Urbanised migration:
Rethinking the dispersal process to help us find a progressive answer to refugee arrivals

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

FEPS YOUNG ACADEMICS NETWORK

The Young Academics Network (YAN) was established in March 2009 by the Foundation of European Progressive Studies (FEPS) with the support of the Renner Institut to gather progressive PhD candidates and young PhD researchers, who are ready to use their academic experience in a debate about the Next Europe. The founding group was composed of awardees of the "Call for Paper" entitled "Next Europe, Next Left" – whose articles also help initiating the FEPS Scientific Magazine "Queries". Quickly after, with the help of the FEPS member foundations, the group enlarged – presently incorporating around 40 outstanding and promising young academics.

FEPS YAN meets in the Viennese premises of Renner Institut, which offers great facilities for both reflections on the content and also on the process of building the network as such. Both elements constitute mutually enhancing factors, which due to innovative methods applied make this Network also a very unique project. Additionally, the groups work has been supervised by the Chair of the Next Left Research Programme, Dr. Alfred Gusenbauer – who at multiple occasions joined the sessions of the FEPS YAN, offering his feedback and guidance.

This paper is one of the results of the fifth cycle of FEPS YAN. Each of the meetings is an opportunity for the FEPS YAN to discuss the current state of their research, presenting their findings and questions both in the plenary, as also in the respective working groups. The added value of their work is the pan-European, innovative, interdisciplinary character – not to mention, that it is by principle that FEPS wishes to offer a prominent place to this generation of academics, seeing in it a potential to construct alternative that can attract young people to progressivism again. Though the process is very advanced already, the FEPS YAN remains a Network – and hence is ready to welcome new participants.

FEPS YAN plays also an important role within FEPS structure as a whole. The FEPS YAN members are asked to join different events (from large Conferences, such as FEPS "Call to Europe" or "Renaissance for Europe" and PES Convention to smaller High Level Seminars and Focus Group Meetings) and encouraged to provide inputs for publications (i.e. for FEPS Magazine: The Progressive Post). Enhanced participation of the FEPS YAN Members in the overall FEPS life and increase of its visibility remains one of the strategic goals of the network.

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Introduction

There are complex social, political and economic reasons that explain why many asylum seekers and refugees travelling into Europe settle in major urban centres.[1] For refugees who arrive to seek asylum, where they end up may be a matter of choice or a result of other factors: a link with friends or family; a paid transaction with a smuggler; or a governmental dispersal process. In this paper we analyse how governmental dispersal processes are used by some European states to move asylum seekers to designated spaces, and why this is often problematic for the settlement and integration of newly arrived communities. At present the reception conditions in many European cities are often inadequate for providing sufficient social and practical support for refugees, and this can make it difficult for those who arrive to rebuild their lives, or to make meaningful, enduring connections with their new communities. This paper will focus on the underexplored, urban dimension of refugee reception to explore how European cities respond to newly arrived refugees, and what opportunities exist to adopt a more progressive approach in providing for their needs, and fostering a more inclusive environment.

Through a discussion of dispersal policy in the United Kingdom and Germany, we examine the significance of urban spaces for processes of refugee hospitality and integration. Dispersal here refers to policies and procedures which govern the spatial distribution of newly-arrived asylum seekers, by directing where they are sent to live and the type of accommodation they will have access to. While we have political and ethical concerns about the use of dispersal, owing to the ways that it controls and restricts the freedom of asylum seekers to move[2], we acknowledge that the dispersal of asylum seekers, who have not been granted the right to remain in European states is in principle compliant with EU law[3]. As Europe continues to receive a significant number refugees and asylum seekers, the ongoing dispersal of new arrivals seems likely to remain a key policy response of Europe's governments, as they seek to resettle large numbers of refugees in a manner that evenly spreads responsibility for reception. As such, this paper adopts a pragmatic perspective, assessing the shortcomings of current dispersal policies, and seeking to find ways that they could be rethought and improved in order to capitalise on the potential of urban areas to provide a welcoming environment for refugee resettlement and inclusion. This is not to overlook the valid objections to dispersal or the fact that any large scale migration to urban areas inevitably produces particular social and political challenges, but rather to shed light on how current dispersal policies might be more efficient, and at the same time more effective in facilitating integration between refugee groups and host communities. While it could be argued that the only 'truly' progressive

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[1] Collyer, M (2005) When do social networks fail to explain migration? Accounting for the movement of Algerian asylum-seekers to the UK. Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 31(4), 699-718.
Koser, K. (2001). The smuggling of asylum seekers into Western Europe: Contradictions, conundrums, and dilemmas. Global human smuggling: Comparative perspectives, 58-73.

[2] Zetter, R., Griffiths, D., & Sigona, N. (2005). Social capital or social exclusion? The impact of asylum-seeker dispersal on UK refugee community organizations. Community Development Journal, 40(2), 169-181.
Schuster, L. (2005). A sledgehammer to crack a nut: deportation, detention and dispersal in Europe. Social policy & administration, 39(6), 606-621.
Darling, J. (2011). Domopolitics, governmentality and the regulation of asylum accommodation. Political Geography, 30(5), 263-271.

[3] Tánczos, Judit (2016) Lost in transition? The European standards behind refugee integration. Migration Policy Group, p. 6.

approach to the question to dispersal would be the abandonment of such policies in favour of free movement, we suggest that the current political context surrounding migration in the majority of European states- combined with the widespread and embedded reality of dispersal practices across Europe- means that the complete and immediate abandonment of such policies is both unlikely and unfeasible. Instead, we advocate for a pragmatic and incremental approach to policy, whereby existing dispersal regimes are modified and reworked so as to better reflect progressive ideas and, more importantly, to foster a more welcoming and ethical reception for asylum seekers.

