essence” of difference but rather on boundaries as such (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss and Cassidy, 2019; Paasi, 2021).

Othering dynamics frame refugees either as “victims” or as “undeserving”. Framing refugees as victims is based on a hierarchical and relational gap that portrays refugees in need of protection and European citizens as protectors. Refugees are thus in need of charitable intervention (Jackson, 2002; Ticktin, 2011). This can be seen in the state-organized approach to housing that deprives asylum seekers of making even the most banal decisions of daily life (Täubig, 2009) and the operationalization of vulnerability in the reception process (La Spina, 2021). This often overlooks that refugees also are victims of coercive state practices at borders and within the reception infrastructure (Mainwaring, 2016). Discourses that frame refugees as undeserving consider their agency (of migrating) as a threat to national social welfare systems and labour markets (Mayblin, 2020). In this frame, their claims to protection are unfounded, and they do not deserve support. Especially when they do not adhere to the envisaged bureaucratic trajectories and refuse to comply with reception conditions, they are marked as undeserving. This means that, together with the loss of material reception, there also is the normative allegation of being insufficiently grateful to the host society. This is reflected, for example, in the difficulty that people in the Dublin procedure or Dublin returnees face in accessing material reception in certain member states (Bartel, Delcroix and Pape, 2020; Picozza, 2020; Pian and Hoyez, 2022).

Refugee agency also is increasingly explored in migration studies (Carling and Collins, 2018; Triandafyllidou, 2019; Borrelli *et al.*, 2022; Etzold and Fechter, 2022). This is due to an awareness that traditional migration theories often fail to explain why migrants continue to migrate despite seemingly impossible odds (de Haas, 2021; Ruedin, 2021). The autonomy of migration (AoM) approach, for example, suggests that migration is not merely a response to political and economic pressure but rather a “constituent force in the formation of polity and social life” (Papadopoulos and Martignoni, 2014, p.38). The strength of this approach is a focus on migrants’ border struggles that analytically starts from the migrants’ viewpoint to reverse state-centred perspectives on the primacy of state control (Tsianos and Karakayali, 2010; Papadopoulos and Tsianos, 2013; Scheel, 2013; Borrelli *et al.*, 2022). Despite its analytical focus, this literature does not speak of agency per se, using other terms, such as contestation, autonomy or resistance instead (Mainwaring, 2016). Collectively, however, it addresses issues of agency by studying not only concrete acts of resistance to border and state control (Rygiel, 2011, 2012; Sanò, Storato and Della Puppa, 2021) but also practices of spatial disobedience, including the refusal to subject oneself to the conditions of material reception, such as geographical restrictions enforced by reception conditions and the Dublin Regulation (Tazzioli and Garelli, 2020).

Scholars studying the agency of asylum seekers and illegalized migrants have criticized the AoM approach for insufficiently considering the exclusionary and violent effects of border and reception regimes, particularly for irregularized and asylum-seeking individuals (Squire, 2017). Citta Mainwaring (2016) and Vicky Squire (2017) conceptualize migrants’ agency in irregular and fragmented migration trajectories to demonstrate how migrants, in a highly constrained and coercive asylum regime, develop resistance and resilience or rework their living situations and migration trajectories in a field marked by constraints and uncertainty (Mainwaring, 2016; Squire, 2017). Michel de Certeau (2003 [1984]) conceptualizes the contestation of spatial domination as spatial tactics that reappropriate or contest space through techniques of sociocultural reproduction such as moving, walking, naming and narrating (Certeau, 2003; Low, 2016, p. 19). From a microlevel perspective, this entails not only the ability to navigate overarching state power in the form of asylum and border regimes but also “daily, meticulous, and dispersed procedures of disciplining social bodies and discursively ascribing subjectivities”, as in the case of reception practices (Safouane, Jünemann and Götsche in Borrelli *et al.*, 2022, p. 1144). Agency thus not only refers to acts of resistance to these procedures but also to accepting them, adjusting to them or reproducing dominant norms and

expectations (of deservingness) of the host society (Safouane, 2019; Boccagni, 2020; Steigemann and Misselwitz, 2020).

Methods

To study bordering that manifests in day-to-day reception practices and resistance to these practices, ethnographic methods are most apt. Ethnographic tools interested in daily life experiences produce “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973), which allow us to depart from the universal label “asylum seeker” or “refugee” to investigate how individuals actually live under these labels and their reception (Bragg, 2022). Focusing on migrants’ narratives and their subjective modes of expression constitutes a powerful counternarrative to the traditional representation of migration as unidirectional (De Genova, 2017). The ethnographic fieldwork that informs this paper was carried out nonconsecutively in Italy from spring 2018 to winter 2019 and in France from summer 2018 to summer 2022. During this time, I met the three men from West Africa (Ghana, Senegal, Ivory Coast) and stayed in contact with them until 2022 via WhatsApp and phone calls. I met all three individuals through nongovernmental organizations and civil society associations that support asylum seekers and migrants in their struggle for social rights in the respective countries. I first contacted the organizations with my research project; if there were enough resources and interest, I visited their localities. In the locality of the organization, I approached my interlocutors, presenting myself as a researcher interested in reception conditions, and asked them whether they were interested in talking to me about their situation in the reception system, exchanging numbers if they agreed. When contact was maintained and a second meeting organized, I brought a consent form written in English or French, reading it to them and letting them sign it. Throughout the contact, I regularly informed the three individuals on the progress of this project.

For conversations with my interlocutors, I used the “go along” method (Kusenbach, 2016). Conversations took place while walking around in the city or sitting in parks. The choice of meeting places was left to my interlocutors, allowing them to speak in what they saw as safe and comfortable environments. Conversations were not recorded, but I took notes during and after the meetings. Later in our relationships, all three agreed to a recorded interview. Two occurred in December 2018 in Italy and one in May 2022 in France. The corpus of material thus consists of extensive field notes from each meeting, WhatsApp messages, and the three recorded interviews. This corpus was anonymized and analysed in a coding group with two sociologists and an anthropologist using grounded theory methods (Strauss and Corbin, 1997).

In the following chapter, I first introduce the three accounts of Noah, Jackson and David before situating the empirical material within the theoretical approach.

Noah

When I first met Noah², a then 25-year-old asylum seeker from Ivory Coast, in May 2018 in Padua, he seemed fairly relaxed. For almost a year, he had been living in a medium-size reception centre in the city of Padua in northern Italy. He had been transferred there after 17 months of living in an extraordinary reception centre (CAS), an assembly of former military barracks in the small village of Bagnoli di Sopra. The extraordinary reception infrastructure had been implemented in Italy as a temporary emergency measure in response to the so-called North African emergency in 2011 and had been formalized through legislative decree No. 142/2015, which implemented the Reception Conditions Directive. The CAS gained notoriety for being very overcrowded and for its particularly low-quality reception. The managing organization had gained the contract in April 2017 with the cheapest offer of 23,32 Euros per migrant per day. Later, both the old and the new contractors were involved in fraud scandals related to the management of the centre, being accused of generating money for their own benefit at the expense of the people accommodated (Di Nicolas, 2018; Lava, 2019; Lucchin, 2019). Although the Italian reception infrastructure ranges across a wide variety of sizes and qualities of reception, many extraordinary reception centres are known for low living standards and inadequate reception conditions (Novak, 2019).

The Italian reception system is guided by a top-down distribution mechanism, from the national to the regional and finally to the municipal level. If municipalities do not engage in the distribution mechanism voluntarily, prefects may open extraordinary reception centres without prior consultation with the municipality. The opening of the CAS in Bagnoli di Sopra was a consequence of this national distribution mechanism. Its opening was enforced in 2015 by the Italian Ministry of the Interior and the prefect of the region without prior consultation with the municipality. Especially in cases where prefects bypass local municipalities to enforce the opening, asylum seekers have a particularly difficult standing vis-à-vis the municipality, and social interaction is challenging. Nobody wanted this camp to exist; the mayor of the small village with approximately 3400 inhabitants, the inhabitants of the village and the refugees themselves all protested against the extraordinary reception centre in one way or another. The forceful allocation of refugees in Bagnoli fuelled negative connotations and a “territorial

² All names have been anonymized.

stigmatization” (Wacquant, 2007) of the centre itself, sensed by the migrants living in the CAS by stares and dismissive reactions of passersby and neighbours.

Noah had been transferred to Padua after protests of inhabitants over the camp, and its reception conditions gained media attention in February 2018 (PadovaOggi, 2018). He was active in the protests and met some activists from Padua who had come to support the migrants. He, and an activist who had become his friend, assumed that these connections and his activism were the reasons for his transfer. Being accommodated in Padua, in a medium-size accommodation centre, improved his quality of life. Noah had met a woman from Ivory Coast who also was applying for asylum, and she had become pregnant. He seemed well integrated within the activist networks. In Ivory Coast, he had been working as a mechanic, and he had managed twice to be hired in Padua, once by a mechanic and once in a company that produced natural rubber pieces for industrial use. However, both contracts were cancelled because of his insecure status as an asylum seeker. One afternoon we met at my place, as Noah had proposed to cook an Ivorian dish for me. We had met a few times before in the city at the place where the activists met, and we had spoken about many personal issues. While he was already well versed in Italian, we spoke French, a language he had grown up with and which allowed him to express himself in more depth. During this conversation, while a fish was frying in the kitchen, I actually realized that I had evaluated his situation wrongly. In this conversation, he told me that he had received a negative appeal decision from the civil court and that he was scared about the future, especially because he didn’t want his child to be born here, where he had no more possibilities, no job and no papers. He was very frustrated about his situation, emphasizing his initial idea to make a life in Italy and all the efforts he had put into learning the language and getting hired, but being constantly subjected to a political system that hampered serious forms of participation in the host society. Despite his compliance with the reception system, his successful transfer and the efforts he had put into integrating into Italian society, he was now without perspective and without housing. He felt he had no choice but to continue to migrate to France with his pregnant wife, despite the predicaments of the Dublin Regulation.

In autumn 2018, I met Noah again, in Paris. He brought me to the hospital to meet his wife and newborn son. In France, Noah had again complied with all requirements of the reception system, but it turned out that his living conditions were still perilous because of the various dispersal mechanisms that force people to leave their allotted accommodation once they have lost their entitlements. Since 2015, the French reception system has featured a multitude of different reception facilities that are mostly organized along legal categories that determine

access to and the quality of material reception (Slama, 2018). Upon arrival, he and his young family were placed in the Dublin procedure and accommodated at Porte d'Orléans in Paris in a room of a former hotel without any possibility to cook or receive visitors. Asylum seekers in the Dublin procedure do not have access to regular accommodation. Most often, if they are housed, they stay in facilities called CAO³ or PRAHDA⁴. In either facility, residence requirements can be imposed. After six months, Noah received a deportation notice that he could not comply with, due to the hospitalization of his son. They lost their right to material reception. Time passed, no further action was taken, and the family waited for another year, moving several times from informal housing to informal housing, to be able to lodge a regular asylum claim in France. In early 2020, a regular asylum procedure was opened, and they were transferred to Lyon, where they stayed in a CADA⁵, a regular reception centre. In autumn 2020, his second son was born. A year later, in November 2021, they received a negative decision, which meant that they were no longer eligible for regular reception and had to move out. He was now a so-called “sans papiers”. They went back to Paris, sleeping in hotel rooms and emergency night shelters, until they were oriented towards an emergency shelter in Tournan-en-Brie, 35 km from Paris, only to be dispersed again a few weeks later and lodged in a CAO⁶ closer to Paris. This odyssey had clearly left its mark on Noah's morale. It is hard for the kids, Noah told me: “My child keeps asking me where we live and where the house is. Now it's a habit for him, he sleeps where he is. That is sad for me, I tell myself that this is not possible” (Conversation, Noah, April 2022). In particular, Noah, who had been well integrated in the activist networks in Padua, struggled with the individualization and isolation he experienced in the French reception system. He still felt regret for having left Italy in 2018, while at the same time emphasizing that choices must be made and seeing no alternative to this decision.

Jackson

In July 2018, I met Jackson, a Ghanaian man in his late 30s, in Palermo, the capital city of the province of Sicily. We met in the context of a festival, where he, as a member of a local NGO, was invited as a speaker. He had arrived in Italy in 2014, making his way from Ghana to Sicily, where he was accommodated in a former hotel that also was part of the extraordinary reception infrastructure. There were approximately 150 people living in the centre in a remote location in

³ CAO - Centre d'accueil et d'orientation/accommodation and orientation centre

⁴ PRAHDA - Programme d'accueil et d'hébergement des demandeurs d'asile/Accommodation program for asylum seekers

⁵ CADA - Centre d'accueil pour demandeurs d'asile

⁶ CAO - Centre d'accueil et d'orientation

the Sicilian countryside, 25 minutes on foot above the nearest village. From there, the only public transport available was a school bus that connected the village with the next, bigger town. As in the CAS in Bagnoli, all services, food, medical treatment and language courses were provided inside the camp. Inhabitants thus had no reason, or so the operators argued, to leave the centre. In many cases, the reception infrastructure is organized in such a way that asylum seekers are deprived of almost all decision-making competences. They cannot decide what to eat, when to eat, which doctor to see, which lawyer to speak to, whom to meet, where to go and so forth. All spheres of life merge in one space, disrupting time, biographies and the social order of action and agency (Goffman, 2016; Lochner and Täubig, 2019). However, making decisions about one's own life is an essential component of being human and having a life, and these subjective experiences are profoundly shaped by "time, space, embodiment, sociality, and self" (Willen, 2007, p. 10). The incapacitation of asylum seekers in such a reception infrastructure can thus be an alienating experience and a perceived threat to feeling alive (Willen, 2007; Täubig, 2009).

This was the case for Jackson, who described the place as lethargic, "a morbid still life", removed from time and space, where people get a language course once a week to integrate into a society that they have never seen and are kept away from. Twice a week, the staff came and checked the condition of the rooms and the presence of the refugees. He intervened with them to be transferred to a camp closer to the city, but without success. Jackson decided to leave for Palermo after four months. With this move, he lost his rights to material reception.

He started to go back and forth between Sicily and Calabria to work undocumented in agriculture to cover his living expenses. While for him working was a way to assume his independence and financial autonomy, he was at the same time subjugated to the exploitative working conditions generated by the linkage between (irregular) migration and agrocaptalism in Italy (Corrado and Palumbo, 2022; Dines, 2022). "People there are treated really bad", he told me, "They work every day, sometimes almost 12 hours, no matter if it is cold or hot, too cold or too hot, it is really no life" (Interview, Jackson, December 2018). In our conversations, he was particularly concerned and upset about the amount of abandoned land in the south of Italy—fertile land from expropriated members of the mafia or inherited land abandoned on transfer to another generation. In December 2019, he received a negative appeal decision.

Jackson comes from a family that owns land in Ghana; he has worked on his father's fields and gained expertise. In Italy, he was well connected with local NGOs and politically active. He

worked as a translator for other refugees from Ghana who did not speak English or Italian. However, his real passion was the land that could be cultivated all around the south of Italy. Many times, together with cooperatives and activists, he had tried to obtain access to land by intervening in local communities, but he was not successful because of his legal status and the difficult political situation there. In the interview, he resumed:

Before we left our countries to the West, our first thought was to come to the West so that we can become useful to some societies. But we only arrive here to realize that the western world also doesn't want us or pretends that we are not useful. I may not like Europe, but you can't just go back with the failures, the humanitarian rejections, the pains of your colour abuse, empty hands and with zero experience. Because of this, although people know very well that they have no chance in Europe, still prefer to die here than go back with shame. (Interview Jackson, December 2018)

The botanic garden was Jackson's favourite place in the city when he was not somewhere in the countryside working. We met and walked there a few times; he showed me his favourite trees and flowers and explained to me how to make them grow. We sat in the shade of big trees and took photos of their huge rootage sticking out. The botanic garden seems to be a metaphor for a certain kind of immaterial wealth, of potentiality and growth, the possibility of developing and cultivating one's own skills, that stands in contrast to the abandoned land and unharvested fruits that decay over time. The anger he expressed in the interview and the disappointment of aspirations and experiences is an expression of his own abandonment, where competences and capacities lie idle, blocked by a political system that impeded his involvement in society while providing no possibility of return.

David

David, a 30-year-old man from Senegal who had arrived in Italy in 2014, continued his way to France without applying for asylum in Italy, even though he had been fingerprinted there. In France, he wanted to join friends and acquaintances from Senegal, and he felt more comfortable speaking French. As a healthy single man coming from Italy, he had no chance to be accommodated in the French reception system. This was communicated to him clearly when he first arrived in Paris, although under the Dublin procedure, he would have had the right to be accommodated at least in emergency reception. However, moving from one country to another or making one's way to a specific destination is negatively connoted as "asylum shopping" and

thus morally and economically sanctioned (Slama, 2018; Tazzioli and Garelli, 2020). David's experience as a "Dubliner" was characterized by the structural abandonment that affects many asylum seekers and especially people moving between member states. Abandonment here is used as an organizing principle by the state that is employed to deny certain groups regular reception or even reception at all (Aru, 2021). These dynamics are particularly evident in Paris, where formal and informal reception spaces coexist and the government has aimed to allocate refugees across the national territory through the establishment of a variety of different types of reception centres (Slama, 2020).

