

Local “Battlegrounds” Relocating Multi-Level and Multi-Actor Governance of Immigration

Iraklis Dimitriadis¹, Minke H. J. Hajer², Elena Fontanari³ and Maurizio Ambrosini⁴

Migration to Europe is a complex social process that European governments seek to govern at international, European, national and local levels. Studies on the politics and governance of migration have frequently used the multi-level governance (MLG) approach in order to understand the process of immigration policymaking regarding admission and reception, diversity management, and integration of immigrants (Zapata-Barrero *et al.*, 2017). Recent research has delved into the dynamics and the emergence of different MLG arrangements in order to analyse the complex relations among different scales of governance within states. This research sheds light on the various levels of MLG — local, regional, national, European, or even global — which is the vertical dimension. However, this literature does not effectively explore the relations among different kinds of both public and private actors (Campomori and Caponio, 2017), which is also referred to as the horizontal dimension of MLG (Campomori and Ambrosini, 2020). In other words, the MLG approach may be considered too descriptive to grasp the conflictual nature of interactions among different actors (but see, among the exceptions, Spencer, 2018). The relations among actors may be harmonious, but also contentious, they may involve collaboration, but also conflict. Besides being criticized for providing scant insights into the networks of different actors and the nature of their connections, the MLG approach has been criticized for placing too much emphasis on the outcomes of governance processes, thereby neglecting those processes that produce them (Caponio and Jones-Correa, 2018; Pettrachin, 2020). In recent years, however, the MLG

1 Postdoctoral Fellow, Department of Social and Political Sciences, Università degli Studi di Milano, Via Passione 13, 20122 Milano; iraklis.dimitriadis@unimi.it

2 Postdoctoral Fellow, Department of Social and Political Sciences, Università degli Studi di Milano, Via Passione 13, 20122 Milano; minke.hajer@unimi.it

3 Postdoctoral Fellow, Department of Social and Political Sciences, Università degli Studi di Milano, Via Passione 13, 20122 Milano; elena.fontanari@unimi.it

4 Full Professor of Sociology, Department of Social and Political Sciences, Università degli Studi di Milano, Via Passione 13, 20122 Milano; maurizio.ambrosini@unimi.it
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approach has evolved, becoming more nuanced. For instance, some scholars suggest that, rather than seeing MLG as one fixed perspective, it should be considered as one of many types of governance in multi-level settings (Scholten *et al.*, 2018), or, similarly, as one of many “instances of multilevel politics, each defined by a particular configuration of actors, scale and decision-making process” (Alcantara *et al.*, 2016: 46).

Moving beyond the MLG approach, this literature review focuses on studies regarding the local level in immigration governance. It considers local policies and administrative practices on the one hand, and the role of multiple civil society actors engaged in the reception of asylum seekers on the other. Reflecting on various studies conducted in Europe and, occasionally, in the USA, it seeks to reconstruct the multiplicity and heterogeneity of the governmental and non-governmental actors engaged in the management of migration, and aims to identify possible gaps in this literature. Moreover, given the European context of growing politicization of migration, and of increased polarization regarding migration within local communities, this article offers an analytical literature review of studies that deal with the dynamics between local authorities and the local civil society. Migration scholars have highlighted how the local level can be the basis for exclusionary policies (Semperebon, 2011; Ambrosini, 2013 and 2018), as well as intolerant policies towards migrants, by installing new mechanisms of control in everyday spaces (Gilbert, 2009; Lebuhn, 2013; Gargiulo, 2017). However, local authorities have also undertaken initiatives of immigrant inclusion, thereby creating cities in favour of refugees’ arrival (Bauder, 2017; Garcés-Mascreñas and Gebhardt, 2020; Irgil, 2016; Oomen, 2020a; Oomen and Leenders, 2020). Research on grass-roots initiatives has highlighted the role of local actors in supporting migrants and refugees politically (Bazurli, 2019; Chtouris and Miller, 2017; Karakayali and Kleist, 2016; Mayer, 2018; Raimondi, 2019; Youkhana and Sutter, 2017; Zamponi, 2017), as well as improving their integration (Alexander, 2007). However, local actors have also mobilized in order to stop refugees’ reception or to hinder initiatives in favour of immigrant integration (Castelli Gattinara, 2017; Fouskas, 2019). Finally, this review also considers the role of migrants themselves (Ataç *et al.*, 2016; Fontanari, 2018; Ikizoglu Erensu, 2016).