This argument will unfold as follows: in the first section of the paper we situate our argument in the current political context, by discussing the ongoing debate over the so-called 'refugee crisis'. Here we suggest that this framing is fundamentally misrepresentative and unhelpful, as it overlooks multiple and intersecting challenges that ultimately produce a crisis, but which are not all reducible to migration[4]. By that, we mean issues such as the shortage of housing; the provision of public services; economic deprivation in many urban areas; ongoing fiscal crisis; and issues with social cohesion. We make the suggestion that referring to a 'refugee crisis' does not only consolidate and reproduce negative attitudes towards asylum seekers, but actively obscures many potential solutions to address the challenges that accompany large-scale migration.

In the second section of the paper, we then turn to a discussion of dispersal policies and procedures in the United Kingdom, followed by a comparative discussion about Germany in the third section of the paper. These examples function as case studies through which to consider the specific question of the role of urban areas in managing migration, and the ways in which Europe's cities could prove a unique analytical prism through which to explore the problems usually associated with national and transnational scales of analysis and policy response. We provide an outline of dispersal policies in the UK and Germany for comparative purposes: Germany due to the fact that it has resettled the highest number of refugees in 2015 and also has a highly devolved system of government; and the UK to provide an example of a member state with a more centralised government- and consequently a more centralised control over dispersal processes- as well as greater governmental resistance to the quota system for the resettlement of Syrian refugees. We highlight the pertinent criticisms of both systems and the ways that the current approach to dispersal can be seen to fail both refugees and local communities. From there, we begin to consider how the dispersal of refugees could be undertaken in more responsible and intelligent ways, and how a focus on urban scales could make refugee and asylum policy more responsive to local contexts and challenges. Finally, we discuss and conclude upon our observations from these case studies, and provide ten policy recommendations that could be implemented on the European level, and which reflect the more progressive approach to dispersal policies and procedures.

1. Refugee crisis? Interrogating the terms of the debate.

Our discussion of dispersal policy and practice is situated within the wider context of recent debates about the EU's inadequate response to the arrivals of large numbers of refugees and migrants throughout the Mediterranean. These arrivals peaked in 2015, but remain one of the main challenges facing the EU, both in terms of social and economic efforts to resettle newly arrived people, and in

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[4] Collyer / Crawley reference

relation to the political attempts to work out a coordinated policy response which all member states support. Due to the shortcoming of these efforts, policy discourse is still framed in the terms of a 'refugee crisis' or, less helpfully still, a 'migrant crisis'. Such a framing not only articulates the supposedly unprecedented nature of the challenge, but it also identifies its source in the mass movement of people into the EU.

Academic research has highlighted why this framing is deeply problematic for a number of reasons. Firstly, policymakers only have fragmented and imprecise information about the exact scale of arrivals and deaths in the Mediterranean: the stunning figure of a million arrivals and a seemingly precise number of 3,771 casualties made the headlines in 2015, but these are estimates. New arrivals are in fact hard to count: in 2015 people crossed into the EU through its southern border, then left it for the Western Balkans, and finally entered again heading for Germany, Sweden, and other northern European countries, often getting counted more than once in the process. The number of deaths is also questionable: the figure usually cited reflects information collected by the Missing Migrants Project run by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) but other, higher estimates also exist[5]. It is as much a crisis of arrivals as it is one of gathering information, border controls, and rescue operations.

Secondly, while clearly high, the numbers of new arrivals is not unprecedented: the breakup of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s triggered a displacement of people on a comparable scale, creating 1.2 million of Bosnians refugees alone. Germany recorded over 400,000 asylum claims in 1992, almost the same number as the 2015 figure. Further, if we adopt a geographical rather than a historical perspective, the numbers of refugees arriving into the EU pales into insignificance given that Lebanon, which is half the size of Slovenia, received up to twice the amount of refugees that reached the shores of the whole EU[6]. So it is as much a crisis of arrivals as it is one of reception, wherein European states are unable to step up to the predictable challenges wrought by continuing refugee influxes from South Sudan, Eritrea, Somalia, Nigeria, Afghanistan and Iraq, that have been amplified by the events of Arab Spring and the Syrian uprising in particular.

Thirdly, the geographic context of refugee arrivals also brings geopolitics into the picture, reminding us that the current crisis is as much to do with migration as it is to do with tensions between Southern European and Western Balkan states, both EU members and not; and tensions between Greece, who saw the vast majority of new arrivals via the Mediterranean, and the other Schengen and Eurozone countries. Had it not been for these shortcomings in regional and transnational cooperation, the migratory moves may well have been better managed and the crisis, or the worst of it, averted.

Linked to this point is the fourth dimension of the problem, which is the national context of political responses to the challenges of migration in the south of Europe. These include how the 'jungle' refugee camp at Calais, the fence built on the Hungarian border, the transport chaos at Munich station, and even

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[5] Collyer, Michael and Russell King (2016) Narrating Europe's Migration and Refugee 'Crisis'. In: Human Geography, 9(2), pp. 1-13.
[6] Crawley, Heaven (2016) Managing the Unmanageable? Understanding Europe's Response to the Migration 'Crisis'. In: Human Geography, 9(2), pp. 13-23.

a photo of migrants queuing at the border between Croatia and Slovenia[7], have all been used to justify restrictions on migration by national political parties. Whether we think about the challenges of migration analytically, or try to come up with effective policy responses, we must clearly acknowledge that the crisis is not just one of immigration management but also relates to electoral cycles, national referenda, and political agendas more broadly.

And finally, the recent events show a crisis of the terms of policy debates on migration. Academic discourse has started to move away from the rigid distinction between refugees and migrants, in order to recognise the empirical realities where research has repeatedly shown that people's motivations to move are multiple and complex[8]. However, policy discourse firmly sticks with the distinction between refugees and migrants, which may be firmly rooted in the letter of international law, but is increasingly detached from the ground truth of contemporary migratory processes.[9]

Considered together, these five points demonstrate the multivalent aspects of the so-called refugee crisis. The term 'refugee crisis' is often used to refer to a technocratic challenge, as well as a humanitarian emergency. However, against the backdrop of the multiple political, economic and social crises the EU faces, migration is just one of several variables[10]. We would stress that analysis across different scales can explain how local, national and transnational issues intersect to produce the discourse of 'crisis'. Therefore, considering processes of migration at different scales is significant for evaluating and proposing potential solutions for the difficulties faced by European states. The following sections of this paper therefore focus on the urban dimension of the crisis. By analysing dispersal of asylum seekers in the UK and Germany we compare different models of dealing with new arrivals, to show what the crisis means in practice for asylum seekers and host communities, and to contribute to debates on effective policy responses.