David spent his time in Paris from autumn 2014 to early spring 2015 in squats and informal encampments before being placed in administrative detention for 48 h and then returned to Italy. He was transferred to Milan, where he continued to live in a squat for a few months before he was able to submit an asylum application. After a long period of waiting and insecure housing conditions, he was transferred to the CAS in Bagnoli, where I met him together with Noah and a few other men. He did not like to speak much about his experiences in France; he often said to me that he had to come to terms with his return to Italy and was happy to have a place in the reception system, after being homeless for almost a year. In Padua, together with Noah, he was connected to local associations supporting refugees. In spring 2018, when I met him for the first time, he told me about the demonstrations he had attended in Milan and Rome. He spoke about the empowering feelings of being at the demonstration and feeling overwhelmed by the power of collective claim-making. However, he was critical and even disappointed about the outcome, or rather that nothing changed. At that time, he had worked around Padua picking fruits. He was frustrated because often he did not receive the money that was promised after a workday. One afternoon in Padua, we also discussed the ambivalent position of the trade unions that were present at the demonstrations. "They demand a lot, also for us, which is great, but sometimes I don't know if they want to protect themselves or us..." he told me in this conversation. Later, in June 2018, I visited him in Bagnoli. Normally, external people would not be allowed to enter the camp, but because the chief operator did not want us to sit in front of the camp, he let us into the entrance yard to sit on a wooden bank. While David showed me some music he liked, he gave me, with a low voice, a rough explanation about the functioning of each building, the dorms, the staff rooms, the kitchen and dining spaces all situated in different barracks. We observe some of the staff as they stand together and talk. "If you need something," he says, "you need to know who you talk to. There are those that take you seriously and those that do not, and they all have affinities. Now I know with whom I can

negotiate certain things and who I rather have to avoid” (Conversation, David, June 2018). At the end of 2018, the CAS in Bagnoli was closed, and David was transferred to another CAS, on the outskirts of Padua. At the same time, the governing right-wing Lega party passed legislative decree No. 132/2018, which reduced the allocated budget for the reception system from 32-34 Euros per migrant per day to 19-26 Euros, which made it difficult for municipalities and smaller operators to maintain their services, leading to a further deterioration of reception conditions (Avallone, 2021). Although living closer to the city now, David often sent me pictures and wrote to me via WhatsApp. He described the living conditions as extremely hard and oppressive. He was furious about the bad quality of food, leaking sinks and the fact that the main entrance of his CAS, a huge metal door, was locked at 10 pm. This, he told me, I should make public in my research. Since our last meeting in November 2019, we have regularly conversed through WhatsApp. All this time, he continued to work on the informal labour market and engaged in various small educational projects, as he calls them, so he can ask for a residence permit after living in Italy for 10 years, as he hopes for regularization through work.

Discussion

Through these empirical accounts, my intention was to show how all three trajectories are embedded in the uneven implementation of EU regulations and coercive national asylum regimes that exclude refugees and mark them as “Others” in various ways. The refugees’ decisions are informed by the experiences they encounter within national frameworks of reception embedded in the framework of the CEAS. Italy is both a country of transit and a country of destination. It is the country with the most incoming Dublin requests because of its geographical location at the southern Mediterranean edge of Europe. It also is one of the main recipients of Dublin returnees (Eurostat, 2022). At the same time, it is a country of asylum and immigration, where people aspire to make a living and where that sometimes seems more permeable, by granting protection or regularizing migrants through the labour market (Picozza, 2020; Picum, 2020; Ambrosini, 2023). France is commonly referred to as a country of destination and had for a long time a relatively liberal approach to asylum and citizenship (Fassin, 2005; May, 2016). Its historical, political and economic interconnectedness with many African countries stems from its colonial legacy and is reflected in its immigration policies and the development of “sans papiers” movements (Achille, Forsdick and Moudileno, 2020). France has taken a particularly restrictive position towards people in the Dublin procedure, who are excluded from regular reception in an attempt to dissuade them from coming to France in the first place (Slama, 2018; Montel, 2021). France and Italy have an ongoing dispute over who

must take responsibility for refugees in the Mediterranean Sea and at the French–Italian border. The disputes are a striking example of how asylum is discursively framed as a burden and how member states abdicate their (historical and political) responsibility vis-à-vis refugees (Willsher, 2019). In aggregation, refugee movements can be powerful political acts that shape and challenge member state relations. However, they also can be co-opted by these states to increase practices of control, immobilization and abandonment, as is the case at the Italian–French border (Colombeau, 2019).

These bordering practices that manifest in reception are part of political projects of belonging that constitute a fundamental differentiation between “us” and “them”. This differentiation is tightly related to the colonial and imperial legacies of both Italy and France. Refugees can undo or at least mitigate these bordering practices through mobility. Mobility is thus a way to undo borders, bordering and injustice, but it also is a way to negotiate belonging as a matter of being there, becoming a part and getting a part. Mobility can mean moving within the country following economic or other opportunities that allow them to ensure a living or create networks and social ties of support (Nimführ and Sesay, 2019). Onward mobility also means moving from one country to another because of existing social ties or because of a negative asylum decision. Mobility is therefore also a manifestation of existence, of being, and the will to stay (in Europe). For the people themselves, the question of asylum is secondary, but it also is about a just distribution of resources in the sense of distributive and corrective justice that pertain to the legacies of colonialism (Achiume, 2019). The category of asylum seeker is perceived as a burden:

It is the European system that makes asylum seekers out of us. It is your creation, your bureaucratic category, and we don't know what to do with it. For us, it doesn't mean anything. We don't see each other, ourselves like that until you put it over us. Now we need your help, the help of Europeans to entangle the bureaucratic and alienating identity that you have given to us. (Interview, Jackson, December 2018)

I see the people here in France, and I see that I am apart. Because of the papers, I feel that I am not human; I know very well that I am a human, but the policies that they put into practice with the papers, sometimes I feel that I am not a human being. I didn't do anything wrong. I came here, I was patient, I respected everything they told me, and now you don't have to work when you are in the asylum, you don't have to do this or that. (Interview, Noah, May 2022)

Negotiations of belonging also happen across social, political and economic dimensions that are interrelated. The informal labour market has for all three men represented a form of access that reflects differential inclusion (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2012; Ataç and Rosenberger, 2013). They are included as essential workers in the informal labour market (Ramírez *et al.*, 2021), but they have been excluded from political rights. Here, the negotiation of economic belonging is inherently ambivalent, as work allows an individual to pursue a certain kind of (financial) autonomy, whereas at the same time he or she often is subjugated to forms of exploitation and coercion. Furthermore, work, as precarious as it is, also is connected to concepts of deservingness that structure access to societal belonging (Chauvin and Garcés-Mascreñas, 2014; Ambrosini, 2023).

At the same time, they challenge their political exclusion through political activism that is not only empowering because of the feeling of not being alone but also allows them to formulate claims and affirm their existence vis-à-vis political systems that tend to neglect their needs. Finally, they also undo seclusion and segregation of collective reception through relationships such as friendships and volunteer engagements that allow them to narrate their perspectives and feel a social and emotional affirmation of their existence. In Noah's and David's trajectories, the empowerment that can come from political action and connectivity is particularly visible. Their involvement in the activist networks in Padua gave them strength and stability. Despite the constraints of immobilization, they were able to put down roots locally. Jackson also was well connected in activist networks in Palermo and felt a certain form of collectivization that gave him support. Agriculture, land and working conditions were not only topics relevant for his (financial) survival outside the reception system but also became the driving force of his political activism. However, this is juxtaposed with feelings of disempowerment, when social and political engagement is lost, through onward movement and dispersal.

The microlevel perspective shows how refugees and irregular migrants are untethered geographically and can quickly be caught between their refugee status and illegality, highlighting how labels and policies are in tension with migratory practices, lived realities and aspirations of refugees (Picozza, 2020). To overcome these tensions, all three men have engaged in the reworking of the various reception conditions they have found themselves in throughout their trajectories. They have engaged with staff in negotiations over the daily, meticulous, and dispersed procedures that they have encountered in reception or by speaking

out about the procedures that are intended to discipline them in day-to-day practices. This alienating experience can lead to lethargic withdrawal, as Jackson depicts in his narration. Resistance through collective (political) action or the abandonment of reception can be a way to assert control and agency over this lived experience but entails the risk of homelessness and illegalization.

Disempowering elements of reception practices, such as immobilization, segregation, dispersal, abandonment, and the loss of self-determination, are juxtaposed by tactics of spatial resistance that allow refugees to overcome or undo these bordering mechanisms of reception. The context in which they develop their repertoires of action are marked by coercion, constraints and uncertainty. Decisions are disrupted by courts and their enforcement, as in the case of David, where a return decision overturned his initial plans to stay in France, or in the case of Noah, where the negative asylum decision in Italy forced him to make new decisions and reimagine his trajectory. It becomes clear that individuals progressively change and are forced to change their plans along their trajectories. With this, the repertoire of acts and agency changes as well. New strategies are developed, while others are abandoned, to adapt to new situations. Moments of conscious decision-making alternate with instances of trial and error, and moments where decisions are enforced on your behalf and choices are extremely limited. The described strategies may work well in one instance but fail to provide a convenient solution in another situation.

Conclusion

This research has demonstrated how refugees develop strategies of agency and resistance to cope with the bordering mechanisms of reception. Reception practices in Italy and France vary substantially, relating to geographical positions and historically developed reception systems. In both countries, reception has deteriorated in recent years due to new legislation that has introduced financial cuts and other control-oriented mechanisms (Slama, 2020; Avallone, 2021). It is clear that refugees need support at the moment of arrival to navigate the bureaucratic system and to find orientation and connection, but as the empirical material shows here, European and national reception policies are often inadequate. Narratives of vulnerability, deservingness and charity impose the idea that refugees must accept every type of reception anywhere and ignore individual needs and actual challenges that refugees may be confronting during their asylum procedure (Smith and Waite, 2019). The colonial underpinnings of asylum and inhumane reception practices characterized by increased financial cuts for reception, a

systematic shortage of reception capacities but also policies that focus on control and dispersal, make reception a space that creates precarity and hinders partaking.

This paper gives new insights into ways in which people in reception assert their agency through mobility, the negotiation of political, economic and social belonging, and the reworking of reception conditions. They refuse, they endure, and they comply (with) material reception conditions and the normative expectations connected to them. Decisions and movements are made, undone and remade. Instances of active decision-making and instances of enduring the decisions of courts and administrators alternate, disrupting and shaping trajectories. At the same time, individuals try to make sense of their experiences and adapt to their disrupted journeys and the uncertain future (Willen, 2007; Picozza, 2020). All my interlocutors spoke of fatigue and hardship. In their attempts to regain agency and normality, they often felt stuck and overwhelmed by bureaucratic procedures and the constraints of the coercive reception infrastructure. Despite this, they developed a repertoire of agency that was not guided by an overarching (economic or political) rationale but by a need and will to make their life as good as possible for themselves and their families or simply to survive. Based on this, further research could inquire in more detail into the correlation between the different types of acts and agency in the context of the reception infrastructure or focus on the decision-making processes that precede these acts.

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Empirical Material:

Conversation, David, June 2018 (Padua)

Conversation, David, June 2018 (Bagnoli)

Conversation, Noah, April 2022 (Paris)

Interview, Noah, May 2022 (Stans)

Interview, Jackson, December 2018 (Palermo)

Paper III) Politics of Adjustment. Rural Mayors and the Reception of Refugees.

With Miriam Haselbacher (Regarding my contribution to this co-authored paper see Annex I)

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Abstract

This article approaches the process of opening accommodation centres from the perspective of mayors in rural municipalities. Although the allocation and accommodation of refugees is a competence of the nation-state, it is in the realm of municipalities where reception policies transform into social practices. Mayors have to negotiate socio-political conflicts on the vertical and horizontal dimensions against the background of uneven decision-making structures stemming from multi-governance arrangements and conflicting claims of local citizens. Through qualitative interviews with mayors from rural municipalities in four European countries (Austria, France, Germany and Italy), we show that even though national asylum systems differ, mayors assume similar handling strategies to defuse conflicts and increase acceptance. We introduce the concept of 'politics of adjustment' to describe the simultaneous process of people adapting to a new situation as well as the alteration of implementation practices according to the needs of the municipality. Mayors modify the tight legal framework of reception policies to find a local consensus on accommodation, whilst steering the socio-political process of demarcation and othering that leaves imaginaries on rural whiteness and homogeneity unchallenged.

Keywords: reception policies; multilevel governance; mayors; adjustment; rural areas

1. Introduction

The allocation and reception of refugees¹ in the European Union has triggered various discussions in recent years around questions of burden-sharing between member states as well as accommodation practices within them (Weinar et al., 2018). Both debates – the geographical distribution of refugees and reception conditions – have recurred at the local level. The so-called local turn in migration and integration research draws attention to locally developed policies as well as to gaps between (national) policy goals and (local) outcomes (Adam & Caponio, 2018; Caponio & Borkert, 2010; Caponio & Jones-Correa, 2018; Scholten & Penninx, 2016; Zapata-Barrero et al., 2017). Although migration policymaking remains a core competence of the nation-state, it is at the level of municipalities that political decisions transform into social practices and where difference and belonging are constructed in locally specific ways (Hoekstra, 2018; Yuval-Davis, 2006, 2007). This is of relevance when looking at the implementation of accommodation centres as they are situated on the territory of the municipality. While some studies have highlighted the ability of the local level to challenge restrictive national frameworks and develop more inclusionary and liberal policies (Cohen, 2018; Feischmidt et al., 2019), other studies have shown how xenophobic attitudes prevail and exclusionary mechanisms of reception systems are reinforced (Ambrosini, 2013; Castelli Gattinara, 2018).

Scholarship in migration and integration research has focused primarily on the role of cities and urban regions (Bauder, 2017; Caponio et al., 2019; Oomen et al., 2016) while the body of literature on rural and peripheral areas is still developing (Glorius, 2017; Kordel et al., 2018; Larsen, 2011; Miellet, 2019; Schammann et al., 2020; Whyte et al., 2018). In view of the various facets of localness, this paper seeks to shed light on the role of mayors in the process of opening accommodation centres for refugees in rural municipalities. Rural areas differ from cities in three important aspects: (1) they often have no or little infrastructure for and prior knowledge of refugee reception; (2) local policymaking is characterized by a high degree of personalization, pointing to the political relevance of the role of the mayor; and last but not least (3) rurality as a sociospatial imaginary is frequently constructed as a culturally homogenous

¹ We use the term ‘refugee’ to refer to all individuals seeking protection regardless of their legal status. Thus, it includes individuals whose application for international protection is still pending, those already granted a status or those whose application was rejected and who are illegalized.

space characterized by neighbourliness and tranquillity that serves as the antithesis of the heterogeneous and disordered city (Panelli et al., 2009).

In rural municipalities, the mayor acts as a central node in the process of opening an accommodation centre. S/he is at the intersection between local demands and administrative tasks on the one hand (the horizontal dimension) and regional and national politics on the other (the vertical dimension). In this context, the role of mayors in rural municipalities is particularly interesting as they act both as municipal agents holding political office, and as inhabitants of the municipality who are directly confronted by changes in the neighbourhood and are possibly acquainted with practically everyone in the municipality. In the person of the mayor, horizontal and vertical conflicts of interest converge, and mayors have to mediate opposing demands of the electorate for or against the reception of refugees as well as political obligations embedded in uneven decision-making structures.

Through a comparative, qualitative research on rural municipalities in four European countries, Austria, France, Germany and Italy, we identify similarities in dealing with the opening of an accommodation centre despite national differences and show that even though national asylum systems differ, rural mayors adopt similar handling strategies. We present the five handling strategies that take place on two dimensions (vertical and horizontal) in the empirical section of the paper and introduce them under the concept of politics of adjustment. We understand adjustment as a two-way process that considers the ability of local actors to adapt to a new situation while at the same time modifying framework conditions in local terms. In this process of socio-political change, mayors make use of their capacity to resolve conflicts, facilitating the acceptance of moderate changes in community life while ensuring the continued integrity of rural areas. These actions target solely the citizens of the municipality and do not address the needs of refugees.

Based on our material, we argue that restrictive and liberal approaches in dealing with the opening of an accommodation centre ought not to be pictured as a dichotomy but as concurrent and cross-fertilizing. Rural municipalities only very marginally overstep their jurisdictional boundaries and, although taking a critical stance on certain topics, comply largely with state measures and reinforce disintegrative characteristics of the centre while demanding the inclusion of a limited number of refugees. The concept of adjustment thus draws on literature that talks of local immigrant policies as being ‘specific in their approach of problem solving’

(Zapata-Barrero et al., 2017, p. 3) and on the one that analyses the legal, social and political limits of local reception processes (Glorius, 2017; Kreichauf, 2018).

2. Identifying the role of mayors in rural reception processes

To answer the research question on how rural mayors have dealt with the opening of an accommodation centre and how they have navigated vertical and horizontal conflicts of interest, we build on three strands of theory: (1) we delineate particularities of local level migration policymaking from a multilevel governance perspective; (2) we identify the role of mayors as they navigate these conflicts; and (3) we outline rural reception realities to elucidate the characteristics of the specific context in which mayors deal with the opening of an accommodation centre.

2.1. The local level in a multilevel governance structure

Regardless of the political system, the field of asylum and migration policies in all European member states is characterized by a high degree of centralization, excluding the local level from the decision-making process. While regulations on aspects such as distribution mechanisms and forms of accommodation are enacted by national and state governments, their implementation draws on local governance structures that enjoin different actors from the governmental and non-governmental domain. In practice, this means that municipalities have a limited scope of action when it comes to decision-making whilst being confronted with a variety of different actors with conflicting interests. On a vertical dimension, multilevel governance pertains to conflicting interests of the local, the regional, the national and the supra-national (Scholten & Penninx, 2016).

Scholars in migration and integration research have pointed out options of locally developed migration policies despite centralized power relations (Caponio & Borkert, 2010; Filomeno, 2017). For example, studies that have analyzed municipal activism on illegalized or irregular migrants reveal that the local level should not be reduced to a mere executive force (Doomernik & Glorius, 2016; Kos et al., 2016; Spencer & Delvino, 2019). In the context of little legal flexibility and a high degree of centralization, municipalities make use of jurisdictional and institutional gaps, discretionary powers, or deliberately overstep jurisdictional boundaries and openly challenge supra-local authorities. It is this dissonance between policy formulation and its implementation that lies at the core of research on local level policies, and which frequently results in processes of decoupling (Scholten, 2016).

Within the domain of the municipality, local policymakers are situated in a relationship with local governmental actors, such as citizens, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), service providers and others (Campomori & Caponio, 2017). This diversification of actors within the field of reception policies increases the complexity of local modes of governance. Multiple public and private actors are involved, conjoining vertical and horizontal interests (Schiller, 2018). Responsibility is shifted ‘out’ and ‘down’ (Campomori & Caponio, 2017). In other words, competences, power and knowledge are stratified, and decision-making authority is contested. State and non-state actors are interconnected and define the parameters of local reception policies (Schiller, 2018). In this regard, the mayor acts as nodal point, balancing different interests in a field of unequal power relations.

