Far From Home? The Role of Homelessness NGOs in Fostering the Resilient Arrival City Through Alliance-Building and Migrant Integration

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> **Abstract_** *Resilience is a leading concept in disaster scholarship that has mainly been studied in the context of in situ recovery and reconstruction following natural disasters or in temporary settlements, such as refugee camps, in the aftermath of humanitarian crises. However, it has not been sufficiently investigated in multi-crisis arrival cities receiving acute refugee inflows. The aim of this paper is to fill this knowledge gap by conceptualising the 'resilient arrival city' and further revealing the critical role of homelessness NGOs in resilience-building in multi-crisis arrival contexts, especially through political activation and the integration of refugees and unaccompanied minors. Drawing on field research conducted in Athens (Greece) in collaboration with a Greek homelessness NGO, the paper argues that homelessness NGOs foster the resilient arrival city through the implementation of refugee housing and integration programmes, the provision of improved social services, the formation of socially innovative governance arrangements, and the establishment of strategic partnerships with peer NGOs, international organisations, and public authorities to promote cities and housing for all.*

> **Keywords_** *resilient arrival city; refugee integration; social innovation; bottom-linked governance; housing; homelessness NGOs*

Introduction

Post-disaster resilience scholarship has mainly studied resilience-building processes taking place in *in situ* recovery following disasters triggered by natural hazards or in the context of displacement (e.g., refugee camps) in the aftermath of humanitarian crises. These processes are largely led by the displaced communities themselves, civic society organisations, built environment professionals (e.g., for-profit and non-profit housing developers, architects), and local or national public authorities. What remains understudied is an understanding of resilience in the context of displacement and relocation of refugees[1] in *arrival cities* in new national territories, characterised by a multi-layered crisis both for the displaced population (reception and integration crisis) and for the recipient city/country (social, debt, economic, structural crisis). More attention also needs to be drawn to the role of *homelessness NGOs* in addressing the aforementioned crises and fostering the *resilient arrival city* through their advocacy, networking, and refugee integration and housing programmes. Homelessness NGOs are considered those non-govern-mental organisations who fight against homelessness by providing temporary or permanent housing solutions and social services to people who are roofless, houseless, or living in insecure or inadequate housing.[2] The theoretical insights informing the argument of this paper derive from disaster resilience, social innovation, and migrant integration. Specifically, the paper is embedded in a critical approach of 'resilience', whereby the discursive call for resilience can never be apolitical or power-blind but a fundamentally debated and politically fraught discourse enwrapped with power relations, discursive hegemony, social innovation, and governance fermentations (Davoudi et al., 2012; Paidakaki and Moulaert, 2017; Teigão dos Santos and Partidário, 2011). The paper also distances itself from a 'technocratic' paradigm of social innovation in which initiatives are considered too reformist and compliant with neoliberal logics (Moulaert and MacCallum, 2019; Paidakaki et al., 2018). Conversely, it allies with a 'democratic' paradigm and an emancipatory tradition of social innovation which puts stress on the political dimension of social interactions and foregrounds dissensus, empowerment, and solidarity in the form of invigorated political capabilities (e.g., formal and informal alliances) to access necessary resources for needs satisfaction, create counter-hegemonic alternatives, and ferment more democratic bottom-linked governance arrangements (Moulaert and MacCallum, 2019; Paidakaki et al., 2018).

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[1] In this paper we use the term 'refugees' as a general term that includes asylum seekers and persons who have been granted refugee status or subsidiary/humanitarian protection status (recognised refugees). The paper largely focuses on unaccompanied minors, a refugee subgroup with special vulnerability features.

[2] See the European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion by FEANTSA: https://www.feantsa.org/download/ethos2484215748748239888.pdf.

Empirically, the paper draws upon evidence from the post-2015 EU 'refugee crisis' context in the arrival city of Athens (Greece), providing answers to the following dual key research question: To what extent can homelessness NGOs nurture a resilient (multi-crisis) arrival city through (1) their programmes on social integration and housing provision for refugees, and (2) their political activation and formation of novel, more democratic governance arrangements toward an improved social public policy in the arrival city context?

The city of Athens makes a pertinent case study for this investigation because, since the 2015 Syrian crisis, this metropolis has become an arrival city for refugees from the Middle East, North Africa, and Asia, who used Eastern and Central Mediterranean Sea routes to seek asylum to Europe. Indicatively, Greece reported 856 723 refugee sea arrivals in 2015; a number corresponding to 8.2% of the country's permanent population, while Italy being the second highest European state with a recorded 153 842 arrivals that equals 0.25% of its population (ELSTAT, 2021; ISTAT, 2022; UNHCR, 2016). Moreover, since 2019, one in five unaccompanied minors (UAMs)[3] in Europe, a highly vulnerable subgroup of the refugee population, applied for asylum in Greece (Eurostat, 2020) and has been housed by homelessness NGOs through different housing arrangements, such as protected 'safe zones', hotels, shelters, and Supported Independent Living (SIL) apartments (European Commission, 2015; Greek Council for Refugees, 2020). In recent years, overcrowded shelters forced some UAMs to abandon these facilities and sleep outdoors, leaving them exposed to heightened risks of exploitation. In 2023, over 41 000 UAMs sought asylum across the EU – the second-highest number recorded since 2015 – highlighting the growing pressures on national reception systems (FEANTSA, 2024). Procedural inefficiencies (e.g., slow administrative processes, bureaucratic legal hurdles, unjustified rejections) and limited access to essential services have continued to exacerbate their vulnerability and undermined their prospects for integration (FEANTSA, 2024).

Another reason for the selection of Athens as a pertinent case study for this research investigation was its multi-crisis context. One of the immediate actions taken by the EU to manage the rapid refugee inflow in 2015 was the establishment of 'hotspot' structures that hosted the first reception and identification services. Increasing needs for accommodation infrastructure, administration and assistance services, transportation to urban centres, and asylum facilities emerged and had to be covered by the recipient states in collaboration with European and interna-

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[3] Unaccompanied minors (UAMs) are children under the age of 18 who arrive on the territory of an EU Member unaccompanied by the adult responsible for them by law or by the practice of the EU Member state concerned, and for as long as they are not effectively taken into the care of such a person or who is left unaccompanied after they have entered the territory of the EU Member state (European Commission, Migration and Home Affairs).