2. Dispersal in the UK

Despite high levels of immigration to the UK in the post-war period, British society has never been entirely comfortable with large numbers of migrants entering the country, or the increasingly multicultural and varied society that mass migration has produced.[11] Since the 1970's, British immigration policy has become increasingly selective and restrictive, and discussions in the domains of policymaking and popular culture have centred around how to limit the number of migrants entering the country; monitoring the identities and behaviours of those who are allowed to enter; the failings and limits of inclusive multiculturalism; and the economic ramifications of large-scale migration.

Since the 1990s, British asylum regulations have become increasingly stringent, demanding that asylum seekers provide indisputable proof of their identity and narrative, and subjecting them to harsh and

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[7] See http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/16/nigel-farage-defends-ukip-breaking-point-poster-queue-of-migrants, accessed on 16 September 2016.

[8] Collyer, Michael and Hein de Haas (2012) Developing dynamic categorisations of transit migration. In: Population, Space and Place, 18(4), pp. 468–481.

[9] Crawley, op cit.

[10] Raghuram, Parvati (forthcoming) Beyond policing the migrant crisis: Geographical contributions.

[11] Goodhart, D (2014) The British Dream: Successes and Failures of Post-war Immigration. Atlantic Books.

invasive legal processes: including a rising use of detention facilities, and the normalisation of housing dispersal. This attitude seems to have been partially underpinned by the rise of immigration as a 'toxic' political issue,[12] and the desire of major political parties to gain electoral popularity by playing to the widespread public objection to high levels of migration. Indeed, in June 2016, the British public's vote to leave the European Union (in a referendum that saw 51.9% of voters support the so-termed 'Brexit' and spurred considerable political change in the UK, including the resignation of Prime Minister David Cameron and his replacement with Theresa May) appeared to starkly display public disattisfaction with rising migration. Although the vote concerned the UK's EU membership, the 'Leave' campaign's rhetoric focused on the perceived negative impacts of migration, and the result arguably galvanised politicians in taking a tough stand on migration as a way to gain electoral legitimacy. It is also significant that during her tenure as Home Secretary from 2010-2016, the current Prime Minister Theresa May expanded restrictive immigration legislation more generally, and openly aimed to create a 'hostile environment' for migrants who had entered the country illegally,[13] as well as introducing a controversial law stipulating that UK citizens must earn an annual salary of over £18,600 before their non-citizen partner could apply to reside in the country,[14] effectively splitting up low-income families in which one partner was not a British citizen. This harsh and restrictive policymaking milieu has had a significant impact on the reception conditions for asylum seekers as well as other migrants.

An Example – Dispersal under the Immigration and Asylum Act

Dispersal policies and procedures were first introduced by the British government in the *Immigration and Asylum Act (1999)*. Motivated by a growing concern that local authorities in the London area faced a disproportionately high 'burden' in the face of rising numbers of asylum seekers,[15] the New Labour government at the time introduced measures to disperse new arrivals across the country. The policy applied only to people who applied for support from the state. However, due to the fact that many asylum seekers arrive in the UK facing destitution, in practice it affected a significant proportion of new arrivals. If an individual did not have the resources to meet their basic needs, they could be provided with state-funded accommodation in an area that the government had identified as suitable for dispersal.[16] Dispersal areas are generally located in urban centres outside of London and the South East of England where asylum seekers constituted a lower proportion of the population, and where housing was cheaper and more readily available.

Despite some minor changes to dispersal policy in the years since 1999, such as the identification of new dispersal sites and the introduction of conditions that asylum seekers living in accommodation provided

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[12] Thomas R (2016) 'Immigration and Access to Justice: A critical analysis of recent restrictions' in Palmer, E., Cornford, T., Marique, Y., & Guinchard, A. (Eds.). (2016). Access to Justice: Beyond the Policies and Politics of Austerity. Bloomsbury Publishing.

[13] https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/oct/10/immigration-bill-theresa-may-hostile-environment
[14] https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/feb/22/absurd-minimum-income-visa-rules-forcing-uk-citizens-into-exile-court-told
[15] The Secretary of State for the Home Department, UK Government. Fairer, Faster, and Firmer: A Modern Approach to Immigration and Asylum (1998) page 20
[16] UK Government. Immigration and Asylum Act (1999). Section 95.

through dispersal policies must meet, the overall content of the policy and the ways that it is implemented remains largely the same. Asylum seekers who are entitled to state support are provided with accommodation in an area of the country that has been identified as suitable for dispersal.[17] This accommodation is sometimes a shared house or flat, but for single asylum seekers often takes the form of a hostel or bed-and-breakfast. They are given no choice over either the location of their accommodation or the form it takes. The government provides cash support of £36.95 (approx. €43.50) to asylum seekers awaiting a decision on their case, which must be collected weekly from a local Post Office. Certain healthcare services are provided through the National Health Service, and children under 17 years of age are entitled to access state education services. Outside of this basic provision, dispersed asylum seekers are not automatically entitled to work in the UK, and are often forced to rely on support from friends or charities. The current dispersal regime both limits asylum seekers' resources and freedoms as they await a judgement on their claim, and imposes harsh forms of governance by controlling their everyday movement and stillness- significantly restricting their day-to-day freedom and undermining psychological wellness. [18]

Since its introduction, the British state's dispersal policy has always been centrally managed by the Home Office. Prior to 2012, the Home Office identified suitable sites for dispersal, and entered into contracts with local authorities who were then responsible for managing the asylum seekers accommodated in their localities. However, the authority to alter dispersal policy or decide how it should be implemented, and the extent to which asylum seekers should be supported by the state, remained firmly in the hands of the central government. The ability of local authorities to procure appropriate properties, and administer support services where the need was greatest, meant that there was space for some degree of responsiveness to the local context, and for asylum seekers to voice their needs to a familiar actor.

