Refugee crisis as a major challenge to resilience in “front line” e.u. cities. The case of the reception centres in the aegean.

# PROPOSAL

## Summary

The journey of the refugees to Europe starts with the hope that they would be freed of their traumatic experiences. The root causes of this journey are usually poverty, famine, and persecution on the basis of race, religion, ethnicity, language, gender, and sexual preference, as well as ethnocide, genocide, civil wars, earthquakes, pestilence, and the like. However, for those who manage to cross the Southern European borders, the hope of freedom often finds itself in detention centres -‘the Camp’[[1]](#footnote-1)- of Europe, the true moment of transition. This moment in the life of the refugee is one of extreme tension where a journey of transformation for the refugee begins, bounded by a physical space. More often than not this journey of hope becomes stagnated; an irrevocable journey of despair into the land of hopes with irrevocable exodus from all ‘human emancipation’ and identity causing the refuge to become the ‘Other’. The inadequacy of appropriate shelter for the refuge is an additional stress this crisis is causing, especially in the ‘Host City’[[2]](#footnote-2) where hundreds of migrants are systematically detained on daily basis, like in Greece and Italy, and the refugees are housed under unfavourable conditions, e.g. in former army camps, football stadiums, and unused warehouses which are hastily transformed into detention centres overnight for periods of up to six months, and even longer. The centrepoint of this proposal is **resilience** and how to increase the resiliency of the ‘Host City’ by integration of ‘the Camp’ in its spatial planning and related spatial policies, which has not been developed yet. The research will focus on the reception conditions of the refugees and how these centres can be transformed into “transitional spaces”, by clarifying the psychological and social roles of ‘the Camp’ in the process of transition and illustrate the importance of its physical form and spatiality. First, there is a need to integrate the two meanings of resilience, that is, the short-term capacity of the ‘Host City’ to absorb the crisis of ‘the Camp’ and the long-term capacity of the ‘Host City’ to develop new structures facing this crisis by integrating ‘the Camp’ into spatial planning and related spatial policies. For the short-term capacity, we propose to investigate the forms and the causes of vulnerability of ‘the Camp’ which contribute to reinforce the vulnerability of the refugees as well as asylum seekers living in these centres; and for the long-term capacity, suggest how to increase the resiliency of the ‘Host City’ by increasing the resiliency of the refugees via transformation of ‘the Camp’ by reconfiguring the structures of policies, regulations and etc. at every level (supranational/European, national, regional, municipal). Considering the influx of the refugees by the Aegean Sea into Greece, -50,000 migrants arrived to Greece in July 2015 alone- and the highly criticised reception conditions in some camps there, the research proposes to use Greece as a detailed case study for this investigation, while, at the same time, establishing a “sharing-experiences” network with other “immediate” refugee reception countries, such as Italy, Malta, and Spain, as well as from a “second stage” refugee receptors, such as Denmark, where the desired sustainable structure of refugee camps has already been studied. Using the data collected from the case study, and the supporting network, the research aims to identify vulnerabilities of ‘the Camp’, both in the European Union (EU) and the ‘Host City’, affecting the resilience of the ‘Host City’ which can further be used as a model for other member states. In addition, the exchange of information, and the accruing formulation of proposals for coordination between “first stage” and “second stage” refugee receptors, potentially will greatly facilitate the current too lengthy bureaucratic procedures, which are a major cause of congestion in the reception camps. This research will contribute to attempts to develop a cooperative arrangement among Member States in order to ensure sufficient capacity and appropriate treatment for the refugees in accordance to the Reception Conditions Directive.

## Objectives

The main aim of this proposal is firstly to analyse, at the EU level, how the ‘Host City’ manage the phenomena of ‘the Camp’, and, secondly, how the ‘Host City’ can seek to create resilience within its own context by evaluating their vulnerabilities, by answering the central research questions: **RQ1:**what are the forms and the causes of vulnerability of ‘the Camp’ which contribute to reinforce the vulnerability of the refugees as well as asylum seekers living in ‘the Camp’?, and **RQ2:**How can the resiliency of the ‘Host City’ be increased, by increasing the resiliency of the refugees via transformation of ‘the Camp’? In order to answer the research questions and achieve the aim of this proposal the following objectives are designed and will structure the research. **O1:** To investigate how the regulations and directives, both internal and external to the ‘Host City’, affect vulnerabilities of ‘the Camp’ within the ‘Host City’ and **O2:** To assess the vulnerabilities of ‘the Camp’, both internal and external to ‘the Camp’, based on the collection of primary research data and information of other 1st and 2nd stage receptors. **O3:** To develop a framework for measuring the resiliency of the ‘Host City’ under the stress of ‘the Camp’. **O4:** To develop a policy document about improving the detention policy framework, management, and regulations, with a new ‘philosophy or approach’ both at the national and European level.

## Proposed research methodology and approach

The context and the aims of the proposal have directed the research to use the method of case study as a tool to answer the research questions by the defined objectives. The main aim of case studies is to analyse the context in order to provide meaning to the phenomena studied, by understanding how behaviour and/or processes both influence context and in turn, are also influenced by it. Considering the recent influx of the refugees into South European countries, and in particular Greece and Italy by irregular movements, and the unfavourable conditions and the capacity limitations of their detention in some Aegean islands in Greece, this research has chosen Greece as a case which will afford the research opportunity to explore the vulnerabilities of the ‘Host City’ under the stress of ‘the Camp’ within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence. Considering that vulnerabilities of the ‘Host City’ and ‘the Camp’ are more than a state of being to be assessed at a single point in time, and it is rather generated through processes resulting from interactions between people (e.g. community, political and economic elites), institutional agendas (e.g. government agencies and non-profit groups), and government led planning strategies, a participatory approach, i.e.conducting social research with humans, combined with the study of documents will be adapted for the research. The research, then, aims to balance the attention paid to the formal regulations with input from everyday situation in the reception centres, i.e. ‘the Camp’. In doing so, six different sources of data are suggested to be collected by the research. The study of the documents, laws and regulations that is combined with interviews and surveys with five sets of informants. The five groups of informants suggested for this approach in the case study where the proposed research focuses, are; **1)** Representative of the Greek government in charge of the development of reception policies **2)** managers and employees of ‘the Camp’ in the ‘Host City’ **3)** persons in charge of NGO’s who are involved in the reception system **4)** the refugees in the ‘the Camp’ in the ‘Host City’**,** and **5)** the local people of the ‘Host City’**.** The data described above will be completed and compared, on a more generic level, to data and information available from other refugee receptor countries. The outcomes of the research aim to be of immediate implementation and use on a practical level in the case study (Greece) where the local particularities will be taken under consideration, but also on a policy making level, originating from the E.U., and applicable to all refugee receptor European countries.

1. For the purpose of this research the ‘Detention Centres’ and the ‘Detention System’ will be used interchangeably and will be referred as ‘the Camp’. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. ‘The Host City’ is referred to the receiving country, nations or the city alike. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)