2.2. The mayor at the intersection of vertical and horizontal interests

The lack of decision-making power in asylum policies may cause problems for mayors and their local governments in terms of autonomy, accountability and sustainability. Mayors must account to their voters while at the same time their scope of action is limited by the government’s regulations (Bealey & Johnson, 1999). This situates the mayor in a field of tension between political and moral obligations, representation and responsiveness to his/her own community as well as personal preferences. Mayors operate in this field of tension by (1) representing the needs, demands and concerns of the municipality; and (2) responding to needs, demands and concerns of citizens. Here, a conflict arises between the maintenance of power and the exercise of power (Copus, 2010).

The local political level tends to invite more trust and legitimacy than the regional or national one, a fact explained by the proximity of the electorate to its political representatives and political projects (Dahl & Tufte, 1973; Denters et al., 2014; Fitzgerald & Wolak, 2016). Local politicians spend more time in meeting citizens and foster modes of direct participation in the decisionmaking process (Haus & Sweeting, 2006). In particular, the mayor is often associated with a high level of charisma and leadership qualities (Le Bart, 2003; Headlam & Hepburn, 2017). This high degree of personalization in local politics is supported by the fact that local politicians tend to be perceived as ‘non-political’ and candidates often establish a non-partisan profile (Fallend, 2006; Magnier, 2006). This is even more true for small and rural municipalities, as rural decision-making processes are different from those in urban areas: while policymakers in cities rely on formal bureaucratic structures with a significant distance to their

citizens, in smallscale environments it is not possible to compartmentalize decisions in distinct spheres, instead political and administrative tasks merge (Jacob et al., 2008).

Research has illustrated the complexity of administrative practice and the inevitability of value conflicts in public administration (Wagenaar, 1999, 2004). Here, value conflicts not only pertain to the political orientation of the mayor but reflect his/her social embeddedness in the municipality and his/her affectedness as a possible neighbour of the accommodation centre. In a critical moment, such as the opening of an accommodation centre, the mayor navigates the two ends in trying to meet the needs of his electorate, exercising decisional and administrative power on how to manage the situation and balance personal preferences. To do so, mayors develop a range of strategies geared towards the vertical and the horizontal level to adjust to the new situation.

2.3.Reception realities in rural regions

Material reception conditions define the spatial, temporal and social limits of accommodation centres and have frequently been described as disintegrating and structurally exclusionary (Collyer et al., 2020; Haselbacher & Hattmannsdorfer, 2018; Kreichauf, 2018; Täubig, 2009). The specific arrangement of national asylum laws results in the forced inactivity of refugees, who spend an indefinite length of time waiting for the decision on their asylum application. In practice, access to the labour market and to education or training are reserved for successful applicants of international protection (Kreichauf, 2018). Structural barriers embedded in the legal and administrative framework of the accommodation centre impede active participation in community life. For asylum-seeking refugees, this results in a social standing somewhere between (new) members of the community and temporary guests that are not genuinely associated with the municipality.

Studies on rural reception realities have shown how the lack of institutions and infrastructure makes access to services and mobility key issues in counterbalancing the seclusion of rural geographies (Glorius, 2017; Scheibelhofer & Luimpöck, 2016; Weidinger et al., 2019). Local integration measures in rural contexts further govern the inclusion and exclusion of refugees in the municipality (Adam & Caponio, 2018; Haselbacher, 2019; Kos et al., 2016). On the one hand, refugees are considerably more dependent on services offered by the local community as other networks they could turn to are missing. On the other hand, rural municipalities, in cooperation with other local actors, provide services that go beyond the regular scope, for example, driving services, language courses, etc. In contrast to cities, rural municipalities

cannot resort to prior knowledge and experiences in refugee reception, therefore mayors cannot rely on existing infrastructure but have to build these infrastructures on short notice. Moreover, 'rural' as a socially constructed category often goes along with the idea of a homogeneous autochthone population in contrast to (racialized) newcomers. Local strategies of boundary drawing that aim to preserve an imagined homogenous rural community are deeply rooted in the construction and the preservation of whiteness (Hubbard, 2005a, 2005b; Panelli et al., 2009) even when new dynamics are generally welcomed (Woods, 2018). This self/other divide is present in the way in which local politicians, along with their electorate, manage the arrival of refugees in their municipality and negotiate inclusion/exclusion in rural environments.

To sum up, we first outlined the role of the local level in the context of reception policies. Then we identified particularities in the role of (rural) mayors in policymaking. The local level lacks decisional power, a result of unequal vertical decision-making structures. Rural municipalities usually do not have the infrastructure, resources and knowledge available in cities. Furthermore, the exclusionary and disintegrative legal framework of accommodation centres structurally impedes inclusionary approaches and positions newcomer refugees as disruptive elements, outside of the local community. This provides the analytical framework for our empirical analysis, where we conceptualize mayors as the central node in local negotiation processes and analyse their strategies to deal with the opening of an accommodation centre.

3. Research design and methods

To be able to assess the research question and handle country- and case-specific differences, we chose a comparative actor-based approach. This allows taking into account the institutional setup of refugee reception at local level, as well as the positioning and the handling strategies of the mayor as a key actor. Through this double perspective as a framework for analysis (Mayntz & Scharpf, 1995), we are able to grasp actions, decisions and strategies of mayors without neglecting the institutional and social circumstances in which they are embedded. Based on four qualitative in-depth case studies in each country (Austria, France, Germany and Italy), our research goal was to identify similarities in actor behaviour despite contextual differences. Although it is a challenge to narrow down the multiple contextual framing necessary for comparison, a qualitative approach with a small number of cases seemed more apt to investigate similarities in actor behaviour in a policy field that is marked by structural differences (Mosley, 2013; Gerring, 2007). We thus studied the process of opening accommodation centres through the narrations of mayors in the four countries. Referring to

views expressed by local policymakers has strengths and limitations: they reflect their understanding of the situation and their role in shaping the events, but we are aware that, outside the interview setting, discourses might differ.

3.1. Case selection and approach

The case selection was based on rurality as a spatial concept (Vittuari et al., 2020). All selected municipalities have no more than approximately 5000 inhabitants and a density of fewer than 300 inhabitants/km², the official definition of rurality by the European Commission² (for details on cases, see Table 1). In all selected municipalities, a collective accommodation centre was opened between 2014 and 2019. We focused on cases where the opening of the accommodation centre, albeit met with resistance, did not lead to major protests. This choice corresponds with the research interest to look at cases which are representative for rural reception processes and which have been successfully implemented despite sporadic local resistance. To reduce inner-country variance, we decided to focus on one region in each country (Bavaria in Germany,³ Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes in France, Veneto in Italy), with the exception of Austria, where we conducted two interviews each in the two smallest federal provinces (Burgenland and Vorarlberg). These prescribed selection criteria permit inter-country comparison despite national differences.

In a first step, we identified municipalities that fit the selection criteria via internet research based on newspaper reports and statistical data. In a second step, we contacted mayors via email or phone. All interviews were conducted in the mother tongue of the mayor (French, German or Italian) and translated by the authors. The interviews were conducted either in person in the office of the mayor or by phone and digitally recorded. In addition to a non-response of around 50% in each country, one challenge was to identify municipalities which met the selection criteria, as the number of accommodation centres in rural areas varies significantly between the countries and information on the location of centres is scarce. We also collected supplementary material, such as media accounts, municipal bulletins, local council protocols and conducted interviews with other key actors to generate case files that contextualize the cases. However, our main source were the interviews of the mayors. Interviewees were offered anonymity, including on the name of their municipality, interviews are therefore cited with the first letter of the country and a number: A for Austria, F for France, G for Germany and I for Italy.

² <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/rural-development/methodology>

³ In Bavaria, we focused on the two districts Oberpfalz and Niederbayern.

	Austria			
	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4
Inh. (~); Density ⁴	1800; 135/km ²	1550; 30/km ²	1300; 52/km ²	2250; 86/km ²
Opening AC	2015	2015	2016	2015
Size of AC (~) ⁵	51-150	15-50	15-50	51-150
Mayor in office	2010 - now	1996 - now	2012 - now	1990 - now
Party affiliation ⁶	Local list (Cons.)	SPÖ (Soc. Dem.)	SPÖ (Soc. Dem.)	Local list (Cons.)
	France			
	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4
Inh. (~); Density	850; 13/km ²	800; 17/km ²	3000; 144/km ²	2300; 48/km ²
Opening AC	2015	2014	1993	2016
Size of AC (~)	51-150	15-50	51-150	15-50
Mayor in office	2004-now	2009-now	2014-2020	2008-2020
Party affiliation	Divers Gauche	Local list (Indep.)	Divers Droite	Parti Radicale de Gauche
	Germany			
	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4
Inh. (~); Density	4200; 125/km ²	6050; 75/km ²	4000; 76/km ²	5350; 104/km ²
Opening AC	2014	2015	2015	2015
Size of AC (~)	150-300	15-50	51-150	150-300
Mayor in office	2014-now	2014-now	2014-now	2014-now
Party affiliation	Local list (Indep.)	CSU	CSU	Local list (Cons.)
	Italy			
	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4
Inh. (~); Density	3400; 99/km ²	3200; 170/km ²	6000; 280/km ²	4000; 120/km ²
Opening AC	2015	2015	2017	2017
Size of AC (~)	300+	15-50	300+	15-50
Mayor in office	2014-now	2014-now	2014-2019	2014-2019
Party affiliation	Local list (Cons.)	Fratelli d'Italia	Local list (Left)	Local list (Left)

Table 1: Case Selection. Source: authors, based on statistical data on the municipalities and interviews.

The interview guidelines touched upon four thematic blocks based on the literature and the research questions: (1) the opening of the accommodation centre, (2) the role of the mayor, (3) cooperation and conflict with other actors, and (4) organization of reception in the everyday life of the municipality. Through these four thematic blocks we were able to trace the opening of the accommodation centre up to its establishment to learn how rural mayors understand their role in this process and their adjusting actions towards consensus-building. The interview material was then coded with atlas.ti. A first set of general deductive codes derived from the four thematic blocs targeted specifically vertical and horizontal conflicts of interests. In a

⁴ Following our selection criteria, here we list both the number of inhabitants (Inh.) and the population density of the municipality. In order to assure anonymity, we rounded the number of inhabitants.

⁵ In order to assure anonymity, we give the number of inhabitants of the accommodation centres in bands.

⁶ We followed the self-description of mayors. If mayors are part of a local list and portray themselves as independent, we wrote independent (ind.). If mayors hold strong ties to an established party at the regional or national level, we stated the political orientation in the brackets.

second round, we condensed the codes and inductively developed five strategies in cross-country and cross-case comparison.

3.2. Comparative aspects: country information and framework conditions

The comparison between the four countries suggests a bisection between Austria and Germany, on the one hand, and France and Italy, on the other, which can be related to the political systems and different experiences with refugee migration. Table 2 outlines some of the major differences.

First, the political system and consequently the division of tasks and competencies at the local level diverge. France and Italy present similarities and have frequently been described as continental–Napoleonic systems (Kuhlmann & Wollmann, 2013). Here, the ‘political mayor’ only has few formal competencies, little legal discretion, and good access to central and regional levels of government (Bäck et al., 2006). France is a highly centralized country where municipalities are rather weak and administrative competencies are bundled at the regional level (Denters, 2011, p. 324). The mayor is able to hold multiple offices (*cumul de mandat*) and can thus increase his/her power and competencies. Although not elected directly, the winning list is granted a majority. In Italy, structural features of local government are similar to France, with the exception that party politics and clientelism are more important. Although Italy is also a centralized country, the process of administrative decentralization has revaluated the role of municipalities. Italian mayors are elected directly and share executive powers with higher levels of government, where both regions (*regioni*) and provinces (*province*) have high administrative powers (Kuhlmann & Wollmann, 2013). In contrast, Austria and Germany have a political system where mayors are ‘executive’ leaders, that is, they formally head the municipal administration, are responsible for a broad range of public provision and enjoy a high level of discretion (Bäck et al., 2006; Heinelt & Hlepas, 2006). Mayors have great executive powers and are legitimated through direct election. Municipalities traditionally have a wide range of responsibilities and play a central role in the provision of services. In the federal architecture of both countries, administrative tasks are divided and municipalities carry out the implementation of federal and state legislation.

Second, the four countries have developed distinctive approaches to asylum policies and refugee accommodation. For Austria and Germany, 2015 marked a turnaround in terms of responsibility, as neither country had accommodated large numbers of refugees since the introduction of the Schengen and Dublin system. The number of asylum applications in Table

2 shows how the number of asylum applications varies between the countries and has changed over the investigation period. All countries fixed distribution ratios to disperse refugees across the territory,⁷ which are hardly ever realized in practice. More importantly, the reception capacities are much lower in France and Italy, which results in a high number of refugees without shelter and the development of informal makeshift camps. Austria and Germany, on the other hand, have only few cases of homelessness, which are related mostly to the withdrawal of basic care, and many of the centres that opened before and after 2015 are vacant or have already been closed down (AIDA, 2019).

	Austria	Germany	Italy	France
Political system	federal	federal	unitary	unitary
Mayoral competences	executive leader	executive leader	political mayor	political mayor
Mayor elected	directly ⁸	directly	directly	indirectly
Reception capacity	vacancy	vacancy	shortage	shortage
Asylum applications				
2014	28,035	202,645	64,625	64,310
2015	88,160	476,510	83,540	76,165
2016	42,225	745,155	122,960	84,270
2017	24,715	222,560	128,850	99,330
2018	13,710	184,180	59,950	120,425

Table 2: Contextual information of the country sample; Source: authors based on statistical data drawn from Eurostat and AIDA reports.

Accommodation policies and practices vary substantially in the four countries. Each has a variety of different forms of accommodation. In Italy, the four facilities are Centri di accoglienza straordinaria (CAS), extraordinary (emergency) accommodation centres. In France, all four centres are Centre d'accueil de demandeurs d'asile (CADA), which means regular accommodation centres (AIDA, 2019). Both countries have in common the fact that the prefecture can set up the centres without the need for approval from the municipality. In Austria two centres were managed by private providers (former hoteliers) and two centres were managed by NGOs, similarly in Germany where refugees are lodged either in collective accommodation of the municipality or by individual citizens in so-called decentralized accommodation.

⁷ In Italy, the piano nazionale di ripartizione; in France, the plan national d'accueil; the Grundversorgungsvereinbarung in Austria; and the Königssteiner Schlüssel in Germany.

⁸ In Austria, the mayor is elected indirectly in three out of the nine provinces. However, these were not part of our sample.

4. Empirical findings: navigating vertical and horizontal interests

The opening of an accommodation centre initiates a period of change that is marked by uncertainty (Horst & Grabska, 2015). In the light of uneven decision-making competences, mayors make an effort to advocate the interests of local citizens in the process of implementation in order to establish a local consensus. Figure 1 presents five strategies mayors use to navigate conflicts on the vertical and horizontal dimensions that we discuss below under the term ‘politics of adjustment’. We understand politics of adjustment as a way of accommodating change that comprises two aspects: it is the process of people adapting to a new situation as well as the alteration of implementation practice by local actors. In view of differing attitudes and demands, the main concern of local policymakers is to defuse conflicts and increase acceptance, as the following quotes show.

I think it's a fundamental role. To make the population accept, if the mayor is against it, it is not going to work out. (F_1)

My main concern was to keep public order and channel the hate and the resentment. (I_1)

And again, it's a very important signal, of course it's a contentious topic and there are people who are overwhelmed by the fast pace of the situation ... , but for that we have the mayor who tries to soften anxieties ... , as I say, like in many other areas, I am the representative in this matter. (A_2)

As shown in Figure 1, mayors act as a nodal point, being both part of the municipal domain (i.e., the horizontal dimension) and the supra-local networks due to their political and administrative ties (i.e., the vertical dimension). On the one hand, s/he bargains with state agents and challenges centralized hierarchies to regain control over the decision-making process and amend the concrete arrangement of the reception. On the other hand, mayors establish local modes of governance to consolidate their power, to distribute responsibilities among community members and respond to the demands of the local community.

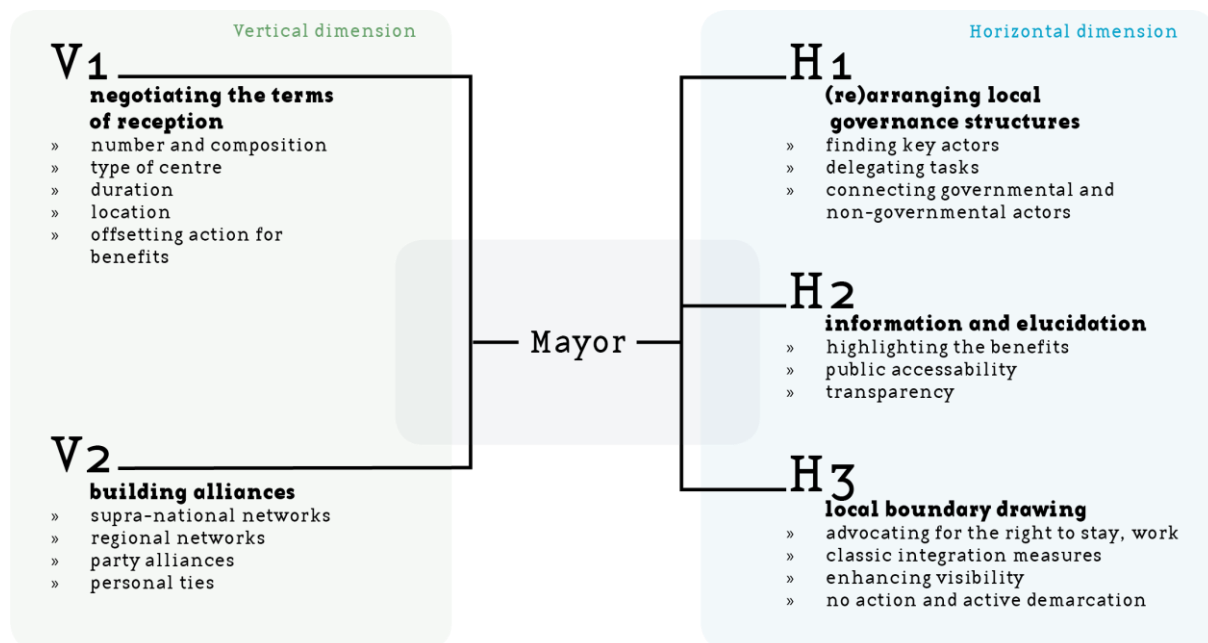


Figure 1: Vertical and horizontal strategies of rural mayors in managing the opening of accommodation centres. Source: Author's illustration.