Our analysis of the literature confirms this increasing importance of local policies, or the local turn in governance (Glick-Schiller and Caglar, 2009; Campomori and Caponio, 2017; Glorius and Doomernik, 2020; Zapata-Barrero *et al.*, 2017), as well as the significant role of different non-governmental actors in migration and asylum governance (Ambrosini, 2018; Campomori and Ambrosini, 2020; Garkisch, *et al.*, 2017; Spencer, 2018). Even though some scholars grasp the dynamic interactions among actors and how they influence policy outcomes, we maintain that more emphasis should be given to how the horizontal dimension of MLG shapes migration governance. We therefore call for further analysis of the dynamics and complex relations not only among different scales (i.e. the vertical dimension), but also among public and private actors. Moreover, we consider local policies to be the result of conflict and cooperation, alternative views and political actions, official policies and practical help, formal statements and informal practices. We do so rather than seeing the relations among different actors as the result of a “negotiated order”. These dimensions are encapsulated in the concept of “battleground” (Ambrosini, 2018 and 2020; Campomori and

Ambrosini, 2020), an analytical notion with which the management of asylum and migration can be understood.

Bordering Practices within Local Communities

Critical border studies stress the proliferation of borders within countries. They highlight how contemporary capitalism produces not only physical and legal barriers among states, but also administrative borders within countries that select among their populations. The production of local borders should be framed within wider global processes affecting several spheres of contemporary social life. It may be said that the real function of borders is this differential regulation. Borders, seen as dynamic processes rather than as fixed and material entities, function as “filters” of access to both territories and resources (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013; Kolossov and Scott, 2013; Bonizzoni, 2020). Accordingly, a global stratification system is produced where the mobility of some people — like migrants and refugees — is considered undesirable or socially threatening and is therefore restricted. Some authors talk about the creation of an “im/mobility regime” (Glick-Schiller and Salazar, 2013). Freedom of movement thus becomes a scarce resource. Here nation-states emerge as the main actors in “the monopolization of the legitimate means of movement” (Torpey, 2000). They do so through a global system of passports and visas regulating access to national territories. In other words, contemporary migration policies grow increasingly selective (de Haas *et al.*, 2016; Ambrosini *et al.*, 2020). “Bordering practices” should be understood as the processes of classifying and ordering space. In this way, the border is used as a governing technique (Green, 2013).

In border studies, the various devices and techniques used to manage the mobility of migrants have mostly been analysed with reference to Foucauldian theory (Walters, 2015). Some border practices and devices produce forms of containment (Tazzioli, 2018) and confinement (Picker and Vivaldi, 2019; Rahola, 2010) intended to sort, rank, and block some categories of people on the move. A typical governmental technique is the organisation of these people into categories — such as “economic migrants”, “asylum-seekers”, “refugees”, “illegal migrants”, etc. — and the creation of hierarchies among them according to their legal statuses (Anderson, 2012; De Genova, 2013; Green, 2013; Isin and Turner, 2002; Rigo, 2011). Legal status emerges as a crucial governmental tool with which to selectively restrict access to several rights and social benefits within European societies and produce inequalities (Faist, 2013). Indeed, at the beginning of the 2000s, some research stressed the creation of a “gradual system of rights” (Ong, 2006) entailing a “civic stratification” (Morris, 2003), that is, a hierarchy of access to rights and welfare benefits determined by legal status. This reflects competition among various structural constraints, such as welfare resources, labour market management, and international obligations like human rights conventions.

The production of borders is also apparent in other practices of local administrations. Empirical studies have shown how various actors create local borders by implementing restrictive policies directed at migrants and refugees. The notion of “local policies of exclusion” (Ambrosini, 2013) has highlighted the “institutional obstacles” to the rights of minorities and their freedom to express their cultural

and religious identity. Local municipalities emerge as actors that either implement European and national policies in a restrictive way or even invent regulations against migrants on their own initiative. They can thereby prevent refugees and migrants from integrating into the social structures of the arrival societies. In particular, it has been shown how several mayors have deployed municipal ordinances as means to restrict migrants' and refugees' access to various (social) rights. These administrative measures have sometimes been implemented in contrast to national laws in the name of emergency or urban security. Another example evidences how mayors, by obstructing the registration of migrants or refugees with the Registry Office (to obtain legal domicile), can directly block their access to healthcare, political rights (eligibility to vote in local elections), welfare benefits, and access to school for children (Bonizzoni, 2020; Campomori and Ambrosini, 2020; Gargiulo, 2012; Gjergji, 2016; Marchetti, 2020). Other studies have highlighted how local authorities have obstructed access to housing and social rights through the implementation of restrictive administrative practices (Bolzoni *et al.*, 2015). Moreover, the lack of adequate policies for the reception of asylum seekers or transit migrants in Italy has resulted in the exclusion of some people from social services, based on politically constructed categories of inclusion or exclusion (Semperebon and Pelacani, 2020). These studies unveil tensions at work within the MLG of asylum and immigration. They show how the restrictive local implementation of national laws can create gaps between the legal provision and the effective exercise of social rights.