tional organisations. This urgent management of refugee reception coincided with a *socio-economic crisis* period in Greece shaped by a series of austerity policies (2010-2017) to counter the Greek Government's debt in the aftermath of the 2008 global economic crisis. Among others, the austerity measures imposed by the EU on the Greek Government in 2009 were spending cuts on public services and a reformation of the healthcare system (Rady, 2012). Combined with a loss of competitiveness in the international market, the austerity measures led to a steep rise in unemployment rates and poverty levels (unemployment rates rocketed from 7.8% in 2008 to a peak of 27.5% in 2013), significant loss of income, a widening of income inequality, a sharp increase in the number of uninsured citizens, an increase in taxes for housing and consumption products (Benmecheddal et al., 2017; Statista, 2021; Stylianidis and Souliotis, 2019), and a 25% increase of people experiencing homelessness in Greece (Melander, 2011). According to Parsanoglou (2020, p.460), this welfare crisis also led to "the retreat, if not collapse, of the welfare state in austerity-hit Greece". Within this multi-crisis arrival context, the 2015 refugee *reception* crisis was gradually transformed (starting in 2019) into a refugee *integration* crisis, further aggravating the pre-existing multi-crisis milieu. A few years later in 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic added another layer to the pre-existing context of intertwined crises. To contain the outbreak of the virus, the Greek Government implemented further restrictions on movement in and out of the hotspots and temporarily shut down (1) the asylum service centre, leaving asylum seekers without proof of application and, thus, obstructing their access to the healthcare system, financial assistance, and labour market, and (2) schools, putting the education of refugee minors on hold due to lack of access to the Internet and digital equipment (Kovner et al., 2021).

Fig. 1 Greece's multi-layered crisis landscape

Crises accumulation	Influenced arrival city territory	Influenced individuals
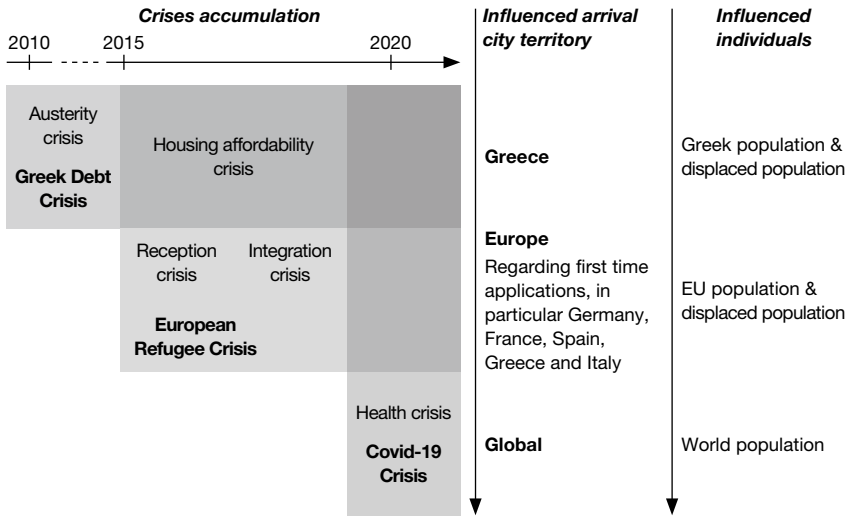
Source: Authors' elaboration

The multi-layered crisis landscape in Greece was further sketched by a *housing affordability crisis* – especially in Athens – partly due to overtourism and a steep increase in the number of Airbnb rentals—going from 132 in 2010 to 126 231 in 2018 (Maloutas et al., 2020; former local politician, interview, 4 March 2021). This in turn led to the intensification of housing unaffordability for vulnerable groups including both migrants/refugees and Greek citizens (homeless, middle- and low-income groups, youth) due to skyrocketing rent prices and raised property occupation taxes (former local politician, interview, 4 March 2021).

To house the most vulnerable refugees since 2015, two programmes were launched: (1) the "Emergency Support to Integration and Accommodation" (in short, ESTIA) administered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) until 2020, and (2) the "Hellenic Integration Support for Beneficiaries of International Protection" (in short, HELIOS) administered by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Both programmes were temporary in nature, offering short-term accommodation solutions and limited long-term perspectives for migrant integration and autonomous living (Kourachanis, 2019a; Kovner et al., 2021). Local authorities, the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, and NGOs were actively involved in the management and implementation of ESTIA and HELIOS. Homelessness NGOs, some of which are also Greek members of the European Federation of National Organizations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA), such as the case study

homelessness NGO[4], PRAKSIS, and Solidarity Now, were main partners in ESTIA, with Solidarity NOW also being part of the implementation of the HELIOS programme. Homelessness NGOs, thus, emerged as main protagonists of social and housing programme implementation for refugees further facilitating the search for short-term and long-term accommodation for their beneficiaries. The support of homelessness NGOs, beyond housing assistance, included basic needs satisfaction (e.g., food, hygiene, clothes, healthcare), psycho-social and legal services, recreational activities, sports, workshops, education, employment skills, language classes, interpretation services, and intercultural activities (ACCMR, 2020; The HOME Project, 2020), especially witnessed in their programmes for UAMs. Despite their critical role in refugees' housing and integration, NGOs are often characterised by "organisational and financial volatility" due to their financial dependence on donors and the framing of their operation by fixed-term contracts signed with state authorities (Kourachanis, 2024, p.4). In light of such challenges and potentials, the capacity of homelessness NGOs to contribute to resilience-building in the Greek multi-crisis arrival setting remains under-investigated (Kalogeraki, 2020; Kourachanis, 2021).

This paper aims to study resilience in the multi-crisis arrival context of Athens by engaging with the integrative and politico-institutional features of homelessness NGOs in resilience-building processes. The paper specifically delves into the work of a Greek homelessness NGO originally founded in the 1990s to support disadvantaged youth and protect their rights through advocacy. The NGO is financially supported both by public funding (e.g., the EU Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund) and private donorship, and who, since 2015, has focused its services and advocacy work on housing and integrating asylum seekers and recognised refugees.

The remainder of the paper is divided into five sections. Section 2 conceptually unravels the interface of resilience, social innovation, and migrant integration. Section 3 explains research methodology and section 4 elaborates on the dynamic integration work and political activity of the case study NGO. Section 5 reflects on the empirical findings and analyses the potentials and limitations of the dual – integrative and politico-institutional – role of the case study in fostering the resilient arrival city. In conclusion, Section 6 offers suggestions on how homelessness NGOs can extend their integrative and politico-institutional impact in post-disaster arrival cities of the future.

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[4] This study refrains from mentioning the name of the specific Greek homelessness NGO case study to respect their request for anonymity. Therefore, it will be referred to as 'the case study homelessness NGO', 'the case study NGO', 'the case study', or 'the NGO'.

