INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE:
COMPARING LOCAL REFUGEE REGIMES

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The 'local turn' in migration studies has raised the question of how to study migration in cities of different size and power in various nation states. In conceptual terms, it has led to a rethinking of the local as a level of policymaking rather than merely focusing at national policies (Caponio et al. 2018). Frequently addressed topics range from migrant access to the labour and housing markets and educational facilities to anti-discrimination and diversity policies in local administrations, as well as migrant representation and not least, place-making at the neighbourhood scale (cf. Martiniello 2013; Bloemraad 2013). This scalar shift in migration studies also becomes visible in an increasing number of studies on refugees and asylum at the local scale. It is within local regimes that political conflicts around the issue of refugee reception become most palpable and where, for instance, the accommodation is organised and negotiated. Furthermore, municipal governments and locally organised civil society initiatives increasingly use their power to participate in the national and European processes of refugee distribution (see e.g. Seebrücke.org). However, it is still an open question to what extent these local refugee regimes share commonalities, or rather differ from one another.

To date, only few systematic studies have adopted a comparative perspective on local refugee regimes and their entanglement with various administrative scales (Darling 2016; Steen 2016; Hinger et al. 2016). However, the comparative perspective forms a common denominator of all contributions in this special issue. It is not by accident that this issue, with its diverse set of perspectives from geography, sociology, history and anthropology, is published in a geographical journal. The discipline of geography has steadily contributed to the field of refugee studies, with about 50 research projects in Germany alone in the period from 2011 to 2016 (Kleist 2018, 21). Still, spatially comparative studies, whether synchronic or diachronic investigations– are still lacking, whereas the field is largely filled with single case studies and characterized by a fragmented production of scientific knowledge (Pott and Schmiz 2018).

That is why this special issue makes a plea for strengthening theory building by re-conceptualising the local level in refugee studies through a relational comparative perspective from 'comparative urbanism' (Robinson 2011, 2016; Ward 2010). It enables a comparative study of migration and refugee regimes, also in small, rather peripheral cities and rural regions beyond major metropolitan gateway cities (Martiniello 2013). Furthermore, it facilitates the description, explanation and theorisation of local refugee regimes as they form in cities, provinces and nations (Ward 2010, 473). It acknowledges power asymmetries, migrant agency and the positionality of cities as posited by the 'rescaling approach' (Glick Schiller and Çağlar 2009). Moreover, a comparative urbanism perspective poses the question of how place-specific the production of local refugee regimes is. It thus lays the foundation for the discourse on the recognition of the local context (place matters!) and the analytical 'local trap' of conceptualising the city as the scale of reference. This translates into a critique of 'methodological urbanism' (Pott 2015) tied to the concept of 'methodological nationalism' (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002; Samers 2010). Lastly, comparative urbanism allows us to understand a local refugee regime as relationally produced rather than bounded and static, as problematized previously in migration studies (Brenner 2004).

Complementary to comparative urbanism, the regime perspective serves as another theoretical framework of the special issue. It does not only allow an analysis of the involved state and non-state actors and their politics, as is the case in many governance analyses. Instead, the regime perspective focuses on negotiation processes, integrating migrant agency as part of the broader civil society into the debate of the local governance of migration (Tsianos and Karakayali 2010, 376; Hinger et al. 2016; Horvath et al. 2017; Pott et al. 2018).

The special issue aims at initiating a thorough academic debate on local refugee regimes. In particular, the analysis of different administrative levels (supra-national, national and municipal) as well as of metropolitan and non-metropolitan contexts adds to the current theoretical debate on how asylum is regulated at the local scale and to what extent place-specific agency and actor networks influence these processes on the ground. This is highly topical in times of dynamic national political agendas towards refugees and an ongoing political and practical negotiation at the local scale. Therefore, with its focus on Germany, the issue enriches the academic debate with new insights from a national context in which the responsibilities for refugee accommodation 'jump scales' (Swyngedouw 1992).

Content

The following papers contribute to filling the research gaps illustrated above. All but the first (theoretical) paper are based on empirical comparative case studies.