In 2012, a significant shift in the governance of asylum saw the Home Office remove authority over dispersal accommodation from local authorities, and instead enter into contracts with four private providers under the guise of a project named COMPASS.[19] This outsourcing of dispersal accommodation has meant that decisions now occur solely between the Home Office and private contractors, which reduces the ability of local actors to influence policy, reducing the potential for asylum seekers to interact with the dispersal process in a meaningful way.[20] Crucially, the use of private contractors has reduced the transparency of the dispersal processes, as public services provided by private sector organisations are not subject to the same level of public accountability as those provided by local authorities. For example, information about services provided by local authorities can be accessed under the Freedom of Information Act (2000) in the UK, whereas equivalent information does not have to be disclosed by private service providers.

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[17] Usually on account of the availability of suitable accommodation, and to ensure that the number of asylum seekers in a particular area does not exceed a ratio of one asylum seeker for every 200 members of the general population. See Darling, J. Privatising asylum: neoliberalisation, depoliticisation and the governance of forced migration. Page 237.

[18] Gill, N (2009) "Longing for Stillness: The Forced Movement of Asylum Seekers." M/C Journal 12(1)

[19] https://www.theguardian.com/society/2012/apr/17/upheaval-fears-g4s-asylum-seeker-housing

[20] See Darling, J. Privatising asylum: neoliberalisation, depoliticisation and the governance of forced migration.

There have been a plethora of criticisms of the system as it stands. On a practical level, a 2014 Independent Committee Report noted that the transition from public to private provision had been poorly managed, and that the standard of accommodation and services provided were often "unacceptably poor," causing further distress and confusion to an already-vulnerable population.[21] In addition, various aspects of the government's management of dispersal have been criticised by academics: for dispersal's propensity to increase asylum seekers' feelings of liminality and exclusion;[22] for policy's lack of attention to the suitability of the neighbourhoods and local communities that dispersed asylum seekers are sent to live in;[23] and for the commonly-used tactic of frequently moving asylum seekers to a different area or city, which can cause significant disruption in asylum seekers' lives and ostensibly prevents them from being able to form meaningful relationships and associations with the local community.

Most recently, the Interim Report of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Integration at the House of Commons strengthened the voice of academic critics of centralized dispersal. The report outlined six principles for improved social, economic and cultural integration of migrants in the UK, and its third principle directly related to the issue of dispersal. The current policy was criticized as a "one size fits all" approach and the report stated that "that the government should consider designing a devolved or regionally-led immigration system[24]" that would be more responsive to local contexts, such as economic opportunities and public service provision in particular regions. Drawing on the example of Canada's Provincial Nominee Programmes it recommended the government set up an independent commission to explore how such a new system might work through devolved Scottish, Welsh and Irish governments, and become embedded in the UK's wider devolution agenda. According to the report, "shaping immigration criteria to address nation or region-specific economic and cultural needs might instill confidence among members of the public that the immigration system works for their area; whilst enabling nations and regions to set regional immigration quotas would create new incentives for politicians to actively make the case for immigration in their area[25]."

Whilst it is increasingly recognized that the current implementation of dispersal procedures unfolds on a local, urban scale, the manner in which it is centrally and privately controlled means that both the governance of space within the British asylum system and the ways in which asylum seekers and local communities can relate to one another are overseen by distant, profit-driven actors. As a result of this, the potential for local communities and civil society actors to foster an efficient and welcoming environment for asylum seekers is severely curtailed at both social and economic levels. This has led to the emergence of a number of wider issues in dispersal areas. First, due to the lack of consultation with local authorities and communities, asylum seekers have often been accommodated in unsuitable areas.

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[21]http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/public-accounts-committee/news/asylum-accommodation-substantive/

[22] See Hynes, P (2011) The Dispersal and Social Exclusion of Asylum Seekers: Between Liminality and Belonging. Policy Press

[23] See Spicer, N (2008) "Places of Exclusion and Inclusion: Asylum Seeker and Refugee Experiences of Neighbourhoods in the UK." Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies. Vol. 34, Issue 3.

[24] All-Party Parliamentary Group on Social Integration (2017) Interim Report into Integration of Migrants, p.15. See http://www.socialintegrationappg.org.uk/reports , accessed on 7 March 2017.

[25] Ibid, p. 16.

Arguably, the availability of low-cost accommodation has been the driving force behind deciding on suitable areas, which has led to asylum seekers being placed into housing that cannot be seen to be habitable, or into areas with high levels of economic deprivation and low social cohesion. For instance, the BBC have reported that asylum seekers dispersed to Glasgow, Scotland, were faced with dirty, dangerous and infested accommodation;[26] and in 2015 reported how the City Council of Newport, Wales had 'pleaded' with the government to find an alternative dispersal site due to the pressures that receiving high numbers of asylum seekers was placing on its public services. Such issues can be seen to have significant impacts on the ways in which local communities and civil society actors are able to interact with the asylum seeking community. Arguably, placing asylum seekers into inhospitable and dilapidated accommodation further increases their marginalisation from wider society by separating them from the community and reinforcing the understanding that asylum seekers are an undesirable or undeserving group[27]. It can also ignite social tensions, especially when asylum seekers are perceived to be taking up valuable or scarce resources, or in areas where the general community suffers from high levels of poverty and deprivation.