The majority of measures taken by mayors target the horizontal dimension and pertain to three areas: the organizational structure of local governance settings (H1), the communication with citizens of the municipality (H2) and modes of local boundary-drawing that govern the inclusion/exclusion of refugees (H3). On a vertical level, mayors are primarily engaged in negotiating the terms and circumstances of reception (V1) and make use of their personal and political ties to lobby their interests (V2). While, in cross-case comparison, mayors may privilege one strategy over another, all strategies are present in the four countries and represent prototypical patterns of actions. In the following, we provide empirical insights into strategies on the vertical dimension and the horizontal dimension, before pointing out explanatory factors and elaborating the concept of politics of adjustment.

4.1. Managing vertical interests

Although most of the interviewed mayors expressed disappointment on how the implementation has been carried out and criticized their exclusion from the decision-making process, they made efforts to negotiate a formula that could be presented to the citizens (V1). For this purpose, the framework conditions of the accommodation centre were renegotiated. This included the number of incoming refugees, their composition (e.g., families), the duration of the contract, the location or the type of reception. Hence, mayors decided to comply with the overall decision to open an accommodation centre but intervened to modify the terms and conditions. In all countries, mayors were able to make changes. Most municipalities expressed

a preference for families rather than young (Muslim) males, exposing racialized notions of foreign masculinities (Scheibelhofer, 2012):

We asked to accommodate families rather than single men ... so now, we do not only have families, we also have couples and singles, but the majority are families. The service provider has played along. (F_2)

Mayors expressed a strong wish that the occupancy would not exceed a certain limit in relation to the population of the municipality. They argued that the small scale of the municipality jars with big accommodation centres, as it is too big a burden and a threat to social cohesion:

If you calculate it, we are 8,000 municipalities in Italy and there are 200,000 arrivals. If you divide this by 8,000, that makes 25 people per municipality. That would not be a problem ... but here we can see that this is being mismanaged. (I_2)

That would be ill-conceived, a forced allocation of masses. It would have been strenuous for the local population if there were suddenly 50 to 60 people, in the beginning they planned to put even 80. And suddenly you would have them all in your village with only slightly more local inhabitants. (A_3)

In Italy and France, where the implementation of reception policies is characterized by steep vertical power relations, national administrations allocated state properties for reception and commissioned service providers co-opted by the state. In such cases, mayors were not informed on the number of refugees residing on the territory, nor were support groups allowed to enter the accommodation centre. In Germany and Austria, the amount of cooperation between the federal, the regional and the local level was generally higher and in some cases municipalities themselves let infrastructure to service providers. This indicates flatter hierarchies and results in stronger interconnectedness between the actors involved (Schiller, 2018). Service providers were then mostly non-state actors willing to cooperate with the municipality and with volunteers and support groups.

To regain control over the reception process, some municipalities took a proactive stance and either bought the respective building or provided municipal infrastructure for the reception:

I think that not every municipality would have done it the way we did. ... Taking 150,000 Euros and renovating the house in such a way that I myself would move in too. ... And now, if we feel that something needs to be done, I don't negotiate for months and weeks with the provincial government or other institutions, we just do it. (A_2)

I provided some flats from the municipality, because I wanted it to be organized by the municipality and not by some private landlord. (F_3)

Retrospectively it was the right way to look for a partner who assumes the supervision of the unaccompanied minors and to make the municipality owner of the property. ... Once it belongs to the public administration, it is possible to control it and to take into account the preferences of the citizens, a private investor from the outside wouldn't have cared. (G_3)

Mayors also negotiated benefits for the municipality not directly linked to the opening of the accommodation centre, but with a positive effect on community life, such as additional jobs in schools or other services put in place, a strategy particularly present in Italy and France:

With the opening of the accommodation centre, we asked the authorities for a community car that could also be used to transport disabled people, this was beneficial for the whole municipality, for the citizens and for the needs of the refugees. (I_4)

At the start of the next school year, we had 60 children and we could maintain one teaching position from the ministry of national education. They have been very attentive to the project and we could get another half-post just for the children of the CADA, to learn the language. (F_1)

Another strategy on the vertical dimension is building alliances (V2). Irrespective of the national context, mayors who had access to party networks on superordinate political levels made use of them to negotiate the terms of reception in their favour. Here, the provincial and district levels are most relevant (Manatschal et al., 2020). While all mayors criticized national policies as an obstacle to local reception processes, the intermediate levels of government were met with more sympathy. Mayors without party ties at provincial level did not profit from this type of political link and narrated this as difficult:

Unfortunately politics do also divide mayors, because those mayors who do not have any centre do not want to take a share. And the will of the electorate goes in the direction that has been initiated by the League (political party), which is hostile, and no one wants to lose their electorate. (I_2)

I am not CSU at all. I am completely neutral. But yes, it is complicated, and you can feel it and they [the Bavarian government] let you feel it. (G_1)

In order to regain power and control over the reception process, alliances of strategic partnership were formed (Heimann et al., 2019). Such inter-municipal networks were geared towards gathering information, knowledge and resources to professionalize reception at local level. This is of particular importance in rural areas as rural municipalities often do not have any prior knowledge on matters of asylum and reception. Mayoral networks were either based on already established channels of inter-communal cooperation or on newly established networks that solely dealt with best practice exchange of refugee reception.

We had regular mayor meetings in the district office, where we all gathered, and we talked about how each of us is organized. (G_2)

We participated in the call for this European project on best practice in the reception of migrants in Europe ... together with five European partners ... we have organized conferences and also meetings with other actors from the region because I wanted to extend this project to the whole province. (I_1)

Municipalities also referenced each other in terms of distribution ratios. This created a dynamic that also affected mayors in their handling strategies. We could observe that, when distribution ratios were met and the number of accommodation centres in the region was high, it was easier for mayors to accept their ‘share’ of refugees and to defend the accommodation vis-à-vis the electorate.

4.2. Managing horizontal interests

At administrative level, mayors rearranged local governance structures, delegated tasks and identified key actors (H1) in order to assume an auxiliary and monitoring role, without losing access to information. This rearrangement of local governance structures connects the administrative core of the municipality with local support groups, resulting in the creation of formal and informal networks of members of the municipal council, employees, NGOs, other local organizations (such as associations or religious bodies), volunteers and sometimes refugees themselves (Campomori & Caponio, 2017; Hinger et al., 2016). In Italy and France, mayors particularly highlighted the role of volunteers and NGOs, where, in Italy, the Roman Catholic Church played a distinctive role in all cases.

As I said, we are a small municipality ... , let's say we rely heavily on associations that manage all the services we are not able to provide. If we would not have all the volunteers and would have to pay people for that work, we could not do it at all. (F_5)

There are no activities, but our parish, together with the one in the neighbouring municipality, they do activities inside the camps, and the Christian refugees go to mass. The parish has also done some integrational projects and shown films on the topic and invited people to tell their stories. (I_2)

In Austria and Germany, in contrast, mayors either used already established channels, such as council meetings or roundtables, or arranged new working groups and identified key actors in the municipal administration who performed important organizational tasks and served as informants.

I had this lady, she was in the financial administration and she took care of the refugees, as civil servant and privately, she was very committed. (G_2)

Apart from modifying organizational structures, mayors engaged in a process of direct communication with the citizens of the municipality in the form of information and elucidation (H2). Mayors informed citizens via local gazettes and newspapers, in citizens' meetings and in personal interactions. They explained the reception process, reported facts and circumstances, highlighted the benefits of the reception for the municipality and lobbied for support groups and civic engagement. This contrasts with the top-down approach at national level in implementing the accommodation centre. While mayors publicly criticized this approach, which was perceived as a breach of trust, they were particularly concerned with transparency and the well-being of the community as they were held accountable for events in the municipality.

I did all the communication myself, externally and internally, with my local citizens, always the latest news, what was happening in the municipality. They needed to know that they were taken care of because I did not cause this situation, I could only react, otherwise I wouldn't have a chance. And that was my part in it. (A_1)

In contrast to cities, the process of information and elucidation is guided by the personal interaction between local politicians and the electorate (Haus & Sweeting, 2006). Mayors are forced to follow a proactive approach in meeting and including as many inhabitants of the municipality as possible. However, unlike cities with a strong administrative apparatus, rural politicians have to take action themselves. This process was described as follows:

I was informed by the prefect at half past nine, and at eleven, the first people arrived ... he said, it is like that. We didn't know how many people would come, but it could be

hundreds. So the citizens started to be furious. Every day I met people, I answered phone calls and e-mails ... all the emergency I had to handle and to mediate (I_4)

First through the local gazette, then directly after I organised a citizens' council ... and, of course, the classic citizen consultation hours. As mayor in a small municipality, you are always available all the time, yes, and in the first days (note: at the opening of the centre) with 2,000 inhabitants, I guess I reached 80% of the citizens personally. (G_3)

In structurally weak areas, mayors highlighted the positive effects of immigration to back their decision to consent to the opening of the accommodation centre and saw the potential to link asylum seekers with local companies that were short of apprentices.

This created two jobs in the municipality, and here employment is scarce and with the children we could save one school class from closing down, and those people use the post office, the pharmacy, associative activities, that is important in rural areas. (F_1)

The topic work. I intervened to organize employment for them (the refugees), to not let them work merely at the municipal building yard, but to employ them in local companies with a shortage of skilled workers. ... I was head-hunter and counselled each one of them myself. (G_3)

It is an opportunity ... , one refugee now works in a hotel in our municipality ... as an apprentice, perfect! The hotel owner is really impressed by him. This is a textbook example for me ... and if something like that happens, it is really valuable. (A_4)

Actions that govern the inclusion/exclusion of refugees, are summarized under the strategy local boundary drawing (H3). Measures range from inclusionary actions, such as campaigning for a right to stay, finding accommodation and a job, to exclusionary mechanisms that perpetuate disintegrative mechanisms of the accommodation centre. The majority of actions can be described as classical integration measures, such as language courses, and activities that foster interaction between the inhabitants of the municipality and the inhabitants of the accommodation centre. Here, contextual characteristics, such as the type and size of the accommodation centre, played a crucial role for the development of inclusionary measures. Generally speaking, the bigger the centre, the fewer inclusionary measures. In these cases, inclusionary measures only target specific individuals, which further stratifies the rights of refugees.

When the first people arrived, we organized a get-together at the town hall to welcome the people and let them meet the locals. There was some motivation, and then, after six months, people started to leave and others arrived and we had to start all over again ... and now people are tired and the CADA is now in its own corner. (FR_1)

That they (the refugees) are being integrated if possible, that they become part of our structures and that this really works. If they join the Judo club or the local football club ... , the kids ultimately all ended up in one of the local clubs, that was very valuable. (A_4)

There were around seven to ten individuals who took care of the refugees. We once organized a get-together ... , they cooked for us and we ate together and it was very enjoyable. (G_2)

Welcoming events – such as confidence-building measures, cooking evenings and common activities – are used to enhance the visibility of refugees. Refugees are invited to tell their stories, cook for their neighbours or celebrate traditional festivities. However, attempts to break up disintegrative elements of the reception system are often coupled with the expectation that interaction happens solely in terms set by the municipality. Refugees are urged to show that they are willing to integrate and ‘deserve’ the efforts made by the local community (Di Cecco, 2020). Voluntary work arrangements are organized to publicly demonstrate how refugees ‘care’ about the municipality, are grateful and hard-working:

We have deployed asylum seekers living in the community, making them visible through self-printed T-shirts with the name of the municipality, to show the local population that they are not only here to take our things but to give something back to the community. (A_2)

In the beginning, the citizens protested, but after two/three months, when the refugees started to do the voluntary work, cleaning the streets, maintaining the green areas in the municipality, they [the inhabitants] also saw the positive impact. (I_4)

However, in all countries there were cases where mayors did not engage in any actions apart from recognizing the centre’s presence on the territory.

Direct contact, like common integration measures, we didn’t have that. There was a kind of distance. (A_3)

No, we have no details of the accommodation, they (the refugees) come, they go, sometimes there is one in the municipality because their application got rejected ... then there are organizations that take care of them, but I don't know how that works, I have no information about that. (F_4)

Furthermore, and to ensure the acquiescence with national asylum politics in case of deportations, negative decisions or geographical redistributions, mayors have actively instructed citizens not to create emotional ties and to accept the decisions made by superior authorities. And the laws that exist have to be enforced.

I have talked a lot with the support groups and told them not to invest in personal ties. It is hard ... but it is important, when the law says someone needs to be deported, then we have to accept it. And we also have to accept it, when somebody is allowed to stay, then we have to help. (G_2)

Of course, not everyone obtained a right to stay ... but here, we as municipality didn't intervene ... we lacked knowledge and information and I also told the asylum group (group of volunteers) again and again to maintain relationships on a level where it does not become a burden if a negative decision is issued in the course of an asylum application, we have to accept it and stand by the mechanisms in the background even though it might hurt ... ; that worked well. (A_1)

Mayors partially relied on disintegrative elements of the reception system and reinforced its exclusionary mechanisms, what we have termed active demarcation. In its strongest form, it is illustrated by racist commentaries against refugees in general and/or specific groups of refugees. Those commentaries reflect pejorative stereotypes about culture and hygienic standards and draw a (visible) line between the racialized 'other' and one's own whiteness (Hubbard, 2005b).

We have to organize cheap accommodation, where they can stay. It can't be, I think, that they get luxury flats. It shouldn't be like that and they don't expect that either. It wouldn't make sense, because we have seen that here, they are clean, but the tidiness is an issue, they are not familiar with it as we are (A_1)

We have all types of populations, Ukrainians, Africans, Syrians, Libyans, ... I would say the only problem are the Roma families, they do not have a very high level of education and they have problems to integrate in western civilization. (F_2)

Yugoslavia, it must be said, they are not so extremely different to Austria, in their mentality, you know. That is what we must realise, that it is just easier than if they are coming from Syria, Iran, Iraq and so on. (A_4)

4.3. Explaining differences and similarities

Although both dimensions – the vertical and the horizontal alike – are decisive in shaping rural reception realities, we here point out some particularities which form an integral part of politics of adjustment: (1) all strategies are present in the four countries, however they manifest more differently in the vertical dimension, which can be linked to the deprivation of decision-making power at the local level and contextual differences of the political systems described above; (2) similarities on the horizontal dimension can be explained best by the characteristics of local policymaking in small-scale environments and reception realities in rural regions; and (3) all strategies target first and foremost the citizens of the municipality in order to establish a local consensus while the voice of refugees remains unheard.

In Italy and France, where governments frequently used emergency accommodation to enforce a top-down approach, the mayoral scope to negotiate terms and conditions was very limited. This also resonates with the specific configuration of unitary states, widening the gap between policy formulation and its implementation. Mayors had little access to policymakers at higher political levels and were only partially able to renegotiate the terms of the reception. To make up for that, Italian and French mayors were more successful in negotiating benefits for the municipality and searched for alliances outside the national political context.

In Austrian and German municipalities, the exceptional situation of 2015 was a decisive moment that made trans-municipal solidarity a topic, to assure that everybody could be held accountable for their share of accommodation. Accommodating refugees was thus not as exceptional anymore and the search for new places as well as the exchange of best practice models was an integral part of institutionalized mayoral meetings in the provinces and districts. In both countries, well established channels of federal negotiation processes were moreover used to manage the dispersion and accommodation of refugees. Here, mayors made use of political ties in the realm of party politics or on a vertical scale with people holding administrative and legislative offices in superior political levels. In this context, mayors were able to either alter reception conditions in the interest of the municipality or to gain knowledge on how to manage the reception process.

Interestingly, the party ideology of the mayor did not play a decisive role, as left-leaning and conservative mayors employed both inclusionary and exclusionary measures within the municipality. The majority of mayors at local level and in our sample is conservative or right-leaning, which did not seem to have an impact, as most mayors take a different stance than national parties and criticize them. This deviation from official party ideology at local level was facilitated by the high degree of personalization of local politics. However, in all countries, the electoral success of the extreme right – respectively, Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ), Rassemblement National (RN), Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) and Lega – was an issue of concern that put mayors under pressure. To sum up: cross-case comparison reveals that the self-positioning of the mayor, transparency and proactive communication strategies were decisive in shaping local reception realities and that party ideology of the mayor – unlike party ties as discussed above – played a subordinate role.

Strong similarities and the dominance of horizontal strategies can best be explained by structural features of rural municipalities, such as the lack of infrastructure and knowledge with regard to reception policies, and particularities of local policymaking in small-scale environments. Mayors have a larger room of manoeuvre on the horizontal dimension and are interested in finding a consensus in order to consolidate their power. Amid the establishment of local policies without prior knowledge of accommodation processes, mayors have to be responsive and take into account the preferences of the citizens. The development of a local consensus in rural municipalities thus follows a pattern guided by personal interaction between citizens and their political representatives who advocate the interests of the community. Infrastructure has to be built adhoc and most often from scratch without professional guidance, this is of particular importance as refugees depend on these infrastructures to overcome disintegrative features of rural reception realities.

5. Discussion and conclusions: politics of adjustment

Our findings have pointed out particularities of rural reception processes. Urban mayors, in particular mayors of big cities, can by-pass multilevel constraints because of their political weight and the configuration of local governance arrangements. Furthermore, they can draw on existing infrastructure and knowledge in migration and integration policymaking (Caponio & Jones-Correa, 2018). Rural mayors are confronted with different conditions. In view of the deprivation of decision-making authority regarding the overall decision to open an accommodation centre, rural mayors make use of legislative gaps and their administrative

powers to adjust the framework conditions according to local preferences. While mayors (re)act based on the preferences of their electorate and their personal beliefs, the voices and interests of refugees are rendered invisible.