In the first paper Bernt (2019) addresses conceptual concerns and lays the theoretical groundwork for this special issue. Taking the increased use of the migration regime approach as starting point, Bernt compares the use of the urban regime concept in political science to the use of the regime perspective in the interdisciplinary field of migration studies. With that, the author differentiates between two essentially divergent definitions of regime: While the political science approach towards urban regimes relies on Stone's rather strict understanding (Stone 1989), the regime perspective in migration studies aims at capturing the regulation of migration within a certain context, such as a limited space, an institutional body or an administrative/political system. As the author argues, the latter approach is rooted in a broad range of disciplines and intellectual streams and provides a wide conceptual scope, leading it to suffer from conceptual vagueness. Here, as Bernt argues, the urban regime theory might enrich the under-theorised concept of migration regime, especially for studies at the urban scale. A major achievement of this contribution is thus its critical discernment of the gaps in migration regime theory.

The empirical papers in this special issue largely highlight the necessity to look more deeply into local configurations of asylum. However, Glorius and her colleagues (Glorius et al. 2019) open up

the discourse on contemporary local refugee regimes by focusing on the multi-scalar European asylum system, the heterogeneity of national reception systems and the role of the local. In choosing Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands as well as a variety of metropolitan and peripheral cities within these nation states as case studies, the paper contributes to the conceptual discussion on the relevance of scale in the analysis of local migration regimes. Identifying and discussing convergent and divergent developments within and between nation states, the authors underline the importance of local over national comparisons when it comes to analysing refugee reception. In doing so, the authors not only illustrate that civil society plays a key role for the reception patterns at the local level in all three countries; they further show for all case studies that small and medium-sized accommodation centres found greater public acceptance than large-scale centres, especially if accommodation was supported by integration measures. The authors conclude with the finding that local reception regimes vary greatly, even within the same national settings and that the agency of civil society actors, local stakeholders and asylum seekers themselves plays a distinct role in the shaping of local asylum regimes.

Adam and her colleagues (Adam et al 2019) study the contacts and networks of refugees as well as their significance for integration in the rural German county Heinsberg and the city of Cologne. They work out how and where refugees build up contacts and networks after arrival when their daily routines are mainly centred around accommodation centres, language courses and appointments with public authorities. Their main findings are that contacts to relatives or friends from the home country are rarely used as core contacts after arrival. Rather, new contacts established through language courses, internships, schools and kindergartens serve as support. In general, these contact persons were from a diverse migratory background and were not restricted to middle-class solidarity structures. Comparing a metropolitan against a rural context, the study further shows that Cologne offers an arrival infrastructure and various opportunities for social encounters, such as Syrian bakeries, that serve people from the city and the hinterlands alike. Whereas the metropolitan context thus provides a fluid and rather confusing support structure with many one-off encounters, opportunity and support structures in the rural context are clearer and easier to handle. This is due, at least in part, to

newly established meeting points in the rural context, such as major bus or train stations, that allow encounters. What is more, widespread hostility to asylum seekers in the rural context of Heinsberg contrasts with the metropolitan anonymity and aloofness of metropolitans in Cologne, where racial profiling by the police force is of greater concern. This paper enriches the special issue through its particular focus on the differences and commonalities between metropolitan and rural contexts in terms of the social integration of refugees.

Borgmann (2019) provides a comparative analysis of refugee regimes in West-Berlin and Hamburg between 1973 and 1982. Focusing on the genesis, development and disruption of these refugee regimes, the author highlights differences and commonalities between the two cities in historical perspective. Furthermore, he shows how broader developments at the national scale lay the foundation for current asylum politics, e. g. an early negative attitude towards asylum seekers as aliens, culturally 'others' or as abusers of the social system. The comparative study does not only provide insights into the negotiation processes between various actors but also illustrates the cities' scope in shaping the local refugee regimes. It thereby contributes to a better understanding of historical path dependencies and their influence on contemporary refugee and asylum policymaking at the urban scale. For instance, Borgmann shows empirical evidence that as early as the 1970s networks of relatives and friends played a role in the accommodation of asylum seekers in Hamburg. In contrast, he also depicts local divergences in the establishment of the first mass accommodation centres and the increasing restriction of asylum seekers' access to work and cash benefits, outlining the shift from an era when asylum seekers regularly held a work permit to an era marked by a mandatory one-year detention period and the disbursements of benefits in kind. Moreover, the paper highlights several acts of refugee resistance and the formation of broad opposition in civil society in response to these backlash-fuelled curtailments of rights and freedoms within the asylum system. With his paper, Borgmann traces the historical development of the contemporary refugee regimes in Germany on the one hand and its local specificities on the other.