Discussion

The way that dispersal is currently framed in British policymaking further reinforces a view of asylum as something that is fundamentally socio-economically problematic, and obscures a series of other, intersecting issues that are clearly important in the provision of reception services to asylum seekers. The 'burden' that the policy was implemented to respond to ostensibly referred to the constraints on certain local authorities' abilities to provide adequate housing, economic support and social services to incoming asylum seekers. However, the government's decision to frame these issues in the context of asylum meant that these multivalent and intersecting challenges were subsumed under a discourse that identified *asylum* as the chief cause of these challenges. The 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act further reinforced this through the establishment of the National Asylum Support System (NASS) to preside over the support and accommodation of asylum seekers whose cases were being processed. The establishment of NASS meant that asylum seekers were no longer permitted access to the regular system of benefits and social housing, and were instead forced to rely on limited stipends to purchase food and other essential goods, due to concerns that providing support for asylum seekers- whose claims to protection had not yet been verified- needed to be made less costly and more efficient, and due to populist concern that asylum seekers were being given access to resources that could have been used to support 'deserving' British citizens.

The political debate on how to address these challenges was therefore couched in the terms of a crisis in the UK's asylum system, which can be seen to have a number of negative effects. First, by positing asylum as the cause of the socio-economic issues associated with dispersal, the debate forecloses consideration of the ways in which a series of other, intersecting issues also play into these problems. For example, the lack of availability of adequate social housing; high levels of economic deprivation in many urban areas; ongoing austerity policies; and poor facilitation of community cohesion in many parts of the UK.

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[26] http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-glasgow-west-35603952
[27] Sales, R. (2002). The deserving and the undeserving? Refugees, asylum seekers and welfare in Britain. Critical social policy, 22(3), 456-478.

The pertinence of these issues in terms of resettling asylum seekers and refugees is illustrated by the reasons underpinning the UK Government's failure to resettle its target of Syrian refugees. In 2015, the then-Prime Minister David Cameron committed to resettling 20,000 Syrians[28] as part of a vulnerable persons resettlement scheme. However, by November 2016 just 2,200 people had successfully been resettled in the UK.[29] This overwhelming failure to meet the target was firstly caused by a failure to identify local authorities that could take the refugees, and secondly, those that came forward often lacked the necessary housing and resources needed to resettle Syrian families. The lack of co-ordination from the central government on this issue meant that local authorities were expected to build the capacity to accommodate Syrian refugees from scratch, which was impossible in many areas due to a lack of funding and facilities. This highlights the fact that there are a number of economic and often also social issues which need to be considered when resettling and accommodating asylum seekers and refugees, which can easily be obscured when the debate is fixed on the desirability or security ramifications of asylum. A second effect of focusing the debate on the 'burden' that asylum seekers place onto local communities and resources is that the state successfully reinforces a view of asylum seekers as an economic drain and undesirable social presence, further legitimising already-restrictive policies and fueling existing social tensions.

As such, the British government's approach to dispersal can be seen to have several significant flaws. First, its overly centralised and inflexible structure means that dispersal policies are implemented with a 'blindness' to local contexts and the problems therein. This can lead to asylum seekers being placed into inadequate accommodation, or into communities which may not be warm to the idea of accepting them. Secondly, the privatisation of accommodation contracts within the government's dispersal regime means that local authorities have been stripped of their abilities to manage and support asylum seekers in ways that are most effective given the local context, resulting in a bureaucratic and- at times- insensitive system which is not responsive to local needs and opportunities. Moreover, by placing dispersal into the hands of private contractors, the government has reduced transparency, meaning that asylum seekers can be treated in manners that are harsher and less considerate of community cohesion, and outside the realm of public deliberation. Based on this, we suggest that re-investing power into local authorities is both a desirable and sensible policy option. This is due to the fact that local authorities invariably have a deeper understanding of the local community and a closer handle on the distribution of resources in the local area, as well as the potential to troubleshoot more effectively should complaints or problems arise in the accommodation that asylum seekers are allocated. By identifying dispersal sites based on the number of asylum seekers already present in the area and the availability of social housing, the current dispersal policy fails to consider the readiness or willingness of local communities and civil society actors to provide a welcoming and supporting reception environment to asylum seekers.

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[28] In June 2015, the British government initially opted out of an EU-wide scheme to resettle a quota of Syrian refugees, and only announced the plans to take in 20,000 individuals after widespread criticism in the media and wider public. Arguably, this decision was motivated more by a desire to appease the electorate than by any intrinsic recognition of the need to resettle Syrian refugees.

[29] http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/aug/03/uk-unlikely-to-reach-target-of-resettling-20000-syrian-refugees-by-2020

Grassroots organisations and civil society actors provide indispensable support and advice to asylum seekers in the UK in various ways, as well as allowing asylum seekers to form meaningful links with the local community. For example, in the city of Bristol in the South West of England, two of the largest community organisations working with refugees are responsible for providing English language classes; legal support and advocacy; general information about the local community; and modest amounts of financial support to several hundred asylum seekers, most of whom live in dispersed accommodation in the most deprived areas of the city. While they are able to offer self-funded services such as language classes and drop-in centres in local communities, excluding them from participating in the asylum reception process in more coherent and meaningful ways means that the state could be missing out on valuable opportunities to work alongside such organisations in order to foster a more efficient and welcoming system. For example, by assisting individuals who encounter issues with their legal process or living situation in a more efficient and sustained manner, and by providing resources to help individuals integrate into the local community more fruitfully. Arguably, whether or not an area has the infrastructure in place to support asylum seekers and provide them with opportunities to integrate into the local community should also be a key consideration when deciding upon dispersal areas, as such grassroots activity holds the potential to reduce social tensions and improve the quality of reception condition.

3. Dispersal in Germany

In 2015, Angela Merkel, the Federal Chancellor of Germany, acknowledged Germany to be a 'country of immigration'. Despite Germany having experienced decades of population influx, this active engagement with resettling asylum seekers has only recently been a hot topic. Major changes in asylum law occurred first in 1993 and 2015, both times in a restrictive manner. Before 1993 German asylum law had *no barriers*, leading to a public debate after rising numbers of asylum applications (restricting through taking out Art.16.§2 of the Basic Law and moving it to Art. 16 a§1). The first restrictions also occurred due to pressure of the Schengen System, aiming towards an EU-wide harmonization of national legislation, including migration policies. These debates led to the so-called 'asylum compromise' of 1993. From then on, applicants arriving through other EU states or safe third-countries could not receive asylum; flight carriers needed to control passengers to ensure they possessed a valid visa; and asylum was only given to politically persecuted people according to specific criteria.