Conceptual Exploration of the Resilience, Social Innovation, and Migrant Integration Interface

Resilience: An overview of the concept and knowledge gaps

Resilience was originally introduced as an ecological concept by Holling (1996) and understood as the ability of systems to absorb change in a timely manner and still maintain their ongoing functions and controls. Although the concept of resilience, when perceived as a one-time action of the system returning to its original state, is applicable in ecological and structural rebuilding contexts, a system's unchangeable constancy cannot apply to complex social systems involving human actors (Davoudi et al., 2012). As a result, resilience was reconceptualised taking into consideration its socio-spatial, economic, institutional, and political features as well as evolutionary dimensions affecting the ability of a system to cope with crises and recover its pre-shock operational structures. Thus, since the bouncing back to pre-disaster conditions (Wildavski, 1991) lurks the danger of returning to pre-existing vulnerabilities, several scholars highlighted the need to define resilience as the ability to 'bounce forward' to stronger, better, safer, and more socially just human settlements (Cutter et al., 2008; Davoudi et al., 2012; Manyena, 2009). This reconceptualisation further implies the transformation of social learnings and knowledge acquired into new institutional arrangements, (re)organisation of social networks, improved governance schemes, and development strategies (Coccossis et al., 2021; Folke, 2006). In this context of post-disaster social transformation, institutional adaptation, and the call for structural changes, various actors and social groups – underpinned by different value systems and visions for the resilient city – seize the opportunity to increase their capabilities to influence change (Paidakaki and Moulaert, 2018). This heterogeneity has elevated 'resilience' from a single capacity of a system to resist shock and bounce back or bounce forward in a linear, monodirectional way, to a highly politically sensitive, continuously changing, socially transformative process, with various 'bounce-forward' imaginations and trajectories (e.g., pro-growth or pro-equity) steered by a heterogeneity of recovery agents (for-profit and non-profit housing providers) (Paidakaki and Moulaert, 2018). More recently, resilience has also been investigated from a migratory perspective in the context of urban transformations (Vains, 2017; Visvizi et al., 2017) and refugee camps (Paidakaki et al., 2021). The latter are considered socially resilient when, on the one hand, they offer a sturdy public camp infrastructure and social infrastructure for social life and recreation and, on the other hand, are governed by a heterogeneity of stakeholders (hegemonic and alternative), who have an equivalent voice and equal space to experiment with their own perceptions of humanitarian aid (Paidakaki et al., 2021).

However, to date, notably few—if any—studies exist scrutinising and critically analysing resilience in the context of new national territories receiving populations displaced by natural or human-induced disasters. In particular, it remains rather understudied how several 'recovery' actors in recipient cities/countries view a humanitarian crisis as an opportunity to foster the resilience of the arrival city. How do these actors help the arrival city bounce forward into the direction of an equity-based urban development and governance by (1) collectively reflecting on the city's pre-existing, underlying, and structural socio-spatial inequalities and ill-defined social urban policies, (2) acting upon and addressing the root causes of long-lived social vulnerability, and (3) working on improved migrant integration and housing-for-all programmes?

In this paper, 'arrival city' refers to the 'virtual arrival city' as explained by the journalist Doug Saunders to address the general places where migrants settle and integrate on a city level. For Saunders (2010, p.18), arrival cities are conceptualised as places that "function to propel people into the core life of the city and to send support back to the next wave of arrivals."

In the scientific discourse on migrants' arrival settlements, the prevalent focus has been on fixed, homogeneous, and clearly delineated enclaves with poor residents and inexpensive dwellings (Meeus et al., 2020). Such socio-spatial phenomena occur in the form of human settlements with a clear physical demarcation such as slum quarters (e.g., bidonvilles, favelas, shanty towns), ethnic districts or immigrant neighbourhoods, or in the form of less demarcated settlements, such as larger urban territories across which newcomers are spatially spread out and interwoven within the urban tissue (Knox and Pinch, 2014; Saunders, 2016 cited in Meeus et al., 2020).

On the whole, arrival cities are much more than the particularities of the built environment and their socio-cultural inclusion-exclusion implications (Ye and Yeoh, 2022). As Wilson (2022, p.3459) aptly observes, an arrival city "is far from stable, being continuously reworked by state policy, geopolitics, economic fluctuations or localised events that rupture or destabilise what came before." Arrival cities further encompass a set of resources managed through formal and informal mechanisms, and the deployment of networks to underpin social interactions, refugees' integration, and political representation; all shaping a distinct social and institutional capital (Saunders, 2010). This, in turn, together with critical infrastructure (administrative, economic, physical, etc.) frame the capacity of the city to operationalise and implement appropriate policies and measures for refugee integration and bounce forward to the (re)establishment of resilient urban structures. The arrival city can therefore be described as an infrastructural basis that underpins sharing and exchange of knowledge and resources between local communities, previously arrived migrants, and newcomers (Hanhörster and Wessendorf, 2020). Sidney

(2019) highlights the role of NGOs as elements of 'arrival infrastructure' since they are mediating between newcomers and local governments to facilitate the provision of housing and a series of legal procedures. In this dynamic context, our paper raises the questions: What can then be defined as a *resilient arrival city*? And how are homelessness NGOs actively involved in enabling resilience-building processes in the arrival city? To conceptualise 'the resilient arrival city' we bridge theories of social innovation with migrant integration literature.

Unfolding the resilient arrival city: Insights from social innovation

Resilience thinking is intertwined with governance conceptualisations, as it reflects, on the one hand, on normative guidelines formulated by the state at different policy levels to support disaster recovery, and on the other hand, on bottom-up socially innovative initiatives by communities and voluntary organisations aiming to cover institutional voids and satisfy acute human needs that are often unmanageable by the state. Crises and disasters trigger necessities that force civil society to self-organise, while the state apparatus may provide institutional mechanisms, through which several socially innovative actors can unfold their potential contribution to resilience-building (Paidakaki and Parra, 2018). Can social innovation, however, have a socio-political transformative impact in a post-disaster context? According to post-political scholars (e.g., Metzger 2011; Mouffe, 1999; Swyngedouw and Wilson, 2014), social innovation can only have limited potential for socio-political transformation because of 'caring neoliberal' views of social innovation whereby the welfare state is shrunk in budget and social responsibility and pre-selected civic society groups (NGOs, business groups) provide low-cost social services (Paidakaki et al., 2018). In governance terms, according to Paidakaki et al. (2018, p.12), "this paradigm translates into a-political, techno-managerial and consensus-oriented elitist governance arrangements that cultivate politically modest social service providers and pre-define linear and mono-directional urban development trajectories that ultimately sharpen inequality in urban society."