Inclusionary and exclusionary actions as well as the demarcation of boundaries that govern the access of refugees to different spheres of the municipality become key elements of politics of adjustment. It is thus the intent to modify the tight legal framework of reception policies according to the needs of the municipality, and to steer the socio-political process of demarcation and othering that leads to a redefinition of rural whiteness and community space (Hubbard, 2005a). In this context, rurality is not a geographical and spatial definition, but a social and cultural construct which is ‘the normative and often unspoken category against which all other racialized identities are marked as Other’ (Dwyer & Jones, 2000, p. 210). The invisibility of refugees and racist practices become normalized and integration paradigms as well as refugees’ conformity with local practices the normative power.

The handling strategies described above resemble a rather assimilationist understanding of integration. They aim at including a small number of new community members who ideally settle for the long term. Unpaid voluntary work and efforts refugees make to fit in, become a crucial part in assessing their willingness and deservingness (Chauvin & Garcés-Masareñas, 2014; Hinger, 2020), a highly selective process that is strengthened through exclusionary characteristics of accommodation practices (Kreichauf, 2018; Segarra, 2020). This is reinforced by transience of rural reception; first, most often refugees return to urban areas as soon as their asylum application has been accepted or rejected, as they are no longer entitled to material reception conditions, while job opportunities or housing is scarce. Second, many of the accommodation centres in rural areas are conceptualized as temporary: more than half the centres included in our study have been closed since. In practice, this means that long-term change in the perception of rural homogeneity and a full integration of the accommodation centre into community life are rare.

In this context, mayors in all four countries have criticized the nation-state and have made an effort to implement their own distinctive policies that are not based on legal status categories but on the participation of refugees who are viewed as a potential resource and future members of the municipality (Hinger, 2020). Although municipalities show tendencies of decoupling (Scholten, 2016) following their own rationale, they hardly overstep the jurisdictional boundaries and assume the integration imperative from the nation-state. These insights soften

the apparently antithetical view of local and national approaches. Instead, we argue here that local adjustment comprises both aspects: the contestation and the constitution of dominant paradigms. The concept of politics of adjustment expands on this field of tension. To settle and resolve the situation, the mayor relies on two concurrent strategies: S/he tries to soften disintegrative measures of material reception conditions in order to secure continuity in the daily life of the municipality while relying on exclusionary aspects of the accommodation centre to continuously draw the boundary between citizens of the municipality and refugees.

To close, we want to point out some connecting points for further research: (1) including a larger sample to refine the concept of politics of adjustment and (2) analysing whether the concept is applicable in other demographic areas such as cities to develop more distinctive explanations on differences and similarities in rural and urban areas.

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Paper IV) Dismantling the Reception of Asylum Seekers. Hungary's Illiberal Asylum Policies and EU Responses

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Abstract

Since 2015 the Hungarian government successfully securitised migration and profoundly changed the country's asylum system. Through qualitative research and expert interviews, this article demonstrates how reception infrastructure was extra-territorialised, while reception standards were concomitantly dissolved. These trends were accompanied by the government-led criminalising of civil society and asylum-seeker support groups. The ramifications of this externalisation deeply have and continue to impact asylum seekers' rights to a dignified reception in an EU member state, as well as contravening EU citizens' freedoms. The article situates and discusses these developments within European securitisation and externalisation efforts, European human rights discourses, and Hungary's illiberal governance. It also identifies the weakness of common European reception standards in light of illiberal policy-making.

Keywords: Asylum; Reception Conditions; Hungary; European Union; Securitisation; Externalisation

Introduction

The rise of illiberalism in Hungary over the last 20 years has profoundly changed the political and social climate of the country (Laruelle, 2022). Since 2010, the radical right FIDESZ government has implemented several far-reaching reforms, touching upon constitutional law, electoral law and citizenship law, concentrating power at the executive level of government (Pap, 2018; Körösenyi, Illés and Gyulai, 2020; Bos and Lorenz, 2021). The migration movements to and through Hungary in 2015 accelerated these developments. From 2000 to 2013, Hungary received an average of 4000 asylum seekers per year. Asylum and immigration were not particularly salient topics in Hungarian society and politics at that time (Szalai and Göbl, 2015). From 2013 on, asylum applications rose, peaking at 117,135 applications in 2015. However, many refugees were only passing through Hungary. In the first half of 2015 alone, over 50,000 asylum applications made in Hungary were withdrawn (EASO, 2016).

The Hungarian government successfully politicised and securitised this moment. An issue can become securitised when discourses and heuristic artefacts such as policy tools, emotions and stereotypes are mobilised to establish a threat that needs immediate action (Balzacq, 2010, 3). Scholars have analysed the far-reaching anti-immigration campaign of the Hungarian government as an instance of securitisation (Szalai and Göbl, 2015; Bocskor, 2018; Anna Vachudova, 2020). Others have studied the effects of this securitisation on Hungarian public opinion (Bíró-Nagy, 2022) and on the Hungarian asylum system (Nagy, 2016; Juhász, 2017). From 2015 onwards, the Hungarian government dismantled its existing reception infrastructure in favour of containment in transit zones at the country's symbolically loaded external border. Throughout this phase haphazard restructuring, the Hungarian government declared a state of emergency due to "mass migration", enabling the governing political elite to increase their power, while reducing the number of checks and balances they would have otherwise had to adhere to normally (Balzacq, Léonard and Ruzicka, 2016, 501). This contribution explores how these legal and political changes have affected the reception infrastructure for asylum seekers and civil society. It also looks at how these changes can be situated in the ambiguous field of European externalisation and securitisation efforts, European human rights discourses, and illiberal tendencies in Hungary.

The Hungarian case is interesting for a couple of reasons. It provides an opportunity to observe the transformation of a small but relatively well-working reception system into a system almost exclusively based on containment and detention in less than 10 years (from 2013 to 2020).

Tracing this process also sheds light on how securitising discourse and policy tools such as legal fences and the transit zone transformed the reception infrastructure into instruments of securitisation. Furthermore, it demonstrates that in semi-authoritarian settings, securitisation does not just elevate an issue into “special politics” and allow policymakers to break specific rules, but also serves the purpose of maintaining and solidifying a political order, delegitimising the opposition and/or parts of civil society (Vuori, 2008; Balzacq, Léonard and Ruzicka, 2016).

Studying the Hungarian case is also interesting in its relation to the European Union (EU) and the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) that sets out the framework for refugee reception in Europe. The EU has repeatedly emphasised its commitments to human rights and the right to asylum while at the same time continuously restricting access to international protection (Léonard and Kaunert, 2019, 71). Scholars have pointed out that the ambiguity at the EU level in matters of asylum and immigration is not accidental but the result of diverging interests between member states and attempts to reconcile them (Geddes, Hadj Abdou and Brumat, 2020; Mos, 2020). Under the auspices of the EU, member states have intensified the securitisation of migration in sorting and ordering migration movements (Huysmans, 2000; Léonard and Kaunert, 2019) and continued to externalise migration control to prevent asylum seekers from entering their national territory, particularly in Southern EU member states (Frelick, Kysel and Podkul, 2016). Southern European member states which use the hotspot approach, conceptualised as a single-space reception infrastructure for admissibility, asylum and return procedures, to prioritise containment and control over policy-driven reception conditions (Campesi, 2018a; Papoutsi *et al.*, 2019; Tazzioli and Garelli, 2020).

I argue that the externalisation of the reception infrastructure in Hungary can thus be understood as a continuity of European and national securitisation efforts. However, Hungary’s securitisation efforts are underpinned by illiberal ideas that reject immigration and multiculturalism (Halmai, 2021). Engrained in this view is the populist repudiation of liberal and representative democracy based on the rule of law and checks and balances as promulgated by EU institutions (Bertoncini and Reynié, 2021). Hungary has criticised the EU’s migration policy framework, refused to cooperate, and portrayed this as a fight over national sovereignty and the protection of a “white and Christian” Europe (Scott, 2020). The unilateral engagement of the Hungarian government in the externalisation and dismantling of the reception infrastructure in Hungary thus provides a valuable point of entry to discuss whether EU regulations and international human rights obligations successfully protect vulnerable groups in EU member states where illiberal discourses and policies thrive.

This article proceeds as follows: the next section sets out a framework of analysis based on concepts drawn from legal and political geography, as well as the literature on reception. Section three outlines my research methodology. The fourth – and most substantive – section analyses how the Hungarian government dismantled its existing reception system and criminalised civil society engagement following the politicisation and securitisation of migration since 2015. Section five discusses the role and response of the EU in reaction to Hungary’s externalisation efforts in relation to reception infrastructure. I then offer some concluding remarks highlighting how ambiguity and the discretionary potential of contractual obligations, gives illiberal policy makers wide room to manoeuvre within the EU policy framework.

Framing the reception of asylum seekers in the context of externalisation

The reception of asylum seekers is typically a matter of national sovereignty. However, since the Lisbon Treaty in 2009 the EU increased its influence in the policy field (Hadj-Abdou, 2021). In the framework of the CEAS, the Reception Condition Directive (RCD) codified common standards of reception. These standards are mostly concerned with material reception conditions such as food, housing, legal and psychological support, as well as the limitation of detention grounds. The harmonisation of reception standards is part of the overall goal to limit or prevent secondary movement of refugees between European member states (Chetail, 2016; Tsourdi, 2016; Zaun, 2018). In reality, the implementation allows for high discretion, reflected in the diverse and variable ways reception is organised in the EU member states (Zill *et al.*, 2020). Therein also lies the growing difficulty of combining the contradictory aspirations of upholding the EU’s normative principles, which are right-enhancing, and appeasing member states by granting common sovereigntist policies that are right-reducing (Lavenex, 2018, 1196). Indeed, in the early phase of the CEAS between 2003 and 2013, the RCD raised or at least maintained standards in reception and assistance for asylum seekers in member states. However, a lack of commitment to its implementation from 2013 onwards and the securitisation of asylum and migration that gained traction in 2015 have weakened its protective force (Geddes, Hadj Abdou and Brumat, 2020).

Many scholars agree that externalisation efforts are a consequence and a feature of securitisation processes within the EU (Longo and Fontana, 2022, Huysmans and Squire, 2009). Indeed, the EU itself has included various externalisation strategies such as visa requirements, carrier sanctions, high sea interception and “safe third country” in its policy framework

(Liguori, 2019, 1). People are physically kept away from European territory, to prevent access to the protections the laws of the Global North provide (Spijkerboer, 2018). This crystallises the ambiguous strategy for matters of asylum undertaken by European institutions, oscillating between the securitisation of borders and human rights guarantees (Geddes, Hadj Abdou and Brumat, 2020). Externalisation policies create an ethical and legal distance where legal duties and responsibilities are blurred. For example, in transit zones and hotspots concerned with “registration, identification, fingerprinting, and debriefing of asylum seekers”¹ the European Commission has linked reception standards to the rules of accelerated asylum procedures and the Return Directive,² and not to the RCD. Concretely, this means less judicial guarantees, a derogation from ordinary standards of reception and lower standards for detention (Frelick, Kysel and Podkul, 2016; Campesi, 2018b).

Literature on the reception of asylum seekers has analysed these policy changes and their impact on the reception infrastructure and reception conditions (Rosenberger and König, 2012; Kreichauf, 2018; Kandyliis, 2019). Legal and political geography scholars (Staeheli, Kofman, and Peake, 2004; Mountz *et al.*, 2013; Scheel, 2019) have foregrounded the relationship between space and law, and the way in which reception centres are a materialisation of the legal framework in which they are embedded. Following this, reception infrastructure can be conceptualised as sites of bordering, where the legal framework of national asylum law and supranational directives materialise (White, 2002; Kreichauf, 2020). Camps and reception centres are sites of bordering as they segregate asylum seekers from the host society whilst serving as a physical border, immobilising their inhabitants and subjugating them using various control technologies (Darling, 2017). At the same time, they function as social borders, too. Disintegrative mechanisms such as curfews, lengthy administrative procedures, the interdiction to work or receive visitors impede taking part in the host society (Collyer, Hinger and Schweitzer, 2020; Segarra, 2020). The degree of openness or closure decides the possibilities of contestation, claim-making and solidarity networks and thus deeply affects civil society engagement in the field of asylum and migration (Haselbacher and Rosenberger, 2018; Feischmidt and Zakariás, 2019; Cantat, 2021).

The geographical emplacement of reception also affects the potential of engagement with the host society and support networks. Reception infrastructure that is placed in remote areas far

¹ Migration and Home Affairs: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/pages/glossary/hotspot-approach_en

² The Return Directive 2008/115/EU lays down common standards and procedures in member states for returning illegally staying third-country nationals.

away from cities or villages generates a physical and relational distance that is difficult to overcome because of the high transportation costs or lack of public connections. The architectural characteristics of defunct buildings, military barracks and containers contribute to the (territorial) stigmatisation of the inhabitants and inscribed in the logic of institutional racism and racialised “othering” (Wacquant, 2007; Pieper, 2008; Minca, 2015; Yuval-Davis, Wemyss and Cassidy, 2019). Here, externalisation practices create a spatial and relational distance. Under the term extra-territorialisation, border control and reception infrastructure are shifted towards the edge of national territories. The territorial border returns thus as a place of symbolic and factual policy-making and sovereignty that immobilises the migrant “other” outside national territory or on the margins of the state (FitzGerald, 2020). This goes in hand with the discursive construction of migrants as a “security threat” whereby politicians link domestic issues of security to border politics. These politics of borders become an instrument of national identity politics, playing an important role in everyday bordering at a societal level (De Genova, 2013; Faist, 2015; Scott, 2020). Reception infrastructure has in many cases become an instrument of securitisation and a vantage point for the state to exert its symbolic power and devalue refugees and support groups. Actors in solidarity with asylum seekers are affected by these changes as their solidarity is marginalised and criminalised. In that sense, externalisation can be understood as a heuristic device when attempting to investigate its effects not only on migrants, but also on civil society and social cohesion as such (Stock, Üstübeci and Schultz, 2019, 2).

Research methods

I began my research on the reception system in Hungary in 2016, starting fieldwork immediately before the closure of the two barrack reception centres in Bicske and Debrecen and just after the opening of the transit zone. My fieldwork in the autumn and winter of 2018 was preceded by numerous attempts to get in contact with the Hungarian authorities to request access to one of the transit zones or the two remaining barrack camps, Vamosszabadi and Balassagyarmat, for my work. All these inquiries were ignored. Consequently, I was not able to speak with anyone directly working in the camp or national authorities in charge of the reception infrastructure. Other attempts to enter the camps through one of the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or civil society groups (which had sporadic access to them) were not successful due to the strict controls on public authority and the lack of resources these groups could and wanted to provide. The reception infrastructure had become a closed space to not only researchers, but to journalists and civil society actors as well (Koch, 2013; Lendaro, 2017).

Traditional fieldwork techniques were thus not useful; I had to adjust to the field's possibilities (and restrictions). These acts of closure are authoritarian, as well as illiberal (in some circumstances), as they foreclose knowledge production (Koch, 2013). This can be detrimental to the field of research because scholars, due to the inaccessibility of information, may turn to more open fields and other countries, where traditional fieldwork techniques can be applied, or turn to apolitical topics that do not entail difficult research environments. Consequently, political actors and the (state-funded) media are left "to define essential knowledge about those regimes" (Goode, 2010, 1056).

I thus turned to expert interviews. The advantage of these interviews is that experts have wide and profound knowledge on the dynamics and processes of the respective policy field (Bogner *et al.*, 2009). At the same time, experts are embedded in socio-cultural conditions, which are reflected in the type of knowledge they can provide (Meuser and Nagl, 2009). This contribution is based on seven qualitative expert interviews from 2018 and 2019. The experts came from international and national NGOs and civil society organisations. By being professionally active in the field of asylum and migration, they had gained practical and processual knowledge on the developments of the asylum and reception infrastructure. The interviewed experts were, based on their professional roles, more or less in contact or cooperation with, or in opposition to, the government's stance on asylum and migration. This was taken into account in the choice of interviewed experts. Two interviews were conducted with members of international organisations that had access to the camps during the research period; five interviews were conducted with members of the NGOs working on immigration issues in Hungary. Two of these NGOs had access to the camps prior to 2017. Three interviews were recorded and transcribed manually. Four interviews were not recorded following the preferences of the interviewees. In these cases, I took notes during the conversation. Interviews were semi-guided and touched upon: (1) the development of the reception system in Hungary; (2) the (non)-involvement of the respective organisation in these developments; (3) specific reception-related challenges identified by the organisation and (4) the development of the transit zone. The interviews were coded inductively, then the codes were reduced and concentrated; finally, the coded sections were compared in order to identify general trends and to develop concepts (Pickel, Jahn and Pickel, 2009).

Additionally, I analysed Hungarian legal documents concerning the Hungarian reception system (such as closures/openings of facilities and material reception conditions), policy papers, and reports related to reception in Hungary between 2013 and 2020, as well as all

available documents created by the European Commission and Council that related to infringement procedures and cases concerning Hungary. An additional, 100-something press releases related to reception from the Hungarian government from 2013 to 2020 were also consulted. This made it possible to embed the interviews into the political and legal changes that occurred between 2013 and 2020, the time period investigated.

Dismantling the reception infrastructure

The Hungarian reception system was established in the late 1980s after the first refugee camp opened in 1989 in Bicske, designed for around 400 people. Shortly thereafter, a second one was developed in 1995 in Debrecen, designed for around 800 people, in response to refugees arriving from Romania and Bosnia (Fullerton, 1996). The Hungarian reception infrastructure is thus framed in the context of mass reception, using buildings with a distinct architectural setting that stigmatise the inhabitants. Both of the first two camps were former barrack camps with concrete buildings with few toilets and bathrooms. The Debrecen camp, situated on the outskirts of the city of Debrecen, was a combination of very old army barracks and some new buildings that were in better shape. It had kindergarten and day school classes until 2013 (Aida, 2015). The Bicske camp was situated a 45-minute walk from the village train station. However, its proximity to Budapest gave the inhabitants significant independence, mobility and the possibility to nurture support networks (Feischmidt and Zakariás, 2019). Moreover, the camps had infrastructure such as heating, water, electricity and showers, as well as sports halls and computer rooms (Aida, 2015). The Bicske camp was also used as a pre-integration facility, hosting the protégé of international protection for up to 12 months until 2016 before the Hungarian government terminated all integration assistance for recognised refugees (Nagy, 2016).