Research has likewise shown how welfare policies can be used as instruments for border control and management of human mobility. Local bureaucratic offices can produce hierarchies and stratification in the access to rights and welfare benefits by implementing restrictive national welfare policies and creating regulations hostile to migrants (Lafleur and Mescoli, 2018). Indeed, migration control practices are embedded in ordinary legal frameworks and are created by means of ordinary border politics (Basaran, 2008; Tuastad, 2017). National bureaucracies operate within a legal framework through an excess of administrative rules that have become progressively institutionalised. The management of migrants and refugees exhibits a trend of slow erosion of existing legal standards by local bureaucracies (Campesi, 2014). Although refugees are entitled to a series of rights and benefits in host countries, the local implementation of these rights shows discrepancies between legal provisions and the effective exercise of rights, as well as new restrictive measures introduced by local actors.

In what follows, we describe the increasingly active role of the horizontal dimension of migration governance. We show how semi-public institutions and private actors have gained importance in the management of immigration in general. This also means that these non-state actors play a role in the construction of borders at the local level. By monitoring migrants and refugees through their legal status, many local institutions — welfare agencies, municipal administrations, universities, public and private schools, health care providers, doctors, hospitals, housing agencies, banks and insurance companies — govern the everyday lives of refugees and migrants. Such local state agencies and private service providers systematically check residents' identification papers, and through these interactions local borders are produced (Lebuhn, 2013). They thus perform their own role in the process of local bordering.

At the Border: Local Conflicts in Border Places

Migration policies and control measures deployed in Europe in recent years, and particularly after the “long summer of migration” of 2015 (Hess *et al.*, 2017), have the tendency to block the intra-European mobility of asylum-seekers and refugees. Since 2011, in conjunction with the Arab Spring uprisings and the Libyan war, the European system of managing migration across the Mediterranean Sea has partially broken down and new processes of bordering have been deployed. Several empirical studies have shown how the border-crossing mobility of refugees within Europe has emerged from the tension between restrictive policies of migration control and the everyday struggles of refugees and their supporters around the political ideal of freedom of movement (Agier, 2014; Christodolou *et al.*, 2016; Denaro, 2016; Fontanari, 2018; Mainwaring, 2016; Mezzadra, 2020; Picozza, 2017; Schmoll *et al.*, 2015). However, only during the long summer of migration of 2015 did the border-crossing mobility of refugees and the related breakdown of the Dublin Regulation reach a peak in the public debate (Kasperek, 2016), strongly influencing the subsequent migration policies at the European and national levels.

In the years 2016 and 2017, several policies and measures marked a process of re-bordering Europe. The strengthening of borders within Europe and countries is a new feature of policies and practices in migration management. This is despite the focus on the EU’s external borders that persists through the multiplication of bilateral agreements with third countries (Cassarino, 2016) — such as the EU-Turkey readmission agreement of 2016 and the Italy-Libya bilateral agreement of 2017. Indeed, the EU’s internal borders have been reintroduced through the enforcement of border controls in transit places between countries. For instance, research on border locations such as Calais at the France-UK border (Agier *et al.*, 2018), Brenner at the Italian-Austrian border (Weissensteiner, 2015), Ventimiglia and Roja Valley at the Italian-French border (Giliberti and Queirolo Palmas, 2020) and Como-Chiasso at the Italian-Swiss border (Tazzioli, 2018) has stressed these new bordering mechanisms. There is an empirical evidence suggesting that pro-migrant actors may be engaged in “debordering solidarity” against policies of exclusion (Ambrosini, 2018 and 2021). However, other actors opposing migration (parties, movements) also assume a role on the local “battleground”. They contribute to bordering practices, or they mobilize to block pro-migrant local policies. Moreover, the local “battleground” shows the involvement of a variety of civil society actors in migration governance — NGOs, churches, political parties, volunteers, social movements and mobilizations of citizens both in favour of and against migrants and refugees. The production of borders is a process evident in very visible and formal border locations. It also takes place within urban spaces through national and local policies, and through less visible and more indirect practices (i.e. within the field of local administration).

Inclusion Policies at the Local Level

Despite the focus of migration scholars on how local authorities engage in bordering practices, several studies have suggested that local governments promote initiatives and policies that favour the integration of immigrants (Marrow, 2012; van der Leun and Bouter, 2015; Oomen, 2020b).

According to the MLG approach, these policies usually involve coordination across different levels of governance, and harmonious relationships may result in more effective policies. However, Scholten (2015) has raised doubts regarding the interplay between local and national governments, and argued for a “decoupling” of their interactions. “Decoupled” relations are the result of different sets of interests and goals across tiers of governance. Similarly, the “local turn” in immigration (Glick-Schiller and Caglar, 2009) indicates that policies at the city level may diverge from, or compete with, national governments’ agendas in the field of migration governance.

