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# "Welcoming Spaces": Migration and New Communities in Marginalised Regions

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**Abstract**
The presence of migration in non-urban areas is mainly related to the paradoxical coexistence of both restrictive migration policies and a proliferation of welcoming initiatives. These initiatives are aimed at (co-)creating "welcoming spaces" and are often driven by older residents and migrant people but can equally be the outcome of initiatives by local governments, NGOs, and businesses. This contribution introduces the potentialities and limits of these initiatives to create hybrid forms of hospitality and prospects to enhance local development. It opens with a reflection on the political relevance of welcoming spaces and their governance from an international and national perspective. Second, it reflects upon the social and narrative significance of welcoming and hospitality. Considering the intersections between the political and the discursive dimension of welcoming spaces, it closes with a recommendation to recognise the collective dimension of hospitality and to create the basis for re-imagining spaces of conviviality in non-urban areas to sustain fairer and more inclusive societies.

**Keywords** Welcoming spaces · Hospitality · Migration governance · Non-urban areas

## Introduction

In recent years, there has been an increasing reflection at the global level on the challenges and potential of migration for regional development, especially for rural, mountainous, and peri-urban regions (Perlik et al., 2019; Schech, 2014). The growing interest in this topic is demonstrated by various programmes, such as the "Long-term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas—Towards Stronger, Connected,

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Resilient, and Prosperous Rural Areas by 2040" (European Commission, 2021) in which the European Commission also explores the possibilities and opportunities for newcomers' integration in non-urban contexts, or the Australian and American national projects "Welcoming Cities", a network composed of municipalities and local stakeholders that want to valorise and support those areas aiming to become welcoming and inclusive for all. Furthermore, the importance of this topic is mainly related to the presence, sometimes paradoxical, of both restrictive migration policies and repressive measures against newcomers and a proliferation of initiatives aimed at welcoming them, documented by current migration scholarship (Heins & Unrau, 2018; Koos & Seibel, 2019; Rygiel & Baban, 2019). These initiatives are aimed at (co-)creating "welcoming spaces" and are often citizen driven but can equally be the outcome of initiatives by local governments, NGOs, and businesses, or they can be migrant initiated. Nevertheless, going against "anti-migration" policies and discourses, such initiatives are often highly contested, if not even criminalised (Fekete, 2018; Driel & Verkuyten, 2020). Moreover, given the local scale of most of these initiatives, the dispersion in space and political sensitivity, the dynamics connected to these "welcoming spaces", the imaginaries they convey, and the impacts on regional areas remain under investigated by the scientific literature. In fact, the majority of the studies shedding light on the relation between migration and local development are well documented in larger metropolitan contexts. However, migration and development have long been interlinked (Bakewell, 2008; Raghuram, 2009). The connection is even more important for regional areas. In fact, although with different historical, cultural, and demographic traits, such areas are often characterised by not only a shrinking population but also a loss of services, infrastructure, places of social connection, and cultural production. Drawing upon these reflections, this Special Issue intends to present an interdisciplinary look at the role that migration can play for these places, its potential and opportunities, as well as its limits. The scope of this proposal, and the papers included here, is to focus on the development of the welcoming capacity of smaller cities, towns, villages, peri-urban areas, and "shrinking regions" undergoing demographic and economic decline while reflecting on the factors (and combinations of them) supporting local development dynamics, collective action, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and institutional innovation. To do this, the papers contained in this Special Issue propose a vision of migrant people that goes beyond the idea that migration is simply an asset/factor for boosting socio-economic growth. The idea is to see whether other models of regionalisation of migration can overcome forms of "subordinated inclusion", inspired by the principle of moral indifference and irrelevant weight from the point of view of citizenship, rights, and equality (Rye & O'Reilly, 2021).

The aim of this Special Issue is, therefore, to reflect on the multidimensional role of migration in reshaping regional areas, creating new opportunities, alternative spatiality, and, in some cases, counter-hegemonic imaginaries capable of challenging media misrepresentation supported by some outlets and anti-migration political discourse (Smets et al., 2019). The papers we propose range from single case studies, able to show the multidimensional, contested, and context-based nature of single experiences of welcoming areas, to cross-country reflections that try to explore

the cultural, social, and economic impacts of regional migration and resettlement policies. From a theoretical and conceptual point of view, these papers illustrate how some integration initiatives at the intersection of migration and local development aim at the creation of new jobs and housing opportunities, hybrid forms of hospitality, and prospects to enhance local heritage, but also new spaces for social contact (Glick Schiller & Çağlar, 2016). Second, these initiatives can act at the level of narratives, trying to offer opposite representations to the dominant paradigm, which sees migration and internal areas only in terms of "problems to be solved", supporting a cultural turn and proposing alternative frames and policies able to enhance the potential of diversity in out-of-town contexts. Contexts which, in some cases, can be transformed into experimental spaces for more equitable, democratic, and sustainable modes of regeneration.