However, scholars of radical social innovation who belong to the broader tradition of critical studies (Eizaguirre et al., 2012; García et al., 2015; Moulaert et al., 2013; Oosterlynck et al., 2013a; b; Pradel et al., 2013) stress the political nature of innovative initiatives taken by civil society organisations, and put emphasis on solidarity, empowerment, and criticism against the socio-economic inconsistencies and disrupting (social, cultural, environmental) consequences of neoliberal urban development (Moulaert et al., 2007 in Paidakaki and Moulaert, 2018). According to this scholarship, socially innovative organisations trigger transformational change by initiating micro-initiatives on the basis of solidarity that establishes new collaborations between organisations and sectors, forms new arenas, and works out alternative strategies for socio-spatial development (Paidakaki et al., 2018). To ensure a

lasting impact of their initiatives, social innovators are embedded in bottom-linked governance structures with the aim to force decision- and policy-makers to "(1) create new mechanisms for the provision of resources, (2) imagine new ways of conceptualising and approaching policy problems, and (3) engage with and empower a wider range of policy implementers and civic actors to develop socially innovative practices" (Pradel et al., 2013 in Paidakaki et al., 2018, p.14). Thus, bottom-linked governance, as a new and dynamic governance arrangement between top-down receptive decision- and policymakers and bottom-up social innovators aiming for human need satisfaction, public policy co-construction and the formation of participatory decision-making mechanisms, becomes a transversal institutionalisation of social change (Paidakaki et al., 2018; Paidakaki and Lang, 2021).

According to Moulaert et al. (2010), the following three main forms of change should be achieved – alone or in combination – for social innovation to eventually have a 'successful' and lasting impact: (1) *the satisfaction of human needs* (material and immaterial); (2) *the empowerment of marginalised social groups* through protection of their rights, enhancement of capabilities, and the (re)creation of visions/culture/ identity; and (3*) changes in social, power, and/ or governance relations* within the community, and between the community and society at large. The goal of social innovation also extends to providing inventively improved conditions that further foster social cohesion (Van Dyck and Van den Broeck, 2013). Social innovation literature can thus provide an instrumental framework with socio-political, ideological, and ethical properties (Moulaert and MacCallum, 2019) to complement resilience discourses and thoroughly unravel post-disaster transformations (Westley, 2013) and social processes that lead to new/post-crisis governance cultures. In this context, a post-disaster/crisis socially innovative governance shift creates an opportunity for the design of a new, more just political economy, and for a reinvented role of the state within a bottom-linked governance form (Paidakaki and Parra, 2018). In such productive governance environments, bottom-up initiatives and voluntary organisations find fertile ground to claim for a more equitable provision of goods and services (Paidakaki and Parra, 2018).

Due to the intrinsic bottom-up and solidarity-based character of socially innovative practices, the main leaders of social innovation amidst crisis times are mainly non-governmental/non-profit organisations, including those belonging in the homelessness sector (Paidakaki, 2021). These actors not only implement social policies to tackle (urgent) social problems, but also organise themselves discursively and actively in their aim to address the root causes of social vulnerabilities and influence the recovery profile of a post-disaster city (Paidakaki and Moulaert, 2017). NGOs are especially quick to activate themselves in times of crisis to respond to urgent and growing/massive social needs. With time, they raise issues of institutional

dysfunctionalities, such as social policy gaps, exclusive governance structures, and deficiencies of top-down decision-making mechanisms (Moulaert et al., 2019; Moulaert and MacCallum, 2019; Paidakaki et al., 2022).

In a migratory context, homelessness NGOs steer novel governance arrangements seeking an improved provision of goods and services varying from food and housing facilities to educational activities and programmes supporting a multifaceted integration of refugees in the arrival cities (Paidakaki, 2021). Homelessness NGOs mobilise their know-how, as well as their horizontal and vertical networking, to build strong bottom-up corps with a political voice (*intra-level governance*) and advocacy groups that allow them to participate in policymaking and bring about bottom-linked governance reconfigurations (*inter-level governance*) (Paidakaki, 2021; Paidakaki and Lang, 2021). By politicising themselves and working collectively, they call for radical changes in dominant institutional structures shaped in a context of increasing financialisation of welfare services and neoliberal reforms; the latter being intertwined with the root causes of humanitarian crises (Arapoglou and Gounis, 2017). In this context, NGOs' responses are often constrained by the state's managerial approach to dealing with crises –'justified' by the nature of emergency landscapes–, project-based funding, rapid implementation timelines, and related policy restrictions. As a matter of fact, in most cases the access of NGOs to resources and infrastructure depends on state or private actors highly affecting the NGO's operation, impact, and capacity to trigger institutional and political change. However, refugee crises activate funding schemes at national and international levels that are channelled through NGOs based in arrival cities, create political synergies and 'infrastructures of solidarity' (Schilliger, 2021), and enable legal and bureaucratic changes that facilitate NGOs' field of action (Parsanoglou, 2020). This creates opportunities for materialising a socially innovative transition in a radicalised neowelfare governance regime (Paidakaki and Parra, 2018). Therefore, the socially innovative nature of NGOs plays a critical role in resilience building, and in the improvement of the recipient city's institutional capacity to satisfy human needs and facilitate refugees' smooth integration in new socio-cultural environments.

Resilience through migrant integration lenses

The concept of migrant integration appeared in academic and policy debates in the 20th-century post-World War context (Phillimore, 2021). It was originally considered part of classical assimilation theories (i.e., Warner & Strole, 1945), which assumed migrant settlement and incorporation through social processes into the dominant way of life in society. This approach was reshaped by scholarly criticism of the conception of a *mainstream society/culture* that assumes a homogenous social environment (in terms of ethnicity, religion, culture, social norms, etc.), strengthened by empirical research findings uncovering structural inequalities that hinder integra-

tion (e.g., injustices in gaining access to the labour and housing markets), the existence of a plurality of integration processes depending on collective actors (communities, civil society, state, etc.), and contextual actors (such as economic situation). Migrant integration was then perceived as "the process of becoming an accepted part of society" (Penninx and Garcés-Mascarenas, 2016, p.14), which is conceptually rooted in the 'cohesive society' of Durkheim (1893). The association of integration with social cohesion is also apparent in a number of international integration policies (Council of Europe, 2008; International Organization for Migration, 2017).

Preston et al. (2022) adopt a critical approach to analyse migrants' integration as a social component of resilience since it encompasses processes that contribute to the development of diverse, solidarity-based, and socially just societies. The same authors underline the roles of governmental and non-profit organisations in supporting a smooth transition of newcomers into new ways of life, even when unpredictable challenges—like Covid-19 pandemics – emerge. The adaptability and effectiveness of those organisations form part of a wider socio-institutional capacity to respond to crises and move towards better-prepared communities. Moreover, the multi-levelness of migrant integration needs and policies demands complex governance arrange-ments that go beyond state-centred coordination mechanisms and triggers poly-centric and multi-actor collaborations (Scholten et al., 2017). Such governance reconfigurations distance themselves from a neoliberal state characterised by a top-down hierarchy, the promotion of profit-oriented activities, and shrinkage of public spending for social welfare which often result in a constrained resilience potential. Instead, they contribute to resilience building by nurturing a neowelfare state, the primary purpose of which is to facilitate the mobilisation and sufficient capitalisation of civil society actors for the production of social goods and services for all (Swyngedouw and Jessop, 2006; Scholten, 2013 cited in Penninx and Garces-Mascarenas, 2016; Manganelli and Moulaert, 2018; Paidakaki and Parra, 2018).