The changes in 2015 further restricted the right of asylum seekers, with the German government trying to enhance the asylum procedure through an acceleration of decisions. The new law declared countries like Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro as safe countries and replaced most monetary allowances given in the reception centres with allowances in kind (Herpell and Stahl 2015; Asylum Package I). Further, a second Asylum Package was discussed in early 2016, mostly aiming towards easier data exchange between governmental institutions dealing with migration and asylum procedures (Stoltenberg 2015). This second package also restricts family reunification, aims to implement a fast track procedure for applicants with low chances of positive decisions, and health problems no longer prevent deportation, except for in severe cases (German Bundestag 2016).

Dispersal and Accommodation

Dispersal policies and procedures are firstly taken on by the BAMF, on a federal state level. The first allocation to a specific initial aid facility is based on several criteria, using the EASY system (**E**rstverteilung der **Asy**lbegehrenden auf die Bundesländer – First distribution of asylum seekers on federal states). This first allocation can either occur at the border, in cases where the applicant has not arrived from a safe third country, or when a person already in the country seeks asylum. The allocation depends highly on the capacity of the each federal state.

Quotas for the dispersal of asylum seekers are decided through the *Königsteiner Schlüssel*. Historically this key was established in 1949 and used for the distribution of costs for national research institutions, though later used for a variety of things and taken into the Basic Law (Art. 91b §2 1969; today: Art. 91b§3). It is calculated yearly by the Federal/Länder Committee on basis of the tax receipts and population of each Land (BAMF 2016). Decisions on distribution further take into account which branch office of the Federal Office deals with the applicant's home country, in case there is differentiation in the offices. According to EASY 1,1 Million people have been registered 2015, although double counting can occur).

Table 1: Distribution quotas for 2016, Germany

Federal Länder	Quota
Baden-Württemberg	12.86456%
Bavaria	15.51873%
Berlin	5.04927%
Brandenburg	3.06053%
Bremen	0.95688%
Hamburg	2.52968%
Hesse	7.35890%
Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania	2.02906%
Lower Saxony	9.32104%
North Rhine-Westphalia	21.21010%
Rhineland-Palatinate	4.83710%
Saarland	1.22173%
Saxony	5.08386%
Saxony-Anhalt	2.83068%
Schleswig-Holstein	3.40337%
Thuringia	2.72451%

(Source: BAMF, 01.08.2016)

After being distributed to the Länder, which cannot refuse to take the decided quota of asylum applicants, each Land has vast discretionary powers and control over further distribution and type of housing. Applicants are accommodated on Länder level; individuals are housed in EAE (Erstaufnahme-Einrichtungen) – First Reception Facilities or ZUE (Zentrale Unterbringungseinrichtungen) – Central

Reception Facilities, where one stays for about three months, and are then moved to communal accommodation on municipality level, which is decided by the district council. It is also possible to be dispersed to municipalities directly and to private housing, hostels, hotels, depending on the type of accommodation each Land has been able to secure for the new arrivals. Generally, the responsible admission unit takes care of asylum seekers' basic needs of food, accommodation, and medical care. It also informs the outpost of the Federal Agency or the nearest reception centre.

Applicants receive an allowance in-kind for day-today living costs, and a monthly sum to cover personal needs. The amount and kind of allowances is decided by the Asylbewerberleistungsgesetz (German Social Welfare Law on Asylum Seekers). It decides on the general allowance for the diet, accommodation, heating, clothes, hygienic products, commodities in the household, monetary allowances to cover personal needs, medical care and individual allowances – depending on the case.

An example - Accommodation in NRW

Arnsberg, as the district council of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) is responsible for allocating asylum seeks to all 396 municipalities in NRW. A reallocation and change of municipality can only be achieved under specific circumstances, e.g. the spouse is in another municipality. This is also decided by Arnsberg. According to the district government (Release 26.08.2016) there are currently 62.000 spots to accommodate asylum seekers. The decrease in numbers of refugees has also led to a decreased need of housing. It is planned to reduce the places to 50.000, of which 35.000 should be actively used, 10.000 places are to be re-activated when needed. Further, spaces are going to be reserved to act flexibly and quickly, to accommodate another 5.000. Emergency accommodation will be reduced and replaced by regular centers.

There are 7 EAE in NRW. Here, asylum seekers should stay only for a couple of days, in order to register. Then they should move to ZUE or emergency shelters, where a longer stay of some weeks is usual, before getting send to the municipality. During the last quarter of 2015 this was done much more quickly, though the aim is to avoid this hasty distribution, as the municipalities receive the allocated number not much in advance and have to take care of arriving people, which would be difficult to prepare for if the process was expedited. The district council works together with municipalities and a great amount of volunteers, e.g. people from Welcome Initiatives in the cities, to get satisfying accommodation.

Discussion

After the debated legislation to ease the construction of new accommodation facilities was approved in 2014, it became possible to build accommodation facilities on the edge of industrial areas, which – according to critics- will create disintegration and exclusion. The Mediendienst Integration (Media Service. Platform for Information, run by journalists) has researched how asylum applicants are housed in Germany, underlining several key issues. Even though German law says that the Länder are responsible for accommodation and supply, many contract private service providers and often do not own properties where housing is facilitated. The outsourced services leave unclear the circumstances under which people are living, and only half of the Länder have mandatory minimum standards

(Mediendienst 2014). A few have some recommendations, but often there is no monitoring, or evaluation. Some Länder have only introduced a stricter list of criteria and employed staff to enforce them after the abuse of asylum applicants became public in some centers. Further, some have implemented new educational courses for security personnel to avoid racist tendencies. It remains a problem that there is little information about which private providers the Länder use to run accommodation facilities (Mediendienst 2014: 7).

A more positive development can be recorded on the dispersal on municipal level. Even though applicants should be accommodated in communal housing after the first 12 weeks in an EAE, regular practice often seems to be accommodation in apartments. This decentralized accommodation approach has not only financial advantages for the municipality and Land, but also creates higher integration (Pro Asyl 2014, Mediendienst 2014: 3).