## The Political Relevance of Welcoming Spaces and Their Governance

Migration is one of the most relevant political, social, economic, and environmental issues of our times (Brettell & Hollifield, 2022). Migrations do not occur in a vacuum; various actors take action to regulate and organise them at numerous levels. In particular, this is still the domain of states, which have the competence to decide on the rules of access to their territory and the conditions of residence and functioning of migrants; however, the type and number of decision-makers and policy actors revolving around migration policies are much broader as also shown in the contributions of this Special Issue. This brings us to the concept of "governance", which is central to the study of migration policies and politics (see Geddes, 2022: 312). The synthetic definition proposed in the recent edition of the IOM Glossary on Migration (2019: 138–139), and adapted from IOM and UNHCR sources, denotes "migration governance" as

> the combined frameworks of legal norms, laws and regulations, policies and traditions as well as organisational structures (subnational, national, regional and international) and the relevant processes that shape and regulate States' approaches with regard to migration in all its forms, addressing rights and responsibilities and promoting international cooperation.

The literature emphasises that migration governance is a very complex organisational process encompassing a rich and diverse group of public actors (e.g. central and federal governments, local governments, but also intergovernmental organizations (IGOs)), social actors (e.g. NGOs, CSOs, religious associations, migrant organisations, grassroot initiatives of local communities), and private actors (e.g. transnational corporations, local businesses) at subnational, national, and supranational levels. As Geddes, (2022: 311-312) observed:

> Migration governance is not simply an ex-post or after-the-fact reaction to migration patterns and flows, but is much more closely involved in shaping migration (...) the meaning of governance can be elusive, but the effects of governance are very real.

These "real effects" of migration governance or lack of it are clearly visible at the local level in all-size localities (from large metropolises to small towns and rural areas) where migrants settle temporarily or permanently. This also affects the scope of "welcomingness" of these places, their forms, and their main actors.

As already mentioned, migration governance takes place primarily within a given country; nevertheless, it conditioned by a number of internal and external factors. If in our considerations we focus only on countries with a democratic regime, the form of the state (territorial system) plays a very important role—whether they are unitary (centralised or decentralised) or complex states (federations, confederations, etc.) and what is the actual administrative division in force, which determines the way in which the management of migration issues is organised at different levels and affects the distribution of the implementation of tasks by public administration bodies and the mechanisms for financing the relevant activities. Among the EU countries, including those under study in the articles in this Special Issue, predominant are unitary ones such as the Netherlands, Poland, Italy, or Spain, among others. The exception is Germany as a federation. Turkey and Georgia are also unitary states (although their democratic character has been questionable in recent years), and Canada is an example of a North American federation.

The institutional and legal framework of a given state is also significant, which determines how competencies related to the management of migration processes are positioned and what priority/place is given to them among public policies. Not all states formalise migration policy (and its components) in strategic documents or establish specialised institutions (e.g. ministries or agencies) for its planning, implementation, and evaluation. However, each state has an admission or asylum policy in practice. Integration policies, concerning the inclusion of newcomers into the host/receiving society, are also perceived and framed (and even named) differently. These policies may be dispersed and mainstreamed within a range of other specific social and economic policies, or they may be intentionally separated and targeted at specific groups of migrant people.

Even if a country does not have an explicitly defined migration policy in a strategic document, this does not imply its absence and "is sometimes a policy statement of its own" (Duszczyk et al., 2020: 2). The key then is migration law (national and international) and the practice of its application, which, in the case of immigration/influx, regulates the rules of access to the territory of a state and the conditions of residence and work and defines legal statuses for migrants and the resulting rights and obligations, as well as the manner and extent of migrants' access to public services.

The state's international cooperation, including membership of various supranational political and economic unions and intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), is another important factor influencing migration governance. The European Union is a particular example on a global scale. It is a supranational organisation with its own laws and institutions; therefore, membership of the EU sets certain political, socio-economic, and legal standards for its Member States. Key to this is shared competence as stipulated in Article 4 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), where both parties—the EU and the Member States—can legislate and adopt binding legislation in specific areas, meaning that states retain autonomy

in selected parts of decision-making and implementation processes (EU, 2012). Shared competence includes inter alia, the area of freedom, security, and justice, in which the EU migration policy (covering the three specific policies—border controls, asylum, and immigration) is embedded (Pachocka, 2017; Pachocka & Wach, 2018), but also other areas important for integrating migrants into/with European societies and ensuring their equal rights such as—EU social or regional policy.