The analysis of integration is often broken down into three main domains: the *socio-economic* domain covering employment, education, housing, health, and social inclusion; the *legal-political* domain referring to rights and citizenship; and the *cultural* domain including language and religion (Hynie, 2018). Access to a variety of employment sectors (Ager and Strang, 2008; Martín et al., 2016), education, housing, and health (Philips, 2013; Ziersch and Due, 2018), as well as equal citizen-ship rights and social connections (Ager and Strang, 2008) have also been under-lined as crucial integration factors. Although several frames have been put forward to analyse integration outcomes and guide the development of coherent integration policies, the nexus between integration and resilience remains weak both in terms of theoretical and policy explorations (Walther et al., 2021). In order to examine the nexus between integration and resilience building, this study adopts the definition

of successful integration formulated by Hynie et al. (2016), who explain that integration can be studied on the basis of eight domains being: (1) *social connections*; (2) *functional integration,* which covers access to education, affordable and safe housing, stable employment, and health services; (3) *language adaptation* that facilitates other integration aspects such as social connections, education, and employment; (4) *institutional adaptation*, meant as necessary practice and policy changes by agencies and institutions; (5) *community welcome,* covering media discourse, beliefs, and attitudes among the larger community and general public; (6) *cultural integration* that consists of working knowledge of cultural and social norms and expectations in the new society; (7) s*afety and security*; and (8) *sense of belonging* referring to the subjective feeling at home and perceived social status within communities.

Methodology

The resilience-bolstering potential of homelessness NGOs in the arrival city is empirically tested with evidence from the integration and advocacy work of the case study homelessness NGO in the arrival city of Athens in Greece. Empirical data were collected during fieldwork conducted in 2021. More specifically, the study was conducted in one of the case study's shelters located in the centre of Athens housing 28 male UAMs (Afghans, Syrians, Bengalis, Pakistanis, and Gambians) and run by various professionals. In preparation for the fieldwork in Athens, a desk study was conducted to gain insight into Greece's multiple crisis context (2009 debt crisis; 2015 refugee crisis; 2018 housing affordability crisis; 2020 Covid-19 crisis) and the reception/accommodation facilities for UAMs offered by social and homelessness NGOs. This desk research included a review of academic papers and documents harvested in data portals (i.e., Eurostat, IMF, Worldometer), reports and policy papers (i.e., United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), European Commission (EC), Greek Council for Refugees (GCR), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), International Organization for Migration (IOM), NGOs), web research on NGOs, and newspaper articles. Additionally, document analysis was carried out regarding the case study's partnerships with other homelessness and social NGOs, UAMs education policy, as well as on legal issues regarding UAMs procedures (e.g., family reunification), advocacy and service networks, and the Covid-19 impact on collective initiatives such as the 'Athens Coordination Centre for Migrant and Refugee Issues' (in short, ACCMR[5]). With the aim of shedding light on the integration and

[5]   ACCMR is a network of over 150 member-organisations covering a wide range of organisations, such as municipal and state authorities, local and international NGOs, International Organisations, refugee and migrant fora, and International Institutions working together for the promotion of the social integration of immigrants and refugees (https://www.accmr.gr/en/).

politico-institutional role of the case-study NGO in resilience-building processes in the context of the arrival city of Athens, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key officers from the shelter and collaborating politicians (empirical categories incl. shelter functioning, location, and neighbourhood; facilitation of integration; historic and future development of services and alliances of the case study NGO; and Covid-19 impact), an anonymous questionnaire was handed out to 10 male UAMs living in the shelter (empirical categories incl. demographics, accommodation history, social connections, emotional well-being and safety/ security feeling, and future aspirations), and informal discussions were realised with UAMs, staff, and professionals working in the shelter.

Integration and Resilience-Building in the Arrival City of Athens, Greece

History and context of integration policy in Greece

Greek history is characterised by a long-standing experience in receiving refugees and responding to their acute social and housing needs. Indicatively, after the Greco-Turkish War (1919-1922) a wave of more than one million refugees, mainly from Asia Minor, arrived in Greece, triggering the establishment of the Refugees Resettlement Committee to undertake the management of loans and the formulation of policies for the settlement of refugees and their incorporation in the labour market (especially in the agricultural and industrial sector). However, such an experience did not result in the development of an improved integration and housing policy system; refugee inflows have rather been addressed in an emergency response rationale (Kourachanis, 2018; 2019a) leading to an inadequate physical and institutional infrastructure. Following a decision of the European Court of Human Rights in 2011 that detected the lack of policies and administrative practices to support asylum seekers in Greece, the first integrated legal frameworks emerged for the establishment of the Asylum Agency (Law 3907/2011), and later for the temporary receptions and accommodation facilities for the asylum seekers (Law 4172/2013) and the social integration of migrants (Law 4251/2014). In the aftermath of the debt crisis, the austerity measures that led to spending cuts on social policies and public services and the wider lack of political will significantly delayed the administrative implementation of migration laws (Kourachanis, 2019b).

The Greek state started organising the migration and integration institutional and policy setting in the aftermath of the 2015 'refugee crisis'. In 2016, significant legislative measures were enacted to address institutional gaps. Law 4375/2016 focused on the accommodation of asylum seekers, while Law 4368/2016 introduced the establishment of Migrant Integration Centres at the municipal level. Additionally,

the role of NGOs was institutionally recognised, and a registration system for NGOs working in international protection, immigration, and social integration was implemented under Ministerial Decree 39487/2016. At the European level, the 2016 Action Plan on the Integration and Inclusion (APII) – which was later amended in 2021 – strongly supported the active involvement of NGOs and their cooperation with state authorities and other EU-level networks to coordinate and implement integration policies and to mediate between civil society and the states (APII, Paragraph 4.2.1). Although the Greek National Integration Strategy (2013, amended in 2019 and 2021) asks for a dialogue platform (Paragraph 3.2.6.2) and an enhanced role of civil society organisations in the integration process (Action 1.2/11) of including NGOs in the list of integration policies' implementers, it focuses on the determination of different state authorities' competences and obligations creating an unclear environment for the actions and contributions of NGOs. The Joint Ministerial Decree 3063/2020 that determines the operation of NGOs mainly describes the registration process and the official recognition of NGOs, rather than their actions in the refugees' integration phase. As far as the regulatory framework related to UAMs is concerned, it was in 2022 that the National Guardianship System and Accommodation Framework was legally determined (Laws 4939/2022 and 4960/2022). The shortcomings of the Greek state that led to a delayed legal and administrative response to refugees' needs, and the gaps in social services provision that were accentuated by austerity policies were often addressed by an increasing number of NGOs reacting fast and mobilising networked know-how to deal with humanitarian crisis (Bagavos and Kourachanis, 2022; Sotiropoulos and Bourikos, 2014).