In 2009, the Hungarian government opened another camp in a defunct building in Balassagyarmat (for approx. 110 people) and another in 2013 in a former workers' hostel in Vamosszabadi (for approx. 250 people). Both facilities are located on the border with Slovakia. While Balssagyarmat is adjacent to a small city that has an important hospital complex, the Vamosszabadi camp is on the outskirts of a small village with the same name, just before the Slovakian border. As early as 2010, the UNHCR raised concern about the high number of refugees in detention in Hungary (UNHCR, 2012). The recourse to de-facto detention in the transit zone can therefore be understood as a continuation of these practices.

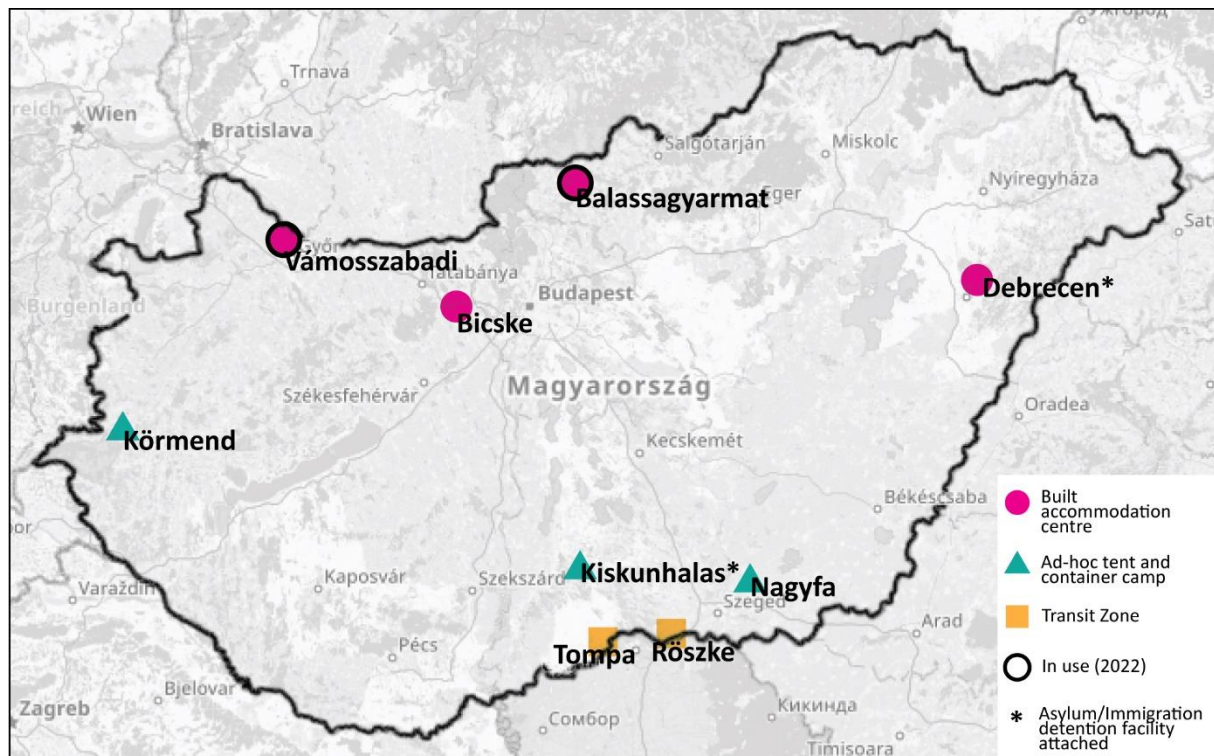


Figure 1 The geographical emplacement of reception facilities. Source: The author

Figure 1 shows the geographical emplacement of the asylum infrastructure. Built accommodation centres slowly became replaced by the cheaper ad-hoc tent camps. The transit zone reception shifted towards the territorial border with Serbia until eventually reaching the no-man's borderland between Hungary and Serbia.

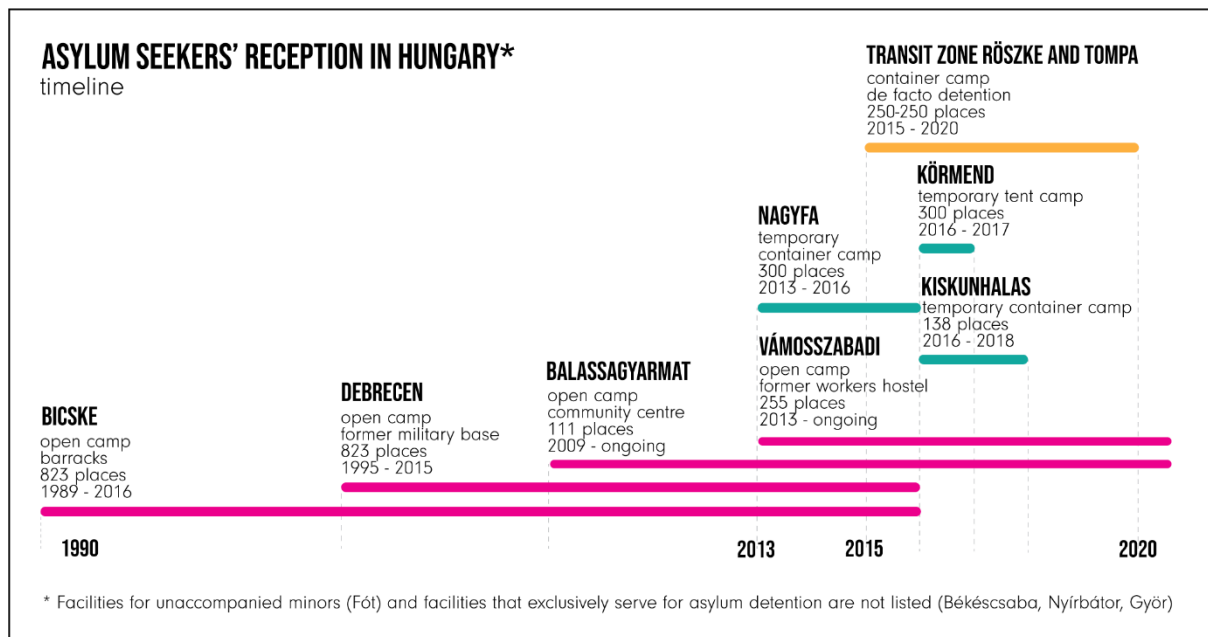


Figure 2 The timeline of openings and closures of camps. Source: The author

From October 2013 to April 2016, Hungary received 4.3 million euros for capacity building in reception and renovating the two main facilities, Debrecen and Bicske, from the European Refugee Fund (OIF, 2016). However, both were closed by government resolutions³ in 2015 and 2016, creating a lack of infrastructure and the mass dismissal of well-trained staff. The years 2015 and 2016 mark a turning point with the closure of Debrecen and Bicske, as reflected by the timeline of this project. Although asylum claims were rising in 2015, and despite financial support from EU institutions, the previously relatively well-established infrastructure was dismantled. This was an act of deliberate obstructive action on the part of the Hungarian government that was aimed at disrupting existing asylum structures and the established networks of professional knowledge. The lack of infrastructure in Hungary, a manufactured problem, led to homelessness for many asylum seekers, shifting the issue from the level of high politics to a banal and everyday security issue (Huysmans, 2011). Media images of dispersed asylum seekers that had to be transferred to the ad-hoc tent camps further strengthened arguments in support of border controls and stricter enforcement. Scenes of chaotic relocations and the production of the racialised migrant “other” helped justify the Hungarian government’s rigorous steps to exert and stabilise its sovereign power and control through the declaration of a state of emergency “due to mass migration”; the police and army were brought in to enforce

³ Government Resolution 1724/2015. (X. 7.)

asylum procedures. The non-action and/or obstructive action of the government helped legitimate the government's call for further securitisation in order to increase its power and weaken regular control procedures through the state of emergency.

In 2015, the Hungarian government built a border fence between Hungary and Serbia. The transit zone was built adjacent to the fence; it was composed of containers surrounded by barbed wire. It was situated in the no-man's land between the two countries. The transit zone had one entrance and one exit on the Serbian side of the facility.⁴ The fence and transit zone were considered as outside of Hungarian territory, and legal obligations therefore did not apply, limiting the possibilities for legal remedies (Nagy and Sonnevend, 2018). The Hungarian parliament had also criminalised the crossing of the fence, obstructing its construction, and/or damaging it.⁵ While these measures did not directly target migrants, they raised the number of migrants in detention because migrants were the most likely to cross the border "irregularly". In July 2016, another amendment came into force that allowed pushbacks within an eight-kilometre strip, disrespecting the principle of non-refoulement codified by the Asylum Procedure Directive (Goldner Lang and Nagy, 2021).

At the same time, the Hungarian government erected a tent camp in Kiskunhalas (2016–2018), using shipping containers to increase the capacity of an existing detention centre by transforming it into a semi-open facility. The government also revamped the Körmen temporary tent facility (2016–2017) on the property of a local police school owned by the state (Hungarian Ministry of Interior, 2016). The shift from reception infrastructure managed mainly by social workers to infrastructure managed mainly by police and army forces (insecurity actors) reinforces the notion that asylum reception was becoming increasingly securitised in Hungary (Balzacq, Léonard and Ruzicka, 2016). The tent camps had inadequate infrastructure and were located far from cities and close to a border crossing. Living conditions were described as extremely harsh, especially in winter (Aida, 2017). These temporary forms of reception made the development of any support infrastructure and the establishment of ties with external support groups or the surrounding villages extremely complicated. Civil society actors that were engaged in pro-migrant activities had an especially difficult time as the radical reorganisation of the reception infrastructure provoked confusion and unease. A member of a civil society organisation described this as follows:

⁴ Law No. CXL concerning the "state of crisis due to mass migration" passed 07.09.2015, Magyar Közlöny 124/2015 19196

⁵ Act C of 2012 Criminal Code and Act XIX of 1998 Act on criminal procedure.

At one point we even demonstrated against the closure of Bicske, not because we thought this was a good camp, oh no it wasn't. We oppose the idea that people stay in camps all their asylum procedure. But in that time, we knew that what would come after, would only be worse. The tent camps, far away, difficult to reach for us. The situation became so chaotic, a created chaos, to make the situation worse for everybody. (Interview 5, member of a civil society organisation, 20.01.2019)

Other actors closer to the Hungarian government noticed the change. In particular, the loss of government contacts within the reception system made the situation very apparent:

With many parts of the Hungarian system [before 2013] we were quite pleased. There were partners in the reception system who were very experienced and dedicated and very willing to look on how we can improve the situation [...] but then things changed. And I think it started already around 2014/15 but had certainly changed when I came in 2015, when politically the issue came much higher on the agenda in Hungary. People were then received and basically put on trains and taken to the northern border close to Austria with the assumption that they would walk across. I am saying the assumption because there was a sort of makeshift camp with tents, but it was very clear that people just keep walking. Nobody wanted to stay in the makeshift camps and there were not enough places anyway. (Interview 1, member of an international organisation, 18.09.2018)

In 2017, these developments intensified through amendments to the Asylum Act LXXX (2007) which allowed pushbacks across the border from anywhere in the country without any legal procedure. The “reinforced legal border closure”, as the Hungarian government called the amendments, decreed that all applicants (except unaccompanied minors under the age of 14) already on Hungarian territory had to be moved to a transit zone and newcomers could only claim asylum within the transit zones.⁶ With this, the transit zones became the main and almost exclusive reception infrastructure, amounting to systematic detention.⁷ The extra-territorialisation in the form of the transit zones is a form of in-between externalisation, realised between borders. With this legal construction, the territorial border line demarcates the right to legal remedies and rights. These forms of extra-territorialisation are based on “micro-distinctions in space measured with a ruler to circumscribe migrants’ access to rights”

⁶ Law XXX from 2007, amended on 28.03.2017.

⁷ In certain cases where individuals had serious health issues, lawyers could demand a transfer to Balassagyarmat (Aida, 2018b, p. 70).

(FitzGerald, 2020, 7). Apart from disrupting the established infrastructure, professional networks and capacities, the territorial shift of the reception infrastructure to border areas was also used as a deterrence measure. It signalled to asylum seekers that they were not welcome and that they should move on to the neighbouring country. At the same time, it was a strategic action to prevent the imposition Dublin III repatriations (Nagy and Sonnevend, 2018, 251). Indeed, in 2018, no country implemented Dublin transfers to Hungary, and a few countries even officially announced a suspension of transfers (Aida, 2018a).

Securitising reception

To make the dismantlement of the reception system a politically conceivable project, the Hungarian government engaged in a variety of securitising tools starting early 2015 (Balzacq, 2007). First, it launched a national consultation on immigration followed by an anti-immigration campaign with large-scale billboards (Szalai and Göbl, 2015; Bocskor, 2018). These exercises allowed the government to successfully politicise the subject, monopolising the dialogue on immigration in the country. The government's ownership of the immigration issue assured that Fidesz could not be outflanked by far-right opposition parties, thereby securing the political dominance of the leading party (Bíró-Nagy, 2022). In September 2015, the Hungarian government went on to build the border fence and the transit zone, two highly publicised tools, to link the issues of border control, security, and migration into one. Furthermore, the government used the chaotic events that occurred during the dismantlement of the reception infrastructure as justification for declaring a state of emergency, enabling them to tighten the asylum legislation through safe third country rules and accelerated procedures⁸. Safe third country rules tend to be complex and vague, which allows member states to bend their meaning and interpret them in a way that significantly lowers asylum standards (Goldner Lang and Nagy, 2021, 460). If applied correctly, the rules require the government to examine each individual case, ensuring the person's protection in the respective third country and proof that there is a connection between the applicant and the country (Frelick, Kysel and Podkul, 2016; Goldner Lang and Nagy, 2021). Transit alone is not a sufficient connection (European Asylum Support Office, 2018). One of the interviewees explained:

We think that in principle it is possible to have a safe third country approach in an asylum reception system, but it cannot be applied the way that Hungary does it. Let's

⁸ Law No. CVI changing Law No. LXXX of 2007 concerning asylum, passed 30.05.2015, Magyar Közlöny 2015/100 17389.

say in the case of Serbia, there is no assessment what will happen to this particular individual, this person, if this person is not received by Serbia, there is no contact with the Serbian authorities. So, the usual safeguards that should be in place included in the EU framework for how to apply first country of asylum and safe third country are not implemented. And this is quite illustrative on how Hungary tends to approach the current set up; they tend to use some of the words that are used in the European framework, but when they implement it, they are doing it their own way. (Interview 1, member of an international organisation, 18.09.2018)

The topic of migration was again a priority for Viktor Orbán's election campaign for the 2018 parliamentary elections (Bíró-Nagy, 2022). Despite the fact that the transit zone was now the quasi-exclusive reception infrastructure and that asylum applications had dropped to 671 in 2018 (HCSO, 2022), the Hungarian government reinforced the "legal fence" through the introduction of new admissibility grounds,⁹ based on a hybrid regulation of the safe third country and first country of asylum concepts.¹⁰ After this, the number of positive asylum claims dropped significantly.¹¹ Material reception conditions deteriorated with the implementation of new admissibility grounds.¹² Asylum seekers that were deemed inadmissible or rejected were denied any support, including the provision of food:

The cases deemed inadmissible initially were not provided with any assistance. They were automatically transferred to the alien's removal procedure according to Hungarian law; when you are in the removal procedure you don't have a right to assistance. That coupled with the fact that Hungary does not consider the transit zones as detention means that the national detention frame also does not apply, so you ended up with people, in our view in detention, who have no assistance, including food. (Interview 2, member of an international organisation, 17.10.2018)

⁹ Section 51(2)(f) and Section 51(12) of the Asylum Act.

¹⁰ A safe third country is a country where people are treated in accordance with certain rules such as: Life and liberty should not be threatened, and the person should have the possibility to request asylum according to the international conventions. For more information see for example: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/pages/glossary/safe-third-country_en First country of asylum is a country where a person has been recognised as a refugee or sufficient protection including non-refoulement. For more information see here: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/pages/glossary/first-country-asylum_en

¹¹ In 2018, out of 671 asylum applications, 68 people were granted international protection and 281 subsidiary protection. For more numbers, see the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (HCSO) https://www.ksh.hu/docs/eng/xstadat/xstadat_annual/i_wvn003.html

¹² Section 51(2)(f) and Section 51(12) of the Asylum Act.

The new legal framework on admissibility allowed the Hungarian government to significantly raise the number of asylum seekers subject to the removal procedure. Because of this, responsibilities concerning material reception conditions were blurred and reception standards were significantly reduced.

The securitisation of migration did not only effect reception infrastructure; it also deeply impacted NGOs and civil society activists working in the field of asylum and migration, who themselves became targets of policy tools of securitisation. This profoundly altered societal relations between migrants, citizens and the state in the construction of new spaces of governance, enforcement and resistance (Stock, Üstübeci and Schultz, 2019; Cantat, 2020). First, because of the closures of well-established reception centres, well-trained and experienced staff were dismissed. Second, in 2017 the Hungarian government terminated monitoring agreements and cooperation with NGOs involved in the support of asylum seekers and refugees:

We offer some basic support; this was how it worked, how it used to work for several years very well: A strong collaboration with the government and a strong and daily collaboration with the immigration office, with the police, and with certain other units who used to work with refugees. [...] That was the past; everything was destroyed, everything broken into pieces, with the opening of the transit zones, where we are prohibited to enter. (Interview 4, member of an NGO, 31.08.2018)

This disruption was accompanied by the fact that new facilities were erected close to territorial borders and far away from Budapest, the location where most organisations are registered. This significantly increased the costs and travel times for groups attempting to partake in activism. One member of an NGO described it as follows:

It is not worth to travel four hours there and back to offer services for four people if they also speak different languages. It makes one worker plus two interpreters for one day; we cannot do that. (Interview 3, member of an NGO, 22.01.2019)

Geographical distance impedes interaction between civil society and government, silences refugees and obstructs claims-making. In the same vein, researchers and journalists were denied access to (all) reception facilities including the transit zones (ECRE, 2019).¹³ Not only did this

¹³ In 2016, a Hungarian journalist brought the case to the European Court of Human Rights, who decided that the denial of access was a violation of the freedom of expression. See the case of Szurovecz v. Hungary. [https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/fre#{%22itemid%22:\[%22001-196418%22\]}](https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/fre#{%22itemid%22:[%22001-196418%22]})

deprive the public from important knowledge on what was happening in the transit zones (and elsewhere), it also deprived asylum seekers of opportunities to make themselves heard and to formulate claims.