Also, migration history and previous/past migration experience are crucial for the level of the "maturity" of public institutions in managing migration and determine the power/role of other non-state actors, including the social sector and the private sector. Western European countries (Germany, the Netherlands, France, Italy, or the Scandinavian countries) have a significantly longer tradition of immigration, both voluntary (for job or family reunification) and forced (as the main host countries for asylum seekers), which intensified in the 20th century after the Second World War. An interesting example—increasingly raised in the literature for more than a decade—is the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (including Poland), which were closed to international migration flows and international cooperation in this regard (including with IGOs like UNCHR or IOM) as Eastern Bloc members (Stola, 2010; Grabowska-Lusińska et al., 2011; Duszczyk et al., 2020; Sobczak-Szelc et al., 2022). Only the collapse of the USSR and the multidimensional systemic transformation at the turn of 1980/1990 created the space and conditions for the gradual formation of modern migration governance in CEE countries. In practice, this meant the need to work out migration law from scratch in the new realities of the democratic regime and free market economy, the development of institutions competent in this area (which was perfectly visible in the example of the refugee protection system) and, as a result, migration policy. Preparing for EU membership and the need to align national law with the EU acquis, and then fulfilling the resulting obligations and ensuring certain standards, was not without significance here.

Migration governance is linked to the demographic dimension of population flows and the migration status of the state and its evolution over time (immigrant, emigrant, or emigration-immigration states), which is crucial in the approach to migration management. Globally, there are well-known examples of countries that have been created by immigration (e.g. USA) and that still have a high demand for significant settlement immigration with a specific demographic and socio-economic potential (e.g. Canada and Australia). There are countries, especially in Europe, which opened up to immigration for economic reasons after the Second World War (e.g. Germany) or which were magnets for newcomers as a result of decolonisation (e.g. France, UK). In turn, recent decades have seen an increasing discussion about the depopulation of a large number of European countries and their demographic ageing, which determines the instrumental perception of migration as a simple solution to current and future socio-economic development problems (e.g. in Central and Eastern Europe).

In considering migration governance, MLG (Marks et al., 1996), which can be implemented in different variants, has remained a useful theoretical concept for years. It is able to capture the role of the different actors of migration governance at different levels and their complex horizontal and vertical relationships. The multi-level approach to migration governance and the importance of the different actors have received a

lot of attention in the academic literature (Caponio, 2021; Zincone & Caponio, 2006; Zelano, 2018). Undoubtedly, this is a strongly Eurocentric approach, firmly inspired by the experience of European integration processes in the second half of the 20th century, where both the EU and its member states had to agree on how to regulate and organise different areas of public policies and politics (Geddes, 2022).

In this view, many scholars are also sustaining the importance of a different perspective on migration governance that privileges the viewpoint of origin and transit countries, non-state actors, and includes both urban and rural perspectives (Triandafyllidou, 2022). Recent decades, for example, have seen the rise of local-level migration governance, where often, irrespective of the national migration policy framework, local state actors (e.g. local governments, local units of central institutions) and non-state actors (e.g. NGOs, local communities, churches, business) play a key role. The real processes of inclusion, everyday integration, take place at this level (Scholten et al., 2015; Scholten & Penninx, 2016). The concept of multi-level governance of migration is strictly connected to the development of welcoming or unwelcoming spaces and the conditions in which they are created at different scales (Caponio & Ponzo, 2022).

MLG is undoubtedly accelerated by a number of migration-related emergencies that result in increased migration flows, in particular the 2015 migration-management crisis in Europe (e.g. important for Italy, Germany, Spain, or Turkey) and 2022 mass forced migration from Ukraine due to Russian full-scale aggression (e.g. important for Poland and Germany as the main host countries for protection seekers, but also Georgia—to which citizens of Belarus and Russia have been fleeing in recent years). Canada, which is not directly affected by these emergencies in Europe due to geographical distance, has been engaged for years in resettlement programmes for protection seekers, including from Syria and Ukraine due to wars and humanitarian crises on their territory. These emergencies and the ways in which countries are responding to them have further demonstrated the enormous importance of local-level migration governance and the welcoming potential of not only large cities, which tend to attract newcomers, but also medium-sized and small cities as well as rural areas, including those experiencing shrinkage.

In times of dynamic change on a global and regional scale, a resilience perspective (Kulig, 2001; Hall & Lamont, 2013; Boersma et al., 2018; Shimizu & Clark, 2019; Rast et al., 2020) is also important, especially as it draws attention to what assets of NGOs are conducive to their complex response to specific emergencies, but in the long run, the support of state actors and public institutions is necessary (Boersma et al., 2018; Rast et al., 2020). This broader vision of migration governance and the resources available to the different actor groups draw attention to the synergies between them; actors from different levels should work together—although this is not always the case and then decoupling occurs. This was shown by the responses of the EU and its member states in 2015, where the main focus of the response was at the level of central governments in collaboration with EU institutions and some IGOs. A very different picture emerged in 2022, in relation to the response to the war in Ukraine. Here, in the main host countries of forced migrants, including Poland, the local level response was crucial. The EU and governments mainly provided a legal instrument in the form of an EU or national TPS.