While the “decoupling” of local migration policies has been evident in the USA since the 1980s (Oomen, 2020a), it has only become apparent in the European context since 2015. In regard to refugees and (irregular) migrants, this trend has been closely examined in the recent scientific debate on “Cities of Refuge” (Oomen, 2020a; 2020b; Oomen and Leenders, 2020; Garcés-Masareñas and Gebhardt, 2020), or in the American literature on “Sanctuary Cities” (Ridgley, 2008; Hintjens and Pouri, 2014; Bauder, 2017). This literature has stressed the sometimes problematic relations among local and national actors, civil society, and migrants and refugees themselves. The debate sheds light on how some cities have responded to the inadequacy of national migration and asylum laws and policies. In these cities, local governments have developed an independent stance, promoting integration and inclusion, whilst the national state remains undecided or hostile to migration. These cities warmly welcome new arrivals and are proactive in promoting their own agendas by implementing (political) initiatives in favour of human and migrant rights. Their mayors and municipal councils devise measures to break down existing borders, which are discussed, coordinated or disseminated within city networks (Oomen, 2020b). In *Cities of Refuge*, Oomen (2020a) suggests that the actions of local authorities concern different components of citizenship. Cities’ initiatives can shape legal status and political membership, set out rights and obligations, stimulate civic virtues and practices of engagement, as well as strengthen discourses of inclusion and participation. Kos and colleagues (2016), for instance, explored how Dutch municipalities developed practices to cope with exclusionary national asylum policies. Because substantial numbers of asylum seekers were failing to obtain regular status, local governments collaborated with NGOs to operate emergency reception and accommodation facilities. This created tension between themselves and national actors.

The expression “cities of refuge” also denotes a “culture of welcome”: that is, “a historically transmitted pattern of meaning, embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms” (Oomen, 2020a: 129). The British City of Sanctuary movement, for example, promotes this culture of welcome towards asylum-seekers and refugees through various forms of practical assistance: material support and legal advice provided by community-based initiatives to help forced migrants. These practices contest bordering processes, and they provoke disputes on “rightful presence” (Squire and Darling, 2013) and broader questions of justice. But this contrasts with the idea of “levelling” the hierarchies among different government actors proposed by the MLG approach, because “there are a number of areas in relation to the reception of newcomers over which local authorities do have direct control and which continue to act as a focal point for targeted interventions by local authorities” (Broadhead, 2020: 3).

Another example is provided by Garcés-Mascareñas and Gebhardt (2020), who describe the innovative local policies promoted by the local government of Barcelona. This city responded to the needs of new arrivals in a context in which the national government was reluctant to share responsibilities with lower tiers of government. Barcelona’s mayor called the city an “open city” or a “City of Refuge” in early September 2015, and fifty-five other Spanish city councils followed his example a week later. They created a network of cities in order to better coordinate the provision of services to refugees. Moreover, these cities also shifted their advocacy to the supranational level so as to circumvent national governments; a form of “venue shopping” (Guiraudon, 2000) in order to remedy failures of national policies. It can be argued that “Cities of Refuge” do not only provide help and solutions to vulnerable people; they also contribute to the consolidation of human rights globally, as well as to the effectiveness of actions at the local level (Oomen, 2020b). In other words, they have a symbolic purpose because they strengthen the welcoming of migrants and refugees, and the legitimacy of local policies. In regard to this last point, Caponio (2018) highlights how in Italy the participants in a network of welcoming cities have sought to decouple local policies from national dynamics and to strengthen the legitimacy of local initiatives. They have done so by “showcasing” (e.g. organization of events to communicate the issue of local identity cards); “storytelling” (e.g. promotion of alternative narratives on migration, such as emphasising a city’s historical links with diversity); and “shaming” (e.g. speeches by local politicians denouncing anti-immigrant policies or frames such as “Fortress Europe”). But a critical issue still persists: this symbolic support often prevails over the practical support guaranteeing a better reception of people in need of international protection.

While the examples presented above furnish profound insights into the process of de-bordering by local authorities, it should be borne in mind that other actors at the local level can also oppose restrictive policies. According to the street-level bureaucracy approach (Lipsky, 1980), an in-depth understanding of migration management in arrival societies should also consider the possibilities to negotiate borders embedded in the power relations among migrants and refugees, bureaucratic officials, and other civil society actors (Ellerman, 2006). In this regard, Price and Spencer (2014) argue that bureaucrats have the discretionary power to favourably decide on migrants’ access to welfare benefits on the basis of “deservingness”. The extent of this power varies among cities and depends on their size because civil servants’ preferences can play a crucial role in small and medium-sized towns (Oomen and Leenders, 2020). A recent study by Zimmermann and colleagues (2020), for instance, shows that the interaction between non-governmental organisations and the public administration can meet the security needs of refugee women in Germany.