The politico-institutional work of the case study NGO

The case study homelessness NGO has always been a politically active organisation aiming to influence policy through advocacy, lobbying, and public campaigning, either individually as a single organisation or collectively through their participation in several networks and coalitions. In terms of its collective advocacy work, the NGO actively participates in local, Greek, European, and international network initiatives (e.g., ACCMR, DISYN, FEANTSA, PICUM), aspiring to bundle and exchange advocacy experiences/ideas and promote common goals (NGO website, 2021). For this purpose, the NGO allocates one (or two) different spokespersons to each network so that every executive builds up specific network expertise and shares their knowledge with the other NGO members (shelter coordinator, interview, 16 March 2021). Among these networks, of specific importance for the arrival city of Athens in terms of collaborations (e.g., shared social services/ activities/ resources and collective advocacy) and know-how exchange is ACCMR, an initiative by the city of Athens, which, since 2017 when it was established, connects different NGOs (local, national, and international) among each other and with

municipal authorities and elected officials, developing and strengthening intra-level interactions within the non-governmental/humanitarian sector, and creating bottom-linked interactions with public authorities and elected officials. By putting all these actors around a table in theme-based working groups (e.g., legal, health, gender, urbanisation, etc.) and plenary sessions, the city of Athens has enabled coordination in support of refugee integration.

> We collaborate with NGOs who operate under similar funding frameworks (25% Greek government, 75% EU), by (1) advocating collectively through petitions and letters to address issues such as pushbacks, delayed social security numbers, reunification processes, and integration funding, while (2) also coordinating shared services to improve integration plans.[…] We believe when we all speak together our voice is much stronger. And that we have made a very big difference on the Greek society's perception of migration. – Shelter coordinator (interview, 16 March 2021)

Beyond ACCMR, the case study, together with other NGOs, has strategised its collective agency also through joint statements on social media, shared petitions, and open letters to governmental authorities. By co-signing public documents with others, the NGO and its peers have aimed to form one loud collective voice:

- On the *national* level, to ask through an open letter to the then Minister on Migration and Asylum for improvements in the governmental healthcare policy on issues like financial support and health insurance for migrants as well as to address delays in processing social security numbers for UAMs (shelter coordinator, interview, 16 March 2021; NGO website, 2021). As a result of this collective advocacy effort, the social security application process was accelerated.

- On the European level, to raise several issues (e.g., criminalisation of migrant solidarity, UAM's protection, relocation from Reception and Identification Centres) via joint statements and open letters directed to the Greek Prime Minister, the Greek Minister of Migration and Asylum, and the presidents of the European Council, Commission, and Parliament.[6] In 2019, the Greek Housing Network, in which the study NGO is a member, together with FEANTSA, released

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[6] The EU's criminalisation of migrant/refugee solidarity co-signed by 101 NGOs (i.e., FEANTSA, Red Cross EU, SolidarityNow, Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen) on July 26, 2019; "Children remain invisible" (demanding clarification about UAM procedures in the Reception and Identification Centers, protection, psychosocial support and special care, family reunification processes, etc.) co-signed by 21, mainly Greek, NGOs (e.g., PRAKSIS and SolidarityNow) on March 16, 2020; The urgent UAM relocation away from the Reception and Identification Centers on the Greek islands to other EU Member States due to Covid-19 co-signed by 67 NGOs (e.g., Amnesty International, METAdrasi, PRAKSIS, SolidarityNow) on April 3, 2020 (NGO website, 2021).

a joint declaration calling upon the European Commission to ensure housing to all asylum seekers. In the letter, the welfare crisis context of Greece was also highlighted: "The national welfare system is not adequately equipped to host and support recognised refugees, with the lack of any social housing provision for both locals and newcomers being a fundamental gap" (FEANTSA, 2019, p.1).

There is a growing need for the Greek government to focus more on integration, as the country is no longer in a state of emergency like in 2015 when thousands of people arrived seeking basic necessities such as shelter and food. It is now widely recognised that many migrants are here to stay, and Greece is no longer solely a transit country but increasingly a destination for those rebuilding their lives. – Shelter coordinator (interview, 16 March 2021)

During the times of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, this collective advocacy action was reactivated in a virtual (online) way focusing on issues concerning domestic violence, stress, and mental health among the refugee community (Spyratou, 2020).

In a nutshell, the case study, together with peer homelessness and other NGOs, politically activated themselves during the 2015 'refugee crisis' and the 2020 public health crisis to facilitate refugee integration. Their advocacy action brought back the issue of the lack of long-term social/affordable housing structures and migrant social/integration facilities (e.g., access to citizenship, healthcare, education, employment) on the political agenda and into public debate. However, so far, no crisis has become a turning point for inducing radical social and housing policy reforms or tackling long-standing structural problems (e.g., poverty, homelessness, social exclusion), which can be attributed to a polarised society and limitedly responsive elected officials by both the left-wing (2015-2019) and the right-wing Greek administrations (2019-2021) (shelter teacher, interview, 20 March 2021). In addition, international organisations (e.g., IOM, UNICEF, UNHCR) who played a dominant role in managing the 2015 refugee crisis – often substituting the state and in cooperation with local social and homelessness NGOs – have been gradually withdrawing from Greece or shifting their focus to more recent disruptive events (e.g., Covid-19 crisis) (shelter coordinator, interview, 16 March 2021).

The integration work of the case study NGO

Since 2015, the NGO has been accommodating housing and social needs of asylum seekers and refugees by running housing programmes (e.g., provision of accommodation in safe zones, SIL apartments, and shelters for UAMs or single-parent families), offering psycho-social and education support (e.g., legal advice, liaison with social services, Greek and English language courses), preparing migrants for the labour market (e.g., soft skills development, vocational training, career counsel-

ling, job search, work placement support, workshops, social enterprise initiatives), and fostering socialisation and recreational activities (e.g., leisure activities, sports, creative art workshops, exhibitions, cultural events, city visits, theatre).