The paper written by Hinger and Schäfer (2019) takes as its starting point the different answers of two cities – the former East German city of Leipzig and the north-western Germany city of

Osnabrück – to the increasing number of people seeking protection in Germany over the course of 2015. The paper asks how to compare the different and changing practices and discourses of refugee accommodation in local migration regimes. Centred around the rescaling approach by Glick Schiller and Çağlar (2009) and Lefebvre's (1991) notion of space, the authors develop a model for a systematic comparison of the two cities. Hinger and Schäfer demonstrate that local asylum regimes are shaped by the local migration history, actor constellations and dynamics: Both cities were pioneers in the decentralisation of refugee accommodation, but diverged in their practices following the increased arrival of refugees in 2015. While the asylum infrastructure in both cities underwent major changes, Osnabrück clung to its decentralisation concept, thanks in part to long-standing alliances between refugees and various civil society and institutional actors. In contrast, the local historical context of the German Democratic Republic and subsequent reunification, including very limited experience with migration and major discontinuity, provided an instable local setting for the crisis situation in Leipzig in 2015. With their contribution, Hinger and Schäfer not only compare local asylum regimes in two historically differing local settings but also sketch out a research framework for future space-sensitive, comparative studies in this field.

Synopsis and outlook

In sum, all empirical contributions to this special issue demonstrate a great heterogeneity when it comes to local refugee regimes. However, at least three findings encompass all empirical contributions in this special issue: the importance of (1) the local migration history, (2) the local political regime and (3) the agency of civil society and refugees.

(1) Local migration history is highlighted – explicitly or rather implicitly – in all contributions throughout this issue: the historical absence or under-representation of migration plays a major role for local migration regimes in Saxony, whereas West German municipalities have been able to build on a long history of migration. This local migration history also defines resources and opportunities, as the contributions show. The composition of the local society and the historical emergence of local attitudes and discourses influence the way migration and asylum are negotiated in a city.

(2) A finding common to all of the contributions is that the local political regime is a major factor of refugee reception. Here, it is important to conceptualise the local regime as embedded in provincial, national and supranational politics and constellations and as shaped by discursive ruptures and (dis)continuities. This leads to findings that, for example, the administrative responsibility for refugees – of social welfare offices on the one hand and law and public order departments on the other hand – play a major role in local refugee regimes. Furthermore, the political representation of migrants and refugees is a crucial aspect in local migration regimes.

(3) Civil society also plays a major role in local migration regimes, although its role is ambivalent and sometimes unsteady. Not only does the opposition to repressive asylum laws have a long history in Germany; as further findings in this issue show, civil society's response to the major refugee influx from 2015 on was great solidarity. However, this solidarity was neither stable, nor evenly distributed geographically between East and West German localities nor between metropolitan and rural contexts. As several contributions highlight, it is important to conceptualise civil society as diverse and to see migrant agency as part of its engagement.

In sum, the papers in this special issue show that refugee regimes vary decisively between localities. Looking more deeply into local contexts, at actor constellations and modes of negotiation with the help of the regime perspective and tracing of similarities and differences with the comparative perspective of this issue makes is possible to build theory on local refugee regimes which conceptualises them as part of urban migration regimes. These can be comprehensively studied if, firstly, one considers state and non-state actors and their interrelations; secondly, one takes into account not only legal frameworks and politics but also their negotiations and implementations and thirdly, one incorporates space in the analysis (see HINGER and SCHÄFER 2019).

For geographic migration research, the regimes perspective allows researchers to capture local narratives on migration, migration history, institutions, actors, policies and their relations in a comprehensive framework. It is especially promising for highlighting of power structures, where power is seen in practices, norms, discourses, regulations, and institutions. Thus, the regime perspective offers a theoretical framework for placing migrant agency and other civil society actors centre stage. However, migration regime theory is still under-

theorised and as BERNT (2019) concludes, the cohesive theoretical framework of urban regime theory might help strengthen migration regimes theory, especially at the urban level.

Acknowledgement

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