Bíró-Nagy (2022) has analysed how the criminalisation of border monitoring through the anti-NGO law T333¹⁴ in 2018 was a successful attempt to keep the migration issue alive until the parliamentary elections. The issue was sustained through linking civil society engagement and immigration, portraying both as the enemy of the nation (Bíró-Nagy, 2022, 409). The law criminalised border monitoring within eight kilometres of the border and organisational activities in support of asylum seekers, including informing asylum seekers about legal procedures relating to the asylum application. An interviewee stated the following:

[The organisation] is not allowed to put up posters anymore and they are not allowed to distribute information leaflets. I think in Serbia they [the refugees] might have the chance while waiting to get this kind of information leaflets, but for example, spreading information in Serbia also falls under this legislation. As if [the organisation] was facilitating their coming although this is providing information about the Hungarian asylum system. It is not like please come, but more see what is the situation that awaits you. (Interview 7, member of an NGO, 30.08.2018)

This criminalisation of civil society support and the wider dynamics of suspicion, intimidation and marginalisation touch upon EU citizens' rights and fundamental rights such as the freedoms of speech and assembly. Whilst these are not externalisation measures per se, they are part of securitisation processes in the context of semi-authoritarian settings. Arguably, there is a direct link between the attempt to close land borders at all costs, disregarding international regulations and human dignity, and the repression of civil society actors and so-called watch dog organisations that contest these practices (Carrera *et al.*, 2018).

Reception infrastructure, securitisation, and European responses

The dismantling of reception infrastructure was part of a successful process of the securitisation of migration. Besides the anti-immigration campaign and the related campaigns targeting NGOs and civil society working on migration-related topics, the closure of the well-established camps (with trained staff) in favour of transit zones and make-shift camps managed by police and the army made asylum a salient issue in Hungarian society. Arguably, the obstruction of sustainable solutions and the politicisation of migration during the events of 2015 allowed the

¹⁴ Amendments to Act C of 2012 on the Penal Code, Section 353/A (May 2018) see: <https://helsinki.hu/wp-content/uploads/T333-ENG.pdf>

Hungarian government to reify the issue of migration and consolidate the government's authority in handling it; at the same time, the power of institutions and civil society was reduced. The construction of the fence and the transit zones deeply impacted the overall reception infrastructure of the country, establishing a connection between border security and (in)security actors, namely the police and armed forces. This has reinforced the image of the migrant “other” as a disruptive element in Hungarian society.

Institutional and professional knowledge of reception was dismissed and traditional support networks were disrupted. The criminalisation of support constitutes a tool of securitisation whereby activists and NGOs become enemies that were deemed to pose a threat to the nation (through their work on migration-related topics). Consequently, many civil society actors ceased their activities or shifted their engagement to other fields while bigger international organisations tried to reconcile cooperation with Hungarian authorities while criticising the government's position. The criminalisation of support activities related to asylum and migration is an important threat to civil society activism and the democratic principles of civic engagement.

The radicality of the Hungarian measures may seem striking; however, some caveats need to be considered. Despite commitments to human rights and liberal values, restrictive measures pertaining to foreign asylum-seekers have gained traction in other EU member states (de Haas, Natter and Vezzoli, 2018; Casella Colombeau, 2020). For example, there has been an increase in the use of large mass reception in many EU member states that has been coupled with the deterioration of reception conditions (Darling, 2016; Kreichauf, 2018). The European hotspot approach is an example of this (Campesi, 2018a; Papoutsi *et al.*, 2019). In the same vein, the criminalisation of support groups and pro-migrant activists has led to increased hostility towards these groups and the attempts to hamper their efforts and their activities across the EU (Carrera *et al.* 2018). These developments fall in line with more broad EU policy frameworks that attempt to balance human security (as a norm) and protectionist regulations. This means that current EU asylum policies contain – and are often founded upon – illiberal elements. The dismantling of the Hungarian reception system should be considered as an example of a broader trend of externalisation that has been observable in EU policymaking.

Indeed, Hungary has exhausted legal standards or even violated them.¹⁵ These actions have continuously evoked harsh criticisms and outcries from Western media outlets and EU officials. The illiberal manner in which the Hungarian government refused to receive asylum seekers, coupled with the country's questionable approach to providing rights for asylum seekers (Kürti, 2020), is considered a threat to European normative power in a fundamental way. Hungary not only refuses solidarity mechanisms in relation to asylum (and thus challenges the fundamental principles of solidarity that underpin the EU) but also questions the EU's normative order through threats to undo the fundamentals (such as rule of law, non-discrimination, tolerance and justice) that hold the EU together (Mälksoo, 2019). Kallius (2016) has analysed these dynamics as a continuity of the East-West divide, in which Hungary is presented as backward and resistant to European values. In reaction, the Hungarian government legitimised its actions to its domestic population by underlining its Europeanness in "protecting" European borders, disregarding international standards. Here, the Hungarian government relied upon the EU's "inability to decipher this legislative cynicism" (Pap, 2018, 4).

The European Commission reacted to the legal changes with infringement procedures against Hungary.¹⁶ In 2020, the Court of Justice of the European Union decided in Case C-808/18 Commission vs Hungary that the transit zones amounted to de facto detention and were contrary to EU law. Five years after their opening, the transit zones closed. The gradual dismantling of the reception system took several years because (financial) agreements with the European Commission were partially disregarded, despite criticism from NGOs and international organisations. It was only the coercive ruling of the CJEU that compelled the Hungarian government to close the transit zones against its will. It seems that, for now, the rule of EU law is the last and only resort for restoring a certain kind of justice (in Hungary). However, refugee rights and asylum standards cannot be defended by a court alone, as most cases never go to court; even if they do, it takes too long to ensure adequate treatment, as was the case with the Hungarian transit zones. Furthermore, court decisions are often not supported by political actors; in fact, the disunity between the courts and politicians tend to deepen the potential for conflict.

¹⁵ In case C-924/19, the CJEU decided in 2020 that transit zones were unlawful detention, violating Article 2(h), Article 8, Article 9, and Article 11 of the RCD.

¹⁶ Infringement Procedure INFR (2015)2201. Which was referred to the EU Court of Justice (CJEU) in 2018. In 2019, it opened another infringement procedure for the non-provision of food and criminalisation of civil society INFR (2019)2193. (See: EC 2018, 2021)

This is particularly pertinent when considering member states like Hungary that have a weak commitment to democratic rules and have curtailed their support for guarantees under the rule of law (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2019; Körösenyi, Illés and Gyulai, 2020). The potential for conflict stems from the blatant application of illiberal ideas and concepts by the Hungarian government, illustrating many of the inherent weaknesses to liberal democracy and the fundamental liberal values, such as the rule of law, that underpin the EU (Mälksoo, 2019; Bertoncini and Reynié, 2021). However, the EU is itself caught up in contradiction between balancing security concerns and upholding the human rights of migrants in matters of asylum and externalisation (Nancheva, 2015; Kallius, 2016, 2017). The strong illiberal stance of the Hungarian government and the legal ambiguities inscribed in European regulations has created a scenario in which the EU is now essentially powerless in compelling compliance from the Hungarian government. The EU's legal framework has not prevented Hungary from undermining the existing reception standards. Similarly, the EU-wide directives on reception conditions have also been ignored by the Hungarian government. Furthermore, it has highlighted how the securitisation of asylum through externalisation measures, the dismantling of the reception infrastructure, and the closing of borders has also impacted domestic civil society and other substate actors contesting these practices. Consequently, it is not only asylum-seekers rights that are comprised, but also the fundamental rights of Hungarian citizens.

Conclusion

In this contribution, I showed how the reception infrastructure in Hungary was dismantled in the period between 2013 and 2020. The Hungarian government closed relatively well-established open camps and replaced them with ad-hoc tent and container camps to address the lack of reception capacity, a scenario the Hungarian government created itself. In a phase of heightened migration pressure, the government successfully securitised the issue, reverting to limited policy solutions to increase its power and control through emergency measures. I pointed out how the securitisation of migration shaped the extra-territorialisation of reception in the transit zones; relatedly, it also led to the criminalisation of civil society actors, disrupted local and national support networks, undermined the right to asylum of qualifying migrants, and threatened EU citizens' rights such as the freedoms of speech and assembly. The securitisation of asylum thus allowed the Hungarian government to: (1) use a variety of tools and discourses to securitise migration and reception, ultimately dismantling the reception system; and (2) elevate the topic as a security issue, asserting its opposition to the liberal values of the EU while simultaneously increasing its own power within the national context by delegitimising parts of civil society.

The analysis of the process of securitisation, a constitutive element of illiberal policymaking, in the context of the reception of asylum seekers showed how the exhaustion, and at times purposeful overstepping, of legal boundaries are used to consolidate power and assert illiberal world views (Pap, 2018; Halmai, 2021; Sajó, 2021; Sajó, Uitz and Holmes, 2022). However, there can also be illiberal tendencies in law-making elsewhere when absolute values such as the rule of law or human rights considerations become relative (Drinóczi and Cormacain, 2021). Illiberal policymaking within different policy fields and securitisation discourses and acts performed by successful populist parties inside the EU need more critical attention in order to understand current societal and political challenges and changes. It would be erroneous to think of Hungary as an outlier in asylum policymaking, even though this might be a comfortable idea for European institutions. Such thinking plays into familiar tropes that situate “eastern Europeans” outside “Europe,” reinforcing normative divides and creating instability, while at the same time obscuring the political and societal consequences of the rise of illiberal tendencies in other European member states.

The more EU institutions try to split themselves between diverging interests, the more they weaken their own human rights framework, making it that much easier for consolidated illiberal

regimes and illiberal parties in the member states to exhaust these ambiguities (Mos, 2020). Future research should focus on the correlation(s) between changes in the domestic contexts of EU member states and how these changes at the institutional and multi-level context of the EU, thereby shedding light on different possible paths that the EU and its member states could take to consolidate their normative values. This research necessitates a critical investigation of how illiberal tendencies and processes of securitisation in countries with strong illiberal parties have the power to shape and change specific issue areas, policy fields, and public perception at the institutional level in the EU, inadvertently or directly weakening European institutions. Finally, future investigations can shed light on the transformative power of illiberal ideas within the EU and resistance strategies at the local, national and European levels.

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Interview 5, member of a civil society organisation, 20.01.2019, Budapest

Interview 7, member of a non-governmental organisation, 30.08.2018, Budapest

Discussion

In this PhD thesis, I have analysed reception practices as sites of bordering in examining reception infrastructure in different European member states. I consider how bordering practices are constituted in similar or different ways in different national contexts, relating them back to broader societal developments that are governed through political projects of belonging (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss and Cassidy, 2019). The four papers demonstrate how reception practices are used to draw sociopolitical boundaries that demarcate refugees and contain them in a space that is marked by legal exceptionalism, thus constituting instances of bordering. These practices of bordering entail different actors of and in reception that shape, enact, implement, and contest policies that unfold at the different levels of governance.

In addressing the research question on how reception practices constitute sites of bordering I have situated diverging reception practices on a bordering continuum. This continuum is not concerned with reception systems, and it is not interested in sorting countries from “good” to “bad”; rather, it is concerned with different practices. These practices may take place concomitantly in one country, or one practice may be absent in another. A continuum is a series of similar items in which each is almost the same as the ones next to it, but the last is very different from the first.¹ Arguably, reception practices that merge with forms of detention are those that engage the most radical form of exclusion and bordering. Not only are refugees detained and thus have no access to local communities and surrounding municipalities, but civil society support structures are also marginalized and prohibited from entering. Here, it is often only the way via the rule of law that protects the right to dignified reception. Equally strong bordering mechanisms are very large and overcrowded collective reception facilities that overwhelm the local environment. This creates a high level of defensiveness towards refugees and politicizes reception. Dispersal policies are yet another form of bordering: they prevent the emergence of social contacts and networks through constant local displacement. Another aspect in which the absence of reception practices constitutes an instance of bordering is that of neglect: the strategic reduction of financial resources and the long-term shortage of reception places are part of the state practice of othering.

¹ https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american_english/continuum

In the following two sections, I first discuss my findings that pertain to the converging characteristics on the spatial dimension, and then I expound on my findings that pertain to divergences on the political dimension. These present two concomitant developments: in the spatial dimension, many characteristics of collective reception converge despite different legal frameworks, whereas in the political dimension, policies and the roles of actors tend to diverge.

Convergence on the spatial dimension: Spaces of reception

Spaces of reception share some common characteristics that are more or less independent from the national context as the findings of the papers show. These characteristics are immobilization, othering, and reduced self-determination. In all national contexts collective accommodation often takes place in secluded areas, making it difficult for asylum seekers to overcome distances. Both spatially and symbolically, refugees are positioned at the margins of society. This immobilization is accompanied by long asylum procedures and increased uncertainty about the future. The use of specific buildings that are reused or converted for housing leads to increased stigmatization and othering. On this premise, refugees are perceived as a homogeneous group by local communities (Pieper, 2008; Kreichauf, 2018). This reinforces public perceptions of refugees as an undefined mass of people and can lead to the politicization of reception on the local level. In the four papers, I have focused on spaces of reception and have studied the characteristics of reception centres as well as the role of actors in reception, to show how the space of refugee reception as such becomes a site of bordering.

In paper 1, *The Reception of Asylum Seekers in Europe: Exclusion through Accommodation Practices*, I show how meticulous bureaucratic measures cover the entire sphere of refugees' lives. Regulatory framework conditions, for example, even determine which types of leisure activities are possible and have the social effect that refugees are permanently outed as such in everyday life. The force of governmentality connected through space and power that emerges here determines not only the encounters and possibilities within the reception facility but also the contact with the environment. This paper gives an overview on these everyday bordering practices in Italy and Austria. They are structured by state regulations, which are reflected in the house rules and bureaucratic structures of the organization of accommodation. Staff and social workers implement these regulations on site and often have little leeway in doing so. As resources are scarce, however, they often must decide who can be a beneficiary of, for example, a place in a language course or voluntary work, where much depends on relationships,

behaviour and favouritism. Many staff members have no specific training in this area which can lead to the unreflective reproduction of everyday racisms or to staff advocating for people beyond their professional boundaries. The discretion and scarcity of resources thus creates an imbalanced and unjust system.

Like many other bordering practices, reception practices are subject to the neoliberal structuring of migration governance and labour markets (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2012). My findings reveal how reception is subject to these neoliberal bordering processes that govern the differential inclusion of refugees. Collective reception is a cost-effective way of accommodating refugees, which is based on market logics that follow a tender and offer system. This neoliberal market logic dominates the management of reception complicates and diffuses responsibility. Many services are designed as in-kind services. In large facilities where, for example, vocational training is provided by (untrained) staff or health care is provided by doctors (or other medical staff) on site, refugees do not have the possibility to freely choose, and they do not have a reason to leave the centre. The centre therefore becomes a border that refugees are expected not to cross. The high level of regulation, with simultaneous informal unequal treatment and the marketisation of social benefits, reinforce the diffuse power of governmentality, which is also directed primarily at the self-disciplining of the refugees.

Refugees feel obliged to subjugate themselves to these regulations as a form of self-discipline, keeping to themselves and accepting poor service; alternately, they refuse to subject themselves to this tightly regulated net of discipline. Through the analysis of three migration journeys in paper 2, *Moving, Naming, Narrating. Refugees undoing Bordering Practices of Reception in Italy and France*, I have illustrated how the undoing of bordering practices in reception can bring autonomy as well as other forms of precarity and domination, especially because this requires a break from normative ideas about how refugees behave and thus subordinate themselves to other legal categories or expectations of deservingness. Although reception and material reception are in principle experienced as positive, refugees often feel restricted by the paternalistic system and alienated from their own sense of integrity and self-determination. Through my analysis I have identified three strategies refugees use to gain autonomy: mobility, the negotiation of economic, political and social belonging and the reworking of reception conditions. Through these three strategies, refugees undo bordering practices that are nested in reception practices. I show how refugees contest spatial domination through techniques of sociocultural reproduction, as theorized by De Certeau (2003). Moving (as onward mobility),

naming (in the form of political and social engagement) and narrating (speaking about their experiences) are ways to undo the bordering practices to which they are subjugated (ibid).

Through these techniques, refugees themselves can mitigate political and social bordering processes and overcome spatial boundaries. They encounter the different quality of the spatial dimension and the political dimension by engaging in the contestation of spatial domination. First, through onward mobility, refugees are confronted with normative expectations that underly the European legal framework that regulates onward movement within European member states (the Dublin regulation). Returned refugees (from the Dublin procedure) do not qualify for the same reception standards as other refugees do. While state policies implement the regulation, the normative grounding embedded in discursive frames of deservingness and othering fosters these forms of inequality (Picozza, 2020). Second, when negotiating social and political belonging through claim making, they learn to direct claims to the local level (e.g., for living conditions) as well as to the national level (e.g., a change of policies). This allows refugees to gain a contextual understanding of the political situation that helps them situate themselves in the broader context of dynamics of inclusion and exclusion at the societal level.

Another important factor in mitigating bordering practices is the negotiation of economic belonging. With this, I mean negotiating belonging either through work on the (in)formal labour market or voluntary work in local municipal space or in NGOs and associations. In reception, volunteering is often encouraged, and those who seem particularly promising or sympathetic are referred to perform voluntary work. In relation to the informal labour market, however, the situation is somewhat different. Practices of informal work are tolerated as long as refugees behave inconspicuously. On the one hand, this gives refugees the possibility to gain financial independence, replace low state support or feel useful and extend their competences within the local network in which they are embedded. It is also a possibility to open up new spaces and ways to participate in the host society and position themselves as hard working and deserving. On the other hand, this is intrinsically related to the entanglement of bordering practices and the neoliberal economic rationale. While the work that is done in this informal labour market is essential (and thus tolerated in the reception system), it is based on precariousness, insecurity and exploitation (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013; Ramírez *et al.*, 2021).