In light of the eight domains of successful integration by Hynie et al. (2016) in the area of shelter, the NGO showed specifically strong performance in six domains. Firstly, regarding *social connections*, it aimed to foster friendships between minors of the same nationality or ethnic background through bedroom arrangements and strengthened cross-national friendships by organising sports and recreational activities. Secondly, the NGO responded to *functional integration* by the provision of comfortable housing, access to health services, and enrolment of each UAM into a local Greek school. The case study supported minors in continuing their studies at least until they have completed the first year of the non-compulsory Lyceum. From then on, 16-year-olds are eligible for employment support by the Hellenic Manpower Employment Organization (European Commission, 2021) from which UAMs receive financial support to gain access to further education or participate in a skills training programme (e.g., computer skills) (Greek Council for Refugees, 2020). However, according to the shelter coordinator (interview, 16 March 2021), there is no provision of tailored educational programmes for UAMs over 16 who face language barriers, particularly in training areas, and limited support to help pursue higher education or gain access to university, further hindering their long-term educational and professional integration.

> We have a significant gap in state schools offering needs-based education adapted to limited language proficiency and skill training programmes for young adults (e.g., cooking, tailor profession, etc.), for which many of our boys show high interest. – Shelter coordinator (interview, 16 March 2021)

> As an adult past 18 years, in Norway, for example, they provide language classes and support in finding your first job. Because if you don't have a job, you are out. Here, there is a gap. After you get accepted in Greece, going from illegal to registered status, there is nothing and you end up on your own. You get support for one or two months and that's it. – Social worker (interview, 21 March 2023)

Thirdly, as an attempt to close this gap, and in addition to the previous, the shelter teacher and caregivers offered additional *language* support and used to collaborate with another NGO for e.g., sewing, arts, mobile phone repairment, and bike repairment lessons before Covid-19 (shelter teacher, interview, 20 March 2021). Fourthly, concerning *institutional adaptation*, the NGO internally and flexibly adapted its UAM integration programmes based on input from minors and other NGOs. They gathered this input from the minors themselves in so-called 'community meetings' when minors voice ideas for policy or practice improvements (e.g., organising more cooking activities, rescheduling bed/mealtime, discussing Covid-19 movement

restrictions) as well as from personal relations with peer NGOs (e.g., PRAKSIS and METAdrasi) and the multi-partner network of ACCMR whereby resources (e.g., musical instruments, books, clothes, food, sports, and craft equipment) as well as best practices are shared. Fifthly, the NGO was active in *cultural integration* through the organisation of city visits together with social workers that show UAMs Greek shops, and attendance to free public cultural events (e.g., traditional Syrian and Afghan dancing) by several NGOs (e.g., members of ACCMR). Finally, *safety and security* were ensured spatially and economically. The shelter was equipped with locks, cameras at the entrance, and 24/7 surveillance. The case study also handed out weekly pocket money, allowing UAMs to buy snacks and personal items (e.g., Greek street food, coffee, energy drinks, cigarettes, games). The shelter coordinator (interview, 16 March 2021) stressed the fact that a child has the right to be a child, and that childhood represents a unique fundamental period in one's life that never returns. Based on such rationale, the organisation sought to ensure that the minors temporarily do not need to worry about money and work, encouraging them to focus on education and wellbeing.

The homelessness NGO was less effective in the integration domains of *community welcome* and *sense of belonging*. With respect to *community welcome*, while consciously choosing to locate its shelters in central and multicultural areas, the NGO did not sufficiently foster relations between minors and the general pre-existing inhabitant group apart from the local school community. The questionnaire and informal discussions with UAMs revealed that the minors did not feel welcome in Athens and even less in that specific neighbourhood. They brought up several experiences of racial or hateful remarks on the street in confrontation with Greek citizens. To tackle such anti-migrant sentiments, the NGO documented and communicated facts and positive migrant stories mainly on public social media platforms. Another domain covered less productively by the case study was *a sense of belonging*, referring to feeling at home and feeling part of a community. The cultivation of feeling at home was not prioritised since the organisation attaches more importance to instantaneous wellbeing. According to the organisation's psychologist (interview, 20 March 2021), the homelessness NGO cannot set such a goal because the shelter is considered a continuously changing transition phase.

> Home means many things such as family and stability, this is not the same, because this is a place where many things continuously change; both the inhabitants and the staff […] So we try, -as long as they are here-, to make them feel well, safe, and comfortable to maintain sincerity in our relationship and show mutual respect. – psychologist (interview, 20 March 2021)

> Integration within a safe zone is not feasible due to the lack of stable conditions. It represents only the initial step, with the shelter still acting as a transitional space, a bridge. If the SIL apartment system functions effectively, it becomes the most optimal environment for integration out of the three, as it allows individuals to achieve greater independence and autonomy—whether they remain here or relocate elsewhere. – psychologist (interview, 20 March 2021)

Nevertheless, the case study did empower the minors to own the shelter during their stay by allowing homemaking practices like traditional cooking (e.g., taste of home country) and personal wall decoration (e.g., drawings, posters, pictures, crafts work), occasional one-on-one gatherings, and the previously mentioned community meetings. Focusing on a sense of community, the case study – in cooperation with other NGOs (e.g., members of ACCMR) – organised free public weekend activities in the arrival city (e.g., non-formal education, theatre, food, sports, music concerts in parks or squares) in pre-Covid-19 times. However, according to the caregiver (interview, 8 April 2021), these extra-curriculum activities were highly attended by migrants and refugees and almost zero Greek citizens, except for NGO staff. Consequently, meeting and including same-age Greek people in this community was a challenging issue.

Revealing the Resilience-Building Potential and Limitations of Homelessness NGOs in the Multi-Crisis Arrival City

Potential for fostering the resilient arrival city through socially innovative initiatives

As evidenced in our case study, homelessness NGOs intensified advocacy at the national level in the emergence of bureaucratic impediments that caused delays in the implementation of their integration programmes, and at the EU level for the UAM relocation from refugee camps and safe zones to more decent accommodation in the mainland of Greece and other European countries. Homelessness NGOs also recognised the value of coalescing with peer organisations to increase their influential capacity when interacting with multi-level public authorities and elected officials. Their inter-linked interactions and influential capacity were also bolstered by igniting public debate on social and public policy gaps and needs. Through shared platforms, such as ACCMR, homelessness NGOs co-nurtured bottom-linked governance fermentations by strengthening their municipality ties within the arrival city and expanding them to the national level (ministries of social affairs, migration, health) and international/European level (European Commission, DG ECHO, DG HOME).