This brief overview of the *Länder*-managed system of dispersal has taken into account its merits, as well as some key disadvantages. Besides the Syrian resettlement programme, which devolved into a system quickly capable of adapting to the large influx of new arrivals, many adjustments came too late (see Berlin Masterplan 2015). The issues still remaining are faced by all EU Members hosting and taking in asylum applicants: housing, cohesion, deprivation and economic support. The focus of distribution is more on "burden-sharing," than on successful integration (Hinger 2016: 81). A long-term integration process and strategy needs still to be advertised and created, including within civil society. Instead the burden-sharing mentality addresses newly-arrived individuals only as the object of help and focuses more on the ability of the state to accommodate individuals, rather than really addressing the problems of people who will not leave the country any time soon, and what the state could do to provide a better welcome to them. On the other hand, the surfacing of migration crisis as humanitarian crisis legitimated a few positive steps – e.g. opening of the borders and the disregarding the Schengen Requirements in 2015.

The framing of migration crisis as humanitarian crisis led to a wave of positive, civil society movements (Hinger 2016), such as the Welcome Initiative, in many cities. Without the help of volunteers and civil society organizations, the unprepared and overloaded municipalities and state facilities would not have been able to function. Preparations based on the predictions of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) have not led to a fully prepared emergency strategy, as of 2015. Thus, transparency, accountability and regulation are a constant issue, especially when planning new asylum housing. This lack of transparency on municipal but also state level led to an increased unwillingness of civil society and neighbourhoods to accept newly arriving people. Often, one would learn of the opening of new centres in one's own community only through the newspaper.

However, the Willkommenskultur still stands in stark contrast with xenophobic attacks and outbursts. With the development of the Patriotic European Against the Islamization of the Occident (PEGIDA) counter-movements established and the concept of Willkommenskultur was used by policymakers, as well as bureaucrats, trying to foster social cohesion and integration (Eckhart 2015).

4. Conclusions: How does focusing on urban scales contribute to a progressive politics of asylum reception?

We are not trying to provide a template – a model solution – but rather putting forward an argument for a system that is responsive and attuned to local contexts. It is about how dispersal should be conceptualised and done (where are communities that will welcome new arrivals? where is housing? where are labour shortages?) rather than specific solutions, which will vary by country. The groundwork may be already there, for example through civic movements such as City of Sanctuary in the UK, but governments quite often work against this, for example by dispersing refugees away from locations that are willing to receive them.

From the case studies presented above, we argue that in order to promote the social inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers in local communities, decisions about the dispersal of asylum seekers must be responsive to local contexts. Therefore, rather than attempting to set out a standardised European model for the national dispersal of asylum seekers, we suggest that there are a number of key areas in which a pan-European policy response could improve practices of governance, and contribute to a more positive politics of refugee resettlement. We believe that a move towards an affirmative politics of European asylum governance holds significant potential as a response to the negative discourse that frames the refugee 'crisis' as detrimental to local and national communities. However, we also feel that our focus on the improvement of dispersal systems in Europe provides what may be described as an 'in the meantime' theoretical approach,[30] which responds to outright critiques of governmental systems that force the movement of asylum seekers to specific sites or locations. We nevertheless acknowledge that the process of moving asylum seekers to specific locations can play a central role in the determination of refugee cases, as enforced movements to dispersal locations or reception centres can in itself be a spatial mechanism of the state to filter 'potential' refugees, and determine the 'deserving' from the 'undeserving'.[31]

To emphasise a progressive approach, which both builds on the strengths of existing urban infrastructure in Europe, and recognises the possibilities of city-level analyses for identifying long-term solutions to accommodating refugees, we now identify the key areas through which a more responsible and intelligent policy response could be developed.

1. Promoting transparency and public accountability through local governance

Local authorities are best placed to develop and administer systems of asylum dispersal. Drawing from the case studies presented of the UK and Germany, we find clear evidence that the spatial distribution of asylum seekers, and ultimately the long term resettlement of refugees, must be supported by local

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[30] Cloke, P., May, J., & Williams, A. (2016). The geographies of food banks in the meantime. Progress in Human Geography, 0309132516655881.

[31] Darling, J. (2011). Domopolitics, governmentality and the regulation of asylum accommodation. Political Geography, 30(5), 263-271.

authorities. National and regional mechanisms of governance must concentrate on how the cooperation of local authorities can be engaged to identify appropriate areas for reception/dispersal sites.

The outsourcing of service provision for the accommodation and support of asylum populations is not desirable and alternatives should be encouraged, such as local authorities retaining management of these services.

2. Identifying urban areas suitable for long-term, and permanent, resettlement

An important part of engaging local authorities is identifying where there are not only short-term housing solutions for asylum seekers, but also long-term opportunities to secure housing and work, so that asylum dispersal is not seen as a temporary 'burden' of specific areas, but is integrated into long-term plans for the social and economic development of areas. An important part of this is recognising the, often urban, sites where refugees can settle and contribute to the local economy once their asylum cases have been resolved. We suggest that incentives could be offered as part of a European package to improve national dispersal mechanisms, for example, providing financial incentives to include an allocation of spaces for the long-term housing of refugees within new urban development projects, or considering tax benefits for employers who recruit and re-train refugees in a new, or existing, profession.

Such an approach requires areas of relative economic and social deprivation and disadvantage to be recognised, so that when dispersal does take place in these areas an equivalent amount of financial investment is provided to create permanent work and houses. This financial support should be provided from public money, with the emphasis on the wider benefits for local residents, rather than being sourced from private philanthropy, or charitable funding, as reliance on non-governmental funding reinforces the view that asylum seekers are a burden on the state and society, rather than a responsibility for both.