The space of collective reception is shaped by the social and political processes that enable its existence and, in turn, shapes social and political processes that are a part of bordering practices. Places of collective reception are positioned to (unequally) distribute power and status within

the respective space (the municipality, the city, the state). This performance of a specific place enacts power and sovereignty (Gregory, Meusburger and Suarsana, 2015). Even if the surrounding environment is not hostile to refugees or reception per se, these bordering processes prevail, as I have shown in Paper 3, *Politics of Adjustment. Rural Mayors and the Reception of Refugees*. This paper demonstrates how local actors, with the mayor as gatekeeper renegotiate rural spaces through adjusting reception conditions in the interest of the municipality. Despite the marginal leeway to manoeuvre they aim to influence how reception spaces are designed, preferencing small and family-oriented facilities.

In paper 4, *Dismantling the Reception of Asylum Seekers. Hungary's Illiberal Asylum Policies and EU Responses*, I demonstrate how space becomes an instrument of radical othering. In Hungary, the transit zone (the space of reception) merges completely with border control technologies at the territorial border and functions thus as a prominent structuring principle of reception (Paasi *et al.*, 2018). The use of collective reception becomes part of the dynamics of securitization and bordering. Othering and bordering happen through the governmentality that is intrinsic to the way collective reception is organized and shape the way reception practices are or aren't integrated into the local environment. The othering in collective reception is therefore a mirror of the constituency of Western thinking about identity and difference (Paasi, 2021). Reception as a site of bordering carries this critical position and solidifies the dualism between "us" and "them". Reception practices are thus particular political projects of governance that must be understood in relation to particular political projects of belonging, which in turn constitute these reception practices (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss and Cassidy, 2019).

Divergence on the political dimension: Power, sovereignty and borders

The divergence of reception practices at the national level pertains to different historically developed reception systems and national legal frameworks. In all four countries, I studied legal changes that have led to an increased use of collective reception, which often goes hand in hand with a decrease in the quality of services provided. This finding is mirrored by the literature focusing on reception in various national contexts (Kreichauf, 2017; Campesi, 2018b). Nevertheless, reception systems diverge from each other. My findings show that on the dimension of political governance, reception practices as sites of bordering are entrenched in the negotiation of sovereign decision-making in matters of asylum at the European level, while the domestic level shapes governments' approaches to reception. Reception practices are also the product of different political projects of belonging.

The most threatening political projects to refugee protection and reception are illiberal and populist tendencies that reject immigration and multiculturalism. The danger lies not only in the radical rejection of those identified as Others but also in the general questioning of liberal values and the rule of law, which are often the last resort to protect refugees from injustice. As I show in paper 4 on the Hungarian case, illiberal policy-making in asylum has also affected refugee reception. Extraterritorialization and the merging of border control and reception in the transit zone completely undermined reception practices and led to a *de facto* detention of (almost) all refugees in Hungarian territory. Attempts to establish a nation-state free from nonethnic Hungarians have led to the elimination of societal elements that are perceived as strangers to the imagined community (Pap, 2018; Kürti, 2020). Refugee reception becomes an instrument of securitization through which illiberal and populist policy makers, such as Viktor Orbán and to a lesser extent Matteo Salvini could successfully elevate the topic of reception to a security issue that in turn justified more restrictive and inhumane reception practices.

My findings show that illiberal tendencies can also be perceived in Italy and Austria. Both countries have initiated reforms in reception practices that lowered reception standards and/or even renationalized parts of initial reception and legal counselling in the form of national agencies. Furthermore, illiberal tendencies are also palpable in EU approaches to reception that relate to the external border of the European Union, such as the hotspot approach in Italy under the umbrella of the EAM. In this case, under the banner of the EU, the RCD is circumvented, and accommodation standards are undermined (Campesi, 2018a).

However, in federal/regional political systems where reception practices are interwoven in the multilevel governance system, the local level can have more power to negotiate or even shape local reception policies, as sometimes happens when municipalities themselves provide spaces for reception. Local actors, such as local governments, neighbours of the reception centre or nongovernmental organizations and civil society, find ways to address bordering practices of reception by either mitigating them to foster social cohesion in the local community or relying on them to uphold exclusionary bordering practices. The paper which focuses on the role of mayors, reveals how this is a two-way process that concomitantly reinforces bordering and othering processes while steering social cohesion at the local level. Local actors can be situated at the intersection between the actors in reception and the actors of reception. On the one hand, like the actors in reception as in Paper 1, they are bound by the state's legal and political framework and have only marginal room to manoeuvre. The framework conditions thus define the possibilities of practice (Caponio and Ponzo, 2022). However, local actors still have the

power to mitigate or circumvent certain regulations (Zapata-Barrero, Caponio and Scholten, 2017). They find themselves as negotiators of framework conditions that mostly serve their interest in maintaining their own position of power. In this sense, bordering practices of reception are primarily negotiated in the interest of their own electorate and thus of the inhabitants of the community, while racist practices and assimilationist understandings of integration become normalized. Here, I thus demonstrate how local political projects of belonging (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss and Cassidy, 2019) arise in resistance to national bordering processes, while they do not question integration imperatives and bordering practices of the nation state.

A bordering practice in reception that strongly influence local level engagement is dispersal. This comes to the fore when looking at the case of France. Here, dispersal policies distribute refugees in the regions, to order them according to legal status, leading to fragmented migration trajectories where social ties and networks are disrupted. Depending on the legal status, reception practices, supervision keys, control mechanisms and autonomy diverge. This is another way space is used to perform power as an ordering principle in the field of asylum. Furthermore, the allocation of different groups with similar legal status creates a stratification that is defined by prospects of staying and deservingness. Dispersal mechanisms and the development of different types of reception centres in France are a consequence of efforts to take refugees away from Paris and are guided by short-term policies that make it easier to establish new types of structures instead of developing long-term sustainable solutions (Slama, 2020).

The findings thus reveal that reception practices in different member states diverge strongly. This raises the question of the (normative) power of European directives and efforts towards harmonization. In principle, the directives regulate the minimum standards of accommodation, with the basic requirement of common normative values with regard to responsibility towards refugees. However, if member states do not (or no longer) share this normative stance, then the directives themselves seem to be too weak to guarantee adequate reception. They link back to the ambiguity with which the European Union frames normative values within the framework of human rights conventions. The EU institutions develop soft law in the framework of external border protection that increasingly undermines accommodation standards, which exposes a contradiction and an internal conflict that can be used by right-wing and populist forces in the EU to weaken normative values and to attack or at least weaken the rule of law. This represents a normative threat to European core values and their fundamental principles (Creppell, 2011;

Mätksoo, 2019). At the same time, asylum, refugee protection and as I argue also reception have become issues of morality policies, that revolve around fundamental values and norms (Mourão Permoser, 2019; Bauböck, Mourão Permoser and Ruhs, 2022). The politicization of asylum and value conflicts that revolve on the national level, weaken EU institutions. Since there is no convergence in the politics of values between different member states the interventional power of EU institutions also fades (Euchner and Engeli, 2018).

In this context, reception policies and practices can be analysed as instruments to negotiate discursive and political claims of sovereignty and normative values of the European Union. If the control of borders and mobility is considered a core element of national sovereignty, then the (albeit sometimes marginal) shift of competences to the European level, takes away a part of member states sovereignty (Agnew, 2003). Reception practices are hence an instrument of political and discursive negotiations of sovereignty that are embedded in national(istic) projects of belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2011; Scott, 2020). These projects are framed differently in European member states; some are directed against European cooperation, some are directed against groups of Others within society, such as refugees or other migrants, and some are directed against both.

Actors of reception can turn reception into an instrument of radical exclusion in which they push the politicization and securitization of the asylum issue and thereby strengthen social othering processes. This has tremendous effects on refugees and, increasingly, for civil society, which is marginalized and criminalized when working on migration-related issues or showing solidarity with refugees. As paper four shows, Hungary has been forerunner in criminalizing the support of refugees or any migration-related activity, although this is an extreme case. Tendencies directed towards the criminalization of refugee support or the exclusion of civil society from certain (reception) practices can also be observed in other member states (Carrera *et al.*, 2018). Reception practices change not only through the legal framework in which they are embedded but also through the engagement of civil society, which tends to mitigate the exclusionary mechanisms of reception. Based on the findings of paper 4, I also show that changing reception regimes, can entail bordering practices within society that go beyond the exclusion of refugees to target NGOs or European citizens and their fundamental rights, revealing the social and political implications of reception as a site of bordering.

Conclusion

This dissertation contributes empirically, theoretically and conceptually to current scientific debates on reception and bordering practices in contemporary European societies. It shows that European member states govern the inclusion and exclusion of refugees by strategically reframing spaces of reception as sites of bordering. The papers of this thesis provide empirical insight into diverging reception practices and the shifts that have occurred in national reception systems since 2015. Through an in-depth ethnographic approach, I contribute to scholarly debates on asylum and refugee protection that aim to understand how member states under the CEAS have changed their reception policies and how different actors have reacted to these changes. I conceptually differentiate between actors in and actors of reception and I am thus able to focus on micro and macro dynamics that govern bordering practices in reception. The multisited approach to reception as a site of bordering challenges a linear or stable perception of reception and instead conceptualises it as a field of shifting claims and counterclaims where various actors negotiate their interests. The analysis reveals that national governments and local actors are driven by different interests which they aim to accommodate through negotiations between the two levels.

This dissertation demonstrates that bordering dynamics in spaces of reception tend to converge, whereas reception practices and policies diverge on national levels. My findings show that spaces of reception share common exclusionary characteristics that are an essential part of bordering regimes as they demarcate refugees in exceptional spaces. On a political dimension, however, reception practices diverge despite a common European regulatory framework. Instead of harmonizing reception practices, member states have renegotiated the perceived loss of sovereignty through reinforcing bordering mechanisms in reception. While refugee reception is governed and conceptualized by national governments, local-level and civil society actors can mitigate and soften the dehumanizing and exclusionary bordering practices. Such inclusionary approaches stand in opposition to thriving illiberal tendencies which not only reinforce the exclusionary elements of accommodation but also undermine accommodation through detention. They also turn against volunteers and civil society organizations that support refugees. This situation calls into question the fundamental rights and freedom of European civilians.

By conceptualizing bordering as a continuum, the dissertation makes it possible to analyse different governmental techniques that continuously approximate reception with bordering

practices. This allows to think of similarities and differences not as separate developments in one member state but as a continuum within the European Union. The bordering continuum consists of a series of similar items that resemble each other and thus indicate government strategies that at times purposefully overstep and exhaust legal boundaries to assert their political worldviews and implement political projects of belonging. The more these interests and worldviews exclude refugees and immigrants and constitute them as Others, the more this plays out in reception practices. The conceptualization of reception as a site of bordering makes it possible to situate such different reception practices, understood as the interplay between policies and actors. It is not limited to local or national developments but is tied to larger societal and political bordering processes in Europe and their normative underpinnings (Drinóczi and Cormacain, 2021).

In times when illiberal and populist ideas thrive and political parties' question fundamental values such as human rights and principles of liberal democracy, these findings on reception as sites of bordering are highly relevant. With this thesis I demonstrate that reception practices are a continuous development that goes beyond individual member states and needs to be placed in relation to the European Union and its institutions and policies and that reception policies and practices that do not only affect refugees but question fundamental values and threatens civil society and its engagement. Finally, this thesis underlines that to conceptualise reception as a site of bordering allows us to grasp how these bordering processes also influence other areas of social coexistence. As Yuval-Davis et al. (2019) note, "bordering has redefined contemporary notions of citizenship, identity, and belonging for all, affecting hegemonic majorities as well as racialised minorities in their everyday lives" (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss and Cassidy, 2019, p. 1).

Following this remark and the findings of my dissertation, further research is necessary to investigate how bordering practices unfold in reception, focusing on the impact this has on society as a whole including refugees and civil society actors. Research is needed to further explore how illiberal tendencies and processes of securitization shape and change policy fields, public perception and bordering processes in European societies. In this thesis, I was able to study four different member states with different positionalities related to refugee admission, allocation and reception. More comparative research could further explain dynamics in and between European member states as well as the ambivalent role of different European institutions in refugee protection. In order to do so, a focus on more unexplored European geographies as well as new methodological concepts on comparative research in such a complex policy field as asylum would enrich scholarly debates on reception and bordering.

Finally, research focusing on more inclusive reception practices could strengthen the concept of the bordering continuum and provide best practice examples for policy makers and other actors in and of reception.

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Annex I - Abstracts

Abstract Deutsch

Die Unterbringung von Geflüchteten ist ein umstrittenes Thema in der Europäischen Union. Mitgliedstaaten diskutieren kontrovers über Verteilungsmechanismen und die damit verbundene mangelnde Solidarität. Ebenso umstritten ist die Unterbringung von Geflüchteten, die durch große Unterschiede in den Mitgliedsstaaten gekennzeichnet ist. Auf der Grundlage eingehender ethnographischer Feldforschung, Interviews und der Analyse von Policy Papers untersuche ich die Rolle europäischer Regelungen, nationaler Asylpolitiken und lokaler Umgebungen in der Aufnahmepraxis in vier europäischen Mitgliedstaaten, nämlich Österreich, Frankreich, Ungarn und Italien. Auf der Grundlage des Konzepts der Grenzziehung (bordering) argumentiere ich, dass Aufnahmepraktiken am besten als mehrdimensionale Praktiken im Zusammenhang mit räumlicher und politischer Grenzziehung analysiert werden können. Die räumliche Dimension bezieht sich auf die Analyse des Aufnahmeortes selbst und der Akteure, die an diesen Orten leben und arbeiten, wo Gesetze und Vorschriften als Formen der Gouvernamentalität zum Tragen kommen. Die politische Dimension betrifft die Akteure, die die Aufnahme durch Gesetzgebung, Verordnungen und Umsetzung auf verschiedenen Regierungsebenen steuern. Durch diese konzeptionelle Linse stelle ich stark divergierende Formen der Aufnahme gegenüber und beschreibe zugrunde liegende Machtdynamik zwischen den verschiedenen Akteuren. Damit zeige ich auf, dass Unterbringungseinrichtungen als Instrumente größerer-gesellschaftlicher Grenzziehungsprozesse zu verstehen ist und dies daher nicht nur Auswirkungen auf Geflüchtete hat, sondern auch auf zivilgesellschaftliches Engagement und Rechtsstaatlichkeit. Durch die Verortung verschiedener Unterbringungspraxen auf einem Grenzziehungs-Kontinuum können sowohl Unterschiede in der Unterbringung zwischen Staaten als auch innerhalb staatlicher Unterbringungssysteme analysiert werden. Mit dieser Dissertation leiste ich einen Beitrag zur Literatur über Aufnahme und Asyl im Mehrebenensystem der Europäischen Union und schließe die Lücke in der vergleichenden und kontrastierenden Forschung über Konvergenz und Divergenz lokaler Aufnahmepraktiken und über Unterschiede in der Umsetzung europäischer Asylpolitik in den verschiedenen europäischen Mitgliedsstaaten.

Abstract English

The accommodation of refugees in the European Union has become a contentious political issue in recent years. Scholars and political authorities in member states have controversially discussed dispersal mechanisms and the lack of solidarity therein. Equally contested are reception practices for refugees, characterized by major differences of living standards in the member states. Based on in-depth ethnographic field work, interviews and policy analysis I explore the role of European regulations, national asylum policies and local environments in reception practices in four European member states, namely Austria, France, Hungary and Italy. Drawing on the concept of bordering, I argue that reception practices can best be analysed as multi-dimensional practices related to spatial and political boundary drawing. The spatial dimension pertains to the analysis of the space of the reception centre itself and the actors living or working in reception centres, where laws and regulations materialize as forms of

governmentality. The political dimension concerns the actors of reception that govern reception through law-making, regulations and implementation on different governance levels. Through this conceptual lens I contrast the strong diverging forms of reception and elucidate underlying power dynamics between different actors. In this way, I show that reception facilities are to be understood as instruments of larger societal bordering processes and that this therefore not only has an impact on refugees, but also on civil society engagement and the rule of law. By locating different accommodation practices on a bordering continuum, diverging reception practices between states as well as within states can be analysed. With this PhD thesis, I contribute to the literature on reception and asylum in the multi-level setting of the European Union and fill the gap in comparative and contrasting research on convergence and divergence of local reception practices and differences in the implementation of refugee protection between European member states.

Annex II - Vancouver Statement

Statement regarding my contribution to the paper “politics of adjustment”

Regarding data collection, I collected the data on rural municipalities in France and Hungary and Miriam Haselbacher collected the data on municipalities in Austria and Germany. We developed the codes in joint coding sessions in multiple rounds of coding, whereas I coded the Italian and French interviews and Miriam Haselbacher coded the German interviews. We developed the concept of the article together and equally contributed to writing it.

Below you find an overview on my contribution to this publication in co-authorship based on the modified Vancouver rules applied by the University of Vienna.

Share of the doctoral student in the creation of the article, chapter or section	A= predominant contribution (100%-70%) B= central contribution (70%-30%) C= small contribution (30%-1%) D= no contribution (0%)	
CONCEPT	the idea for the research or article, framing the research question or hypothesis	B
DESIGN	planning the methods to generate results	B
SUPERVISION	oversight and responsibility for the organization and course of the project and the manuscript	B
DATA COLLECTION/PROCESSING	responsibility for gathering empirical material, organizing and reporting data	B
ANALYSIS/INTERPRETATION	responsibility for making sense of and presenting the results	B
LITERATURE SEARCH	responsibility for this necessary function	B
WRITING	responsibility for creating all or a substantive part of the manuscript	B
CRITICAL REVIEW	reworking the manuscript for intellectual content before submission, not just spelling and grammar checking	B