While the Greek state grappled with multiple socio-economic crises, a growing number of NGOs stepped in, offering socially innovative solutions either independently or through coordinated networks to help addressing refugee crisis. Homelessness NGOs, first, contributed to fulfilling unmet human needs, while state organisations lagged behind. Second, they empowered vulnerable and marginalised refugee communities by amplifying their voices, representing their interests, and facilitating their integration into the social fabric of the arrival city. This confirms what Sidney (2019) had already observed, namely that NGOs become an integral part of the 'arrival infrastructure' enhancing the city's capacity to integrate refugees and cover their basic needs effectively. Third, these civil-society organisations not only provided immediate support but also advocated for the necessary legal and administrative reforms –hence triggering governance changes–, enabling the arrival city to 'bounce forward' to more resilient structures and improve its capacity to respond effectively to similar crises leveraging the acquired know-how for lasting impact. Over time, these efforts contributed to the enactment of new laws that recognised the pivotal role of NGOs and sought to regulate and coordinate their operations. The contribution of NGOs extends beyond immediate crisis response to fostering a neowelfare state model, wherein civil society actors are mobilised and empowered to deliver essential social goods and services.

Homelessness NGOs also aimed at integrating UAMs into Greek society through the development of their capacity to live autonomously and the design of integration programmes with a holistic approach, encompassing functional need coverage (e.g., housing, education, employment, health), intense psycho-social support, legal assistance, and socio-cultural and linguistic knowledge. Regarding the selection of housing units to rent, homelessness NGOs chose strategic and central locations with easy access to various ethnic communities, social services providers/ public authorities, schools, and training centres, to further boost the integration of refugees. Homelessness NGOs also facilitated smoother integration by cross-fertilising each other's resources and strengthening strategic partnerships to achieve improved social service delivery for refugees in and through their interactions in their networks and personal connections built up in the field. By organising free public events for native residents and newcomers in cooperation with municipal authorities, homelessness NGOs did not only foster refugee integration, but also the cultivation of social cohesion, equality, and diversity in the arrival city.

Limitations in fostering the resilient arrival city through socially innovative initiatives

So far, the arrival city of Athens had repetitively experienced several crisis events from 2009 until 2021. Nevertheless, no crisis became a turning point for homelessness NGOs to tackle long-standing social problems or promote structural radical reforms in social and housing policy in Greece that would guarantee housing and social services for all. Especially the refugee reception and integration crisis did not prove to be the momentum for homelessness NGOs to be more politically strong because of the politically and socially polarised society between bottom-up solidarity movements of NGOs and anti-migrant citizen groups. Moreover, both the left-wing and the right-wing Greek administrations were less open to interacting with the homelessness NGOs. With little or no direct communication (platforms) between the NGOs and governmental ministries, no comprehensive bottom-linked governance form could arise despite the promising connection-building initiatives on the local arrival city level (e.g., ACCMR). Furthermore, homelessness NGOs seemed to over-resort to conservative advocacy tools (e.g., calls, mails, open letters) instead of exploring a wider range of innovative and radical instruments for alliance and claim-making (e.g., through larger partnerships and networks of social actors). As far as refugee integration is concerned, homelessness NGOs could not fulfil the potential of their holistic approach to refugee integration in the face of anti-migrant sentiments and the lack of interest by locals in joining community events for the refugee and the local community.

This limited transformative capacity of homelessness NGOs aligns with the broader critique that social innovation often has constrained potential for socio-political transformation (Swyngedouw, 2016). This is rooted in 'caring neoliberal' perspectives on social innovation, wherein the neowelfare state is diminished in both budget and social responsibility, and pre-selected civic society groups (e.g., NGOs, business organisations) are tasked with delivering low-cost social services. NGOs are often seen as 'policy implementers' constrained within project-based funding and managerial solutions that have limited impact on institutional shortcomings. However, their alliance-building, politically active nature, and advocacy at various policy tiers allow them to organise themselves vertically and horizontally and influence governance and service provision.

Conclusions

In this paper, we bridged studies of resilience with literature of migrant integration and social innovation to conceptualise the *resilient arrival city*. Our analysis suggests that a resilient arrival city is *a city that views a crisis as an opportunity to address pre-existing failures or voids in welfare public policies and outdated governance arrangements (hierarchical or paternalistic) and bounces forwards in the direction of bottom-linked and neowelfare governance configurations and the production of cities for all*. In this resilient arrival city, homelessness NGOs – as equal development and welfare provision partners – steer novel governance formations through intense network building and collaborations with the aim of ensuring sufficient provision of housing and social goods and services for all (migrants and native populations alike). Moreover, in the resilient arrival city, resilience entails empowering displaced individuals experiencing homelessness who receive the appropriate support to develop their capacity to live autonomously while remaining socially connected within their host communities, and gain uninterrupted access to safe and affordable housing, education, and healthcare services.

Based on lessons learned from the case study in Athens, the paper revealed that homelessness NGOs can bolster the resilient arrival city through the formation of novel, more democratic governance arrangements and the implementation of refugee integration programmes. By strengthening and extending their network connections, as well as intensifying their collective advocacy work to national and international governmental bodies, NGOs build up a political voice and continue to extend their reach to maximise their impact on decision making and implementation. Homelessness NGOs' potential in fostering the resilient arrival city also lies in reaping the fruits of their long-standing expertise and personal connections built up in the field since the inception of a crisis, offering holistic integration programmes and housing solutions for refugees and UAMs in central and strategic locations. Moreover, socially innovative actions led by homelessness NGOs carry the possibility of improving the living conditions and personal development of the displaced individuals through a smooth integration process towards an empowered and independent adult life.

While social innovation literature highlights the role of NGOs in addressing gaps left by the state, it underscores the risk of operating within a framework that shifts responsibility from the state to civic actors, reinforcing a charitable, crisis-management approach rather than fostering structural change. Our case study showed that this risk is indeed real when NGOs rely on outdated advocacy tools (e.g., calls, letters, petitions) with limited impact on policy making. They also depend on systemic institutions to access financial resources and finetune the time span and operational guidelines of their work to meet programming guidelines. In this way,

NGOs are often politically instrumentalised and co-opted by a neoliberal framework of action (Kourachanis, 2024). This framing may inadvertently legitimise current socio-economic conditions instead of challenging them, reinforcing the erosion of social rights and the depoliticisation of welfare provision. Although the socially innovative actions of homelessness NGOs hold significant potential in supporting refugees' integration and empowerment, their 'project-based' and 'emergency-response' orientation channelled by neoliberal states limits their capacity to trigger structural changes in social and housing policymaking. However, since their role is institutionally acknowledged –even when it is politically instrumentalised–, and their innovative practices attract new funds (Kourachanis, 2024) that can support their continuation, homelessness NGOs' scaling up consolidates a strong political agency and constant call for improved welfare provision systems. This forms part of resilience building in arrival cities that aim to 'bounce forward' to the production of social goods and services for all through the continuous mobilisation of civil society actors. To achieve true transformation, NGOs must move beyond crisis management and engage in systemic change by forging broader alliances and advocating for structural reforms that challenge the root causes of social exclusion and displacement.

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