Civil Society: Taking Over the State’s Responsibilities, and Going Beyond

Governments and civil society actors have a complex relationship when it comes to the welcoming of migrants and refugees. Scholars have argued that during, and after, the 2015 “long summer of migration” (Hess *et al.*, 2017), state systems failed to adequately handle the increasing numbers of migrants arriving

in European countries (Simsa, 2017). Moreover, asylum and migration policies were driven by an “organized non-responsibility”, by which is meant that EU member states passed responsibilities to each other (Pries, 2018; Vandevordt, 2019a). In this context, civil society organizations (CSOs), and hence the horizontal dimension of MLG, played an important role in the governance of new arrivals, i.e. in the reception of asylum seekers (Haselbacher, 2019). This can be interpreted as a shift of responsibilities, not only from the national level to the local level, but also from the public sector to the private sector (Caponio and Jones-Correa, 2018). This was due to two factors: the gap left by national governments in regard to the reception of asylum seekers, and initiatives to support migrants undertaken by civil society actors, often against the political will of governments.

Civil society organizations can be broadly defined as all formal and informal social institutions between the state, the economy and the private sphere (Odmalm, 2004; Putnam, 1993; Simsa, 2017: 78-79). A variety of civil society actors are involved in the reception and integration of migrants: non-governmental organizations (NGOs); non-profit organizations (NPOs) as well as grassroots initiatives (Simsa, 2017; Togral Koca, 2019; Tsavdaroglou *et al.*, 2019); volunteers spontaneously mobilized in informal ways (Ambrosini, 2019); and refugees themselves (Hinger *et al.*, 2016; Belloni 2016; Raimondi, 2019; Ponzo and Pogliano, 2019). These civil society actors all play their part in the reception of asylum seekers. Especially NGOs have become key players in the organization of migrant reception, and the provision of basic care (Haselbacher, 2019; Pries, 2018). Grassroots initiatives by ordinary citizens welcome migrants at train stations (Boersma *et al.*, 2019; Sinatti 2019), donate food and clothes (Zamponi, 2017), or organize language classes (Hamann & Karakayali, 2016). Activists and social movements also provide services to migrants (Belloni, 2016; Raimondi, 2019).

Civil society actors have historically played a role in giving assistance to groups marginalized because of their nationality or religion, also when working against public policies. Examples are the provision of services to migrants in France with false ID documents by the private association “Service Social d’Aide aux Migrants” (Social service of assistance to migrants) during the interwar period (Chibrac, 2004); or the solidarity and help given to the Jewish population in “one thousand and one ways” by French citizens (Semelin, 2019: 273). Asylum-seeker reception, therefore, is not a new development. However, during the post-2015 period the role of citizens and private associations was extended and adapted substantially (Larruina *et al.*, 2019) to also include tasks that traditionally pertained to the state. Voluntary organizations and initiatives proved able to respond more rapidly and more adequately to changing local needs, while governmental actors and some larger and more institutionalized NGOs were held back by their “limited resources and unclear policies” (De Jong and Ataç, 2017: 28). Governmental action (or inaction) in the field of migration can be characterized as a form of emergency governance, rather than coherent and strategic governance (Panizzon and van Riemsdijk, 2019; Simsa, 2017).

CSOs have been principally engaged in medical care, social assistance, language classes, housing, and social integration. Firstly, NGOs have become the primary healthcare providers for immigrants outside reception centres, and

voluntary work by healthcare professionals has become a key non-monetary input to the organization of healthcare services for immigrants (Ambrosini, 2015; Bozorgmehr *et al.*, 2019). Secondly, volunteers have engaged in the provision of social assistance to migrants. Bonizzoni (2019), for example, describes how in Italy the “Zampa Law” introduced the figure of the “volunteering guardian”; a volunteer that legally represents and safeguards the interests of unaccompanied minors on Italian territory. Previously, it was under the responsibility of the municipality, the mayor and social workers. However, the use of volunteers has been considered a way to protect unaccompanied minors more efficiently. Moreover, Schweitzer (2019) highlights how NGOs in Barcelona and London play a significant role in arranging access to (public) services for irregular immigrants. They are often formally entitled to these services but need assistance with the bureaucratic procedures. Thirdly, refugee housing is usually a responsibility of the state. However, during the large influx of migrants, states relied on collaboration with civil society to organize housing for refugees. Hinger and Schaefer (2019) describe the case of decentralized housing plans in Leipzig and Osnabrück (Germany) which included church organizations (Caritas, the Johanniter, Malteser), NGOs (Red Cross, Outlaw), as well as the army and private security companies. Moreover, squatting and informal settlement have become key ways in which immigrants can live outside formal reception centres while being excluded (formally or informally) from the housing market. Social movements, squatters’ movements and activists play a crucial role in these squats and camps (Belloni, 2016; Grazioli, 2017; Raimondi, 2019; Sandri, 2018; Ponzo and Pogliano, 2019).