3. Supporting positive civic engagement

Identifying areas where there are positive civic trends towards supporting the resettlement of populations is an important part of building on positive social trends of hospitality. Popular media and right-wing political discourse tends to emphasise the negative attitudes towards refugees. However, there are a number of civic movements, such as City of Sanctuary in the UK,[32] where local residents have formally constituted themselves to support processes of the dispersal and resettlement of asylum seekers and refugees. We argue that such a move should complement the work done by local authorities, rather than replace it.

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[32] Darling, J. (2010). A city of sanctuary: the relational re-imagining of Sheffield's asylum politics. Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, 35(1), 125-140;
Darling, J., Barnett, C., & Eldridge, S. (2010). City of Sanctuary-a UK initiative for hospitality. Forced Migration Review, (34), 46;
Squire, V. (2011). From community cohesion to mobile solidarities: the city of sanctuary network and the strangers into citizens campaign. Political Studies, 59(2), 290-307;
Squire, V., & Darling, J. (2013). The "minor" politics of rightful presence: Justice and relationality in City of Sanctuary. International Political Sociology, 7(1), 59-74.

Critiques of neoliberalism have emphasised how the shrinking of the state, coupled with increasing reliance on civil society to provide services, has been central to the social exclusion and oppression of the most marginalised and vulnerable groups in society.[33] Increasing the availability of funds for local authorities who are keen to provide combined reception and resettlement programmes in collaboration with civic movements, is a crucial part of ensuring recognition of areas where there are social movements with momentum to welcome refugee communities, in order that such social movements can be engaged and supported to assist.

With these points in mind we conclude that a progressive response to the current challenges of refugee reception should be:

- **Timely: Responsive to the humanitarian needs of migrants moving across borders.**
- **Beneficent: Focused on supporting the conditions needed for human flourishing.**
- **Compassionate: Everyone treated with equal rights, regardless of who is a citizen or non-citizen.**
- **Community-focused: Strengthens ties for all populations to local areas.**
- **Enduring: Able to support long-term processes of integration, rather than focusing on short-term political, economic or social crises.**

Policy Recommendations:

The use of the term 'refugee crisis' as a generalisation is apt to promote negative attitudes towards all kinds of asylum-seekers, political refugees and migrants in the broad sense of the word. It also prevents policy-makers from promoting possible solutions as they address the challenges that accompany large-scale migration. The phrase 'refugee crisis' is fundamentally a misrepresentation and is unhelpful. It overlooks the multiple and intersecting challenges that ultimately trigger a crisis. The framing of a migration crisis as a humanitarian crisis sounds less biased and can lead to a wave of more positive thinking.

Concerns regarding such social problems as the lack of housing, the provision of public services, economic deprivation in many urban areas, the ongoing fiscal crisis and problems associated with social cohesion cannot be reduced to immediate repercussions of migration, but are all deeply rooted in the past.

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[33] Swyngedouw, E., Moulaert, F., & Rodriguez, A. (2002). Neoliberal urbanization in Europe: large–scale urban development projects and the new urban policy. Antipode, 34(3), 542-577;
Jessop, B. (2002). Liberalism, neoliberalism, and urban governance: A state–theoretical perspective. Antipode, 34(3), 452-472;
Haylett, C. (2001). Illegitimate subjects?: abject whites, neoliberal modernisation, and middle-class multiculturalism. Environment and planning D: society and space, 19(3), 351-370.

1. Inevitably, any large scale migration to urban areas produces challenges. The most recent experiences with the dispersal of refugees have been over-centralised and bureaucratised. The inflexible structure of dispersal policies has been implemented with little thought to local contexts. Current dispersal policies need to be implemented with greater care, more efficiently and in a less bureaucratic manner, placing asylum-seekers and political refugees in less random accommodation and thus into more welcoming communities.

2. It is recommended that local authorities be more fully engaged in identifying long-term opportunities for migrants to secure housing and work, so that the dispersal of asylum-seekers or refugees is not seen as a temporary 'burden', but would be integrated into the general long-term development plans for specific areas.
Furthermore, various incentive schemes could be offered within new urban development projects involving refugees, for example, tax benefits for employers who recruit and re-train refugees in new or existing professions, the allocation of space for long-term housing for refugees etc.

3. Getting any dispersal policy and its implementation right is critically important. Failure can cause financial waste, political frustration and disruption for ordinary citizens. The resources applied to implementation should be provided from public reserves, with an emphasis on the wider benefits for local residents, rather than being sourced from private, i.e. philanthropic or charitable, funding. This approach promotes the durability and reliability of dispersal strategies.

4. Providing support for any positive civic engagement in the process of integration and perhaps even in the gradual assimilation of refugee communities as a more natural process, and seeking actively to identify those areas where there is a positive civic leaning towards support for the resettlement of populations, plays an important part in the promotion of positive social trends of hospitality within the receiving population.

5. As shown by the examples cited in the paper, from Britain and Germany, privatisation of contracts for the accommodation of asylum-seekers within a government's dispersal regime reduces transparency and effectively de-politicises the provision of accommodation intended to support asylum-seekers.

6. It is recommended that, in the identification of possible dispersal sites, assumptions should not be based on the number of asylum-seekers already present in an area and the availability of social housing to provide for them. The existing dispersal policy fails to consider how well (or not at all) prepared local communities are to receive, support and welcome newcomers into their midst.

7. Ultimately, long-term resettlement policies for asylum-seekers and refugees must be supported by the relevant local authorities. Identifying areas where positive civic trends in support of the resettlement of populations already exist will make it easier to build on such attitudes to hospitality.

8. Voluntary organizations that have been historically involved in stepping up to protect refugee communities, and the increasingly important ways in which civil society manifests itself are factors

crucial to the processes of integrating people living in concentrated settlements, of seeking to give their lives added security and assisting them to merge smoothly into their host communities.

9. A well-organized, welcoming infrastructure, broadly engaged in providing support and advice to migrants through such services as language classes and drop-in centres has proved to be crucial.

10. Transparency, accountability and thoroughly prepared regulation are major factors wherever work on an asylum policy in countries receiving large numbers of migrants is concerned. It is imperative that a strategy for coping with emergencies be also in place.

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