Fourthly, besides the more basic provision of help, civil society actors assist the integration of migrants into receiving societies in various ways. For example, NGOs, as well as social movements and grassroots initiatives, organize language classes (Hamann and Karakayali, 2016; Hoppe-Seyler, 2020). Or grassroots initiatives organize meetings between citizens and migrants in neighbourhoods (Agustin and Jorgensen, 2019). NGOs can also be seen as part of the official process of helping migrants with formal integration programmes, as in the case of the Dutch Refugee Council (Van Heelsum, 2017: 2143). Moreover, helping migrants to participate politically and claim their rights can be seen as a part of the integration process (Nicholls, 2013a; Nordling *et al.*, 2017; Sandri, 2018; Sinatti, 2019; Vandevordt, 2019b).

Analysis of civil society responses to asylum governance in the post-2015 period shows that those years saw an impressive rise in grassroots citizen initiatives. These groups started to organize and played a distinct role in the reception of asylum seekers, alongside the organizations already created and committed to the cause of refugee reception. This period is also referred to as the “summer of welcome” or “welcome culture” (Fleischmann, 2017; Fleischmann and Steinhilper, 2017; Hamann and Karakayali, 2016). These authors describe a variety of loosely institutionalized and self-organized initiatives consisting of volunteers who often had not previously been concerned with refugees. They also describe groups traditionally committed to the cause of refugees like the radical left, antiracist, and religious groups. These grassroots initiatives, like other forms of pro-migrant volunteering, can be a response to right-wing anti-migrant sentiments and discourses in society (Hamann and Karakayali, 2016). They can also be seen as a way to express frustration with the government’s approach to

asylum seeker reception (Togrul Koca, 2016). However, at the same time those helping migrants often tend to frame this help in explicitly apolitical terms, as a purely humanitarian act (Fleischmann and Steinhilper, 2017; Sinatti, 2019; Parsanoglou, 2020; Schwiertz and Schwenken, 2020). Consequently, scholars have questioned whether or not these forms of help should be interpreted as forms of political action. Indeed, due to the involvement of volunteer groups previously uninvolved with migrant issues, help to migrants is no longer solely a cause pursued by religious charities or political activists. As the help to migrants has become more mainstream, the newly involved citizens have often avoided explicit political contextualization (Fleischmann and Steinhilper, 2017).

Conversely, traditional political actors, like social movements and activist networks, also shift their activities towards help for migrants (Della Porta, 2018). Belloni (2016), for example, describes how migrant squats become places for forms of “welfare from below” because squats provide shelter as well as forms of social security (Belloni, 2016). Zamponi (2017: 97) calls this a trend of “direct social action”, which he defines as comprising “actions that do not primarily focus upon claiming something from the state or other power-holders but that instead focus upon directly transforming some specific aspects of society by means of the action itself”. Similarly, Sandri (2018) uses the expression “volunteer humanitarianism” to denote the connection between humanitarianism and open forms of protest against institutional border securitization practices.

It should be added, however, that civil society and humanitarian actions have also been criticised, not only by political parties and citizens against immigration (Castelli Gattinara, 2017) but also by scholars who have cited unintended consequences and limitations of humanitarianism. Some critics, for instance, refer to practices that tend to silence, infantilize, victimize refugees, and de-historicize or de-politicize their condition (Malkki, 1996; Rajaram, 2002; Khosravi, 2010; Ticktin, 2014).

In sum, there is a myriad of formal and informal ways in which civil society organizations can be seen as part of the reception process of migrants and refugees. However, what is often lacking in terms of the MLG approach is analysis of the interaction between these non-governmental actors and governmental actors. Or consideration is not made of whether and how the former can challenge policies decided at a higher level of governance or determine outcomes in terms of immigration governance (Marzorati *et al.*, 2017).

Negative Attitudes Towards Immigrants and Asylum Seekers

One observation regarding the literature on civil society responses to the large influx of migrants since 2015 is that it tends to focus on the “positive” responses to migrants and on the ways in which civil society helps migrants. But civil society actors can also oppose migration and may challenge governance in this way. Welcoming initiatives whereby a broad alliance of civil society actors provide help and promote tolerance take place in contexts where public opinion often expresses resentment towards asylum seekers (Haselbacher and Rosenberger, 2018). Anti-migrant mobilisations have been described in terms of

an interweaving between the rise of European right-wing groups and far-right activism. This can be observed both in terms of on-the-ground mobilizations and protests (Castelli Gattinara, 2017; Rucht, 2018; Fouskas, 2019) and as a digital phenomenon (Ekman, 2018; Kopytowska *et al.*, 2017). Nevertheless, the literature remains largely silent on these negative civil society attitudes towards migrants. It has done so even though not all civil society actors have responded positively to migrants. Labour unions (in Northern Europe), for instance, have been faced with the dilemma of whether they can support the interests of migrant-workers and native-workers at the same time (Marino *et al.*, 2017), given that the latter fear competition by the former. Moreover, some religious actors have expressed anti-migrant sentiments. Narkowicz (2018) describes a highly divided Catholic Church in Poland, where the general stance of the Catholic Church of welcoming refugees contrasts with strong anti-migrant sentiments, and Islamophobia in Polish “right-wing Catholicism”. A similar case is described in Norway, where at the beginning of the “refugee crisis” churches played an active role in the reception of refugees but over time were increasingly confronted with a fear of the faith of others. This concerned the anxiety of sections of the Norwegian population that the influx of mostly Muslim migrants into an increasingly secularizing country, as well as a new plurality of faiths, would undermine social and political cohesion (Stålsett, 2018: 113-114). Likewise, in Italy, the relation between politics and civil society has often been characterised by conflict. Mobilizations from below, local authorities and right-wing movements have acted to prevent the establishment and functioning of reception centres (Ambrosini, 2018; Campomori and Ambrosini, 2020), and they have campaigned for the closure of squats occupied by asylum-seekers (Ponzo and Pogliano, 2019).

The Role of Migrants and Refugees

In regard to the role of non-state actors in influencing the MLG of migration, some empirical results suggest that migrant and refugees themselves may also be involved (Hinger *et al.*, 2016; Fontanari, 2018; Fontanari and Ambrosini, 2018; Parsanoglou, 2020). Hinger and colleagues (2016: 51), for instance, argue that coalitions between asylum-seekers and support groups influenced accommodation practices and decisions in German municipalities. Moreover, numerous cases have been described of attempts by social movements of refugees and/or undocumented migrants throughout Europe to influence policy-making and improve their situation (e.g. Ataç *et al.*, 2016; Cappiali, 2016; Chimienti, 2011; Monforte and Dufour, 2011; Raimondi, 2019; Frazzetta and Piazza, 2020). Bazurli (2019), for example, describes how social movements by and for migrants specifically seek to influence the city-governments of Milan and Barcelona on how those local governments handle the arrival and transit of migrants. Similar research conducted in Italy suggests that migrants and refugees in collaboration with native citizens can use squatting to address and find solutions for the housing problems of these populations (Belloni, 2016; Grazioli, 2017). Generally, empirical research around the world (Nyers and Rygiel, 2012; Marciniak and Tyler, 2014) has highlighted the active role of migrants and refugees in protesting against restrictive mobility regimes and the security measures deployed to block them. Some of these actions have been understood as deliberate political practices or part of organised political protests, while others have been understood as forms of everyday resistance

(Scott, 1985; Fontanari and Ambrosini, 2018; Chacko and Price, 2020). Finally, the analysis of MLG should take account of struggles for citizenship from below and struggles for the recognition of human rights by the persons directly affected by restrictive migration policies. Migrants and refugees often interact with civil society support groups, as well as with border controllers and policy-makers. By doing so, they contribute to the conflictual and dynamic process that we call the “battleground” of migration governance. By contrast, Nicholls (2013b) has highlighted the tensions that may arise between migrants and advocacy groups because native activists speak on behalf of migrants, setting aside the voice and will of the latter. Overall, it can be argued that the literature often fails to grasp the links and interplay between the action of migrants and refugees themselves and civil society, and how they can shape immigration governance.

Conclusion. The Battleground of Asylum Policies

Having considered a range of case studies on the engagement of local actors in migration and asylum governance, we state that more emphasis should be given to the horizontal dimension and the conflictual relations among different actors at the local level; rather than only considering the vertical cooperation and coordination among actors. The relationship between public and non-public actors within the levels of government, and how these interactions influence or shape policies in relation to migration governance, is an addition to the “traditional” MLG approach. The actual governance of migrants and asylum may be seen as the product of conflicting processes in which different local actors (pro- and anti-immigrant organizations/groups and the immigrant organizations themselves) have a crucial role. Special attention should be paid to contradictions and conflicts among actors of different kinds. This is because of the increasingly significant engagement of actors in favour of migration and the emergence of “cities of refuge” (Oomen, 2020a; 2020b; Garcés-Mascreñas and Gebhardt, 2020), on the one hand, and the involvement of civil society actors opposing migration on the other. Civil society can influence the implementation of policies, as well as the production of borders and the discussions, struggles, and resistance practices against such borders. In this regard, nor should the role of refugees themselves be neglected, because migrant social movements also try to influence policies (Dajani, 2020; Oikonomakis, 2018; Parsanoglou, 2020).

We therefore consider the concept of “battleground” (Ambrosini 2018; 2021; Campomori and Ambrosini, 2020) to be a useful means to comprehend the contentious aspects of the MLG of migration. A battleground perspective highlights the dynamism within the MLG framework whereby several actors and subjects interact — in a cooperative and/or conflictual manner — for the management of migration and asylum processes at different levels (Ambrosini, 2020). This becomes apparent when local authorities oppose national government policies by promoting welfare services, for instance. Or when civil society actors support local authority stances while movements against migrants mobilize and denounce them.

At the international level, this concept may be applied when NGO boats rescue migrants adrift in the Mediterranean Sea despite the opposition of political or judicial powers. But it may also be applied to transnational municipal networks

of “cities of refuge” aimed at influencing national policies; or to occasions when activists or volunteers help asylum seekers and refugees to cross national borders, thus acting against police controls. Therefore, the concept of “battleground” helps us to understand why the outcomes of asylum governance are often different from what has been planned or announced by central governments. Similarly, it helps us to grasp what happens within fractured political and social landscapes, like that of Europe, where several actors of different nature (public or private) and role (citizens, volunteers, activists, social workers, researchers), operating at different levels (local, national, international), are engaged in redefining European borders at a time of change and conflict (Fontanari and Borri, 2017: 33). Future research should therefore more closely investigate the actual dynamics of interaction among actors of different kinds and at different scales of government; as well as how these dynamics can shape migration governance. This will show whether and how policies can be challenged from below.

Although this consideration emerges from a literature review that largely focuses on the reception of refugees and asylum seekers, we argue that such dynamics may also be present in the post-reception period. This concerns issues regarding the integration of refugees into local communities, as well as of refugees whose applications for asylum have been rejected, so that they lapse into irregularity. The access of both refugees and (irregular) migrants to services, housing, labour market and welfare should be studied through the lens of conflictual interaction among different actors.

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Iraklis Dimitriadis, Minke H. J. Hajer, Elena Fontanari and Maurizio Ambrosini

Local “Battlegrounds” Relocating Multi-Level and Multi-Actor Governance of Immigration

The multi-level governance (MLG) approach is widely used to understand the complex processes of immigration policymaking. In this literature review, we consider both (i) the vertical dimension of MLG: the local, regional, national, European, or even global level; and (ii) the horizontal dimension of MLG: the relations between public and non-public actors. While focusing on the local level, this review identifies a trend regarding, on the one hand, local processes of bordering, and local policies of inclusion on the other. Furthermore, the article reviews how civil society has responded to the arrival of refugees. It identifies how this literature pays insufficient attention to dimensions of conflict and, more specifically, to how local borders can be challenged. Moreover, it shows a lack of attention to anti-migrant responses, and to the interaction between migrants and civil society regarding immigration governance. Concluding, the paper argues for the adoption of a “battleground” perspective as a more dynamic basis for the MLG approach.

La politique migratoire comme « champ de bataille » (*Battleground*). Relocaliser la gouvernance multi-niveaux et multi-acteurs de l’immigration

L’approche théorique de la gouvernance multi-niveaux (GMN) est largement utilisée pour comprendre les processus complexes d’élaboration des politiques migratoires. Dans cet article, nous proposons, sous la forme d’un état de l’art, une analyse de la dimension verticale (niveau local, régional, national, européen ou mondial) et horizontale (relations entre acteurs publics et non publics) de la GMN. Centré sur le niveau local et sur les questions d’asile, cet article identifie une tendance concernant, d’une part, les processus locaux de définition des frontières, et d’autre part, les politiques locales d’inclusion. En outre, nous examinons comment la société civile a réagi face aux arrivées de réfugiés. L’article montre que la littérature sur la GMN n’a pas accordé assez d’attention à la question du conflit et à la façon dont celui-ci peut déplacer les frontières sociales au niveau local. La littérature a insuffisamment abordé les mobilisations anti-migrants et les interactions entre migrants et société civile. En conclusion, nous ajoutons que le concept de « champ de bataille » (*Battlegrounds*) permet une compréhension plus dynamique de la GMN.

Los «campos de batalla» locales (*Battlegrounds*). Reubicación de la gobernanza multinivel y multiactor de la inmigración. Revisión de la literatura

La gobernanza multinivel (MLG por su acrónimo inglés) es un enfoque ampliamente utilizado para comprender los complejos procesos de formulación de políticas públicas en torno al tema de la inmigración. Esta revisión de la literatura analiza tanto la dimensión vertical de la MLG: el nivel local, regional, nacional, europeo o incluso global; como la dimensión horizontal de la misma: las relaciones entre actores públicos y no públicos. Centrándose en el nivel local y particularmente en el tema del asilo, esta revisión bibliográfica identifica una tendencia con respecto a los procesos locales de frontera por un lado, y las políticas locales de inclusión por el otro. Las dimensiones del conflicto y el cómo se desafían las fronteras locales no se tratan exhaustivamente en este documento. Sin embargo, a este respecto revisamos cómo la sociedad civil ha respondido a la llegada de refugiados. Esta literatura no ha otorgado suficiente atención a las respuestas anti-inmigrantes, y a cómo la sociedad civil y los migrantes interactúan en relación a la gobernanza de la inmigración. Concluimos elaborando sobre la manera en la que un marco conceptual en términos de «campo de batalla» (*Battlegrounds*) permite aplicar una perspectiva dinámica al entendimiento de la gobernanza multinivel o MLG.