The traditional places for migrants to settle are large cities, which offer wide access to a whole range of public and private services, including education, labour market, health care, welfare system, and legal aid. However, as the Special Issue shows, migrant settlement in rural and semi-urban areas is a growing phenomenon and characterises several countries and territorial systems. The motivation for this trend is twofold. On the one hand, the characteristics of rural areas attract migrants who prefer a lifestyle in non-urbanised contexts, also as a consequence of migration chains. Second, especially for those mobilities associated with forced migration, receiving capacities may not keep up with reception needs. However, the outbreak of war in Ukraine and the arrival of asylum seekers in Southern Europe have shown the developing mechanisms for internal relocation across the country to encourage migrants to settle in smaller cities as well, when in the largest ones the number of migrants has resulted in an inability to serve them in basic terms—lack of accommodation, overburdened social services, and, in extreme situations, technical infrastructure. Many authors criticise these migrant resettlement policies because most rural areas lack appropriate services and infrastructure and because the individual choices of people on the move are rarely considered (Boese & Moran, 2023; Caponio et al., 2022; Membretti et al., 2022). The new challenge will therefore be to understand the welcoming capacities of rural and peri-urban areas and the most suitable governance arrangements to support these welcoming processes while fully respecting the human rights of migrant people.

## The Social and Narrative Significance of Welcoming and Hospitality

By presenting different case studies, governance models, contexts, and practices, this Special Issue delves into the very concept of welcoming. As shown in the previous section, from a political perspective, this concept refers not only to reception and integration policies but also to international geopolitical relations that determine the freedom of movement, domestic resettlement policies, and the possibilities of people on the move to participate in spaces of self-determined political representation (Bennet, 2003). Starting from these contemporary political challenges, the key question arises as to what the role of the social and cultural dimension in conditioning or hindering the processes of welcoming is. Which actors shape welcoming (or unwelcoming) spaces? How does the dimension of social action intersect with the symbolic dimension of culture? To answer these questions, this section will introduce the topic of the role of local communities and civil society organisations to sustain welcoming initiatives and spaces. Second, it will underline the social role of narratives in shaping peripheral welcoming spaces.

The very concept of welcoming spaces recalls another concept that has long been debated in the social sciences, namely that of hospitality. In *Perpetual Peace*, Kant (1983) underlines the intersection between the freedom of movement and hospitality. According to Kant, a hospitable society is characterised by a cosmopolitan political identity shared by all citizens of free states.

Another philosopher who has much questioned the concept of hospitality is Derrida. Derrida (2001) advocates that a hospitable society inevitably has to do with

the dimension of ethics and culture. In *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, he describes how the concept of hospitality is defined by the ways in which people interrelate with those they perceive as different. Although with diverse premises, the philosophical underpinnings of the concept of hospitality share a unifying trait that of reminding that hospitality is always about the collective body. In Kant's case, this collective dimension refers primarily to the political sphere of freedom of movement, while for Derrida, it refers to the ways in which social actors perceive, recognise, and act towards diversity. More recently, Papastergiadis, (2021) investigates the philosophical theories of cosmopolitanism, re-booting ancient theories on hospitality and movement. In particular, he introduces the concept of aesthetic cosmopolitanism, intended as an integration to normative cosmopolitanism, which focuses on normative considerations of ethical responsibility, civic rules, and the construction of transnational institutions. On the contrary, aesthetic cosmopolitanism is a human disposition that opens culture and ethics to the dynamics of difference. As a consequence, cosmopolitanism is revealed in the constant trace of communion, capable of disclosing that the essence of humanity is exactly in the nexus between companionship and hospitality.

This brief excursus tracing the roots of the concept of hospitality highlights two fundamental aspects. First, that hospitality always refers to collective practices and processes. In the case of welcoming spaces, for example, this often refers to the sociocultural dimension of collective action. The aspect that characterises many welcoming spaces is that of a strong activation of the third sector and civil society in trying to support extended processes and practices of hospitality towards people on the move. In this way, the political dimension of policies shaping geographies of movement or exclusion in welcoming spaces is enriched by the dimension of participation of other social actors who play a fundamental role in migration dynamics. A broader vision of governance is thus defined (Swyngedow, 2005) that includes a variety of actors and territorial stakeholders, such as NGOs, associations, social movements and activists, and more or less informal groups of citizens. In this sense, welcoming spaces are usually characterised by a heterogeneity of actors supporting a process of collective action and mobilisation, achieved through civil society's direct participation, but also through enabling local and national policies which support the creative capacities of local communities. The social innovation approach (Moulaert & MacCallum, 2019; Moralli, 2019), for example, represents an interesting perspective for understanding the ways in which both civil and institutional social actors, in this case welcoming initiatives, mobilise different types of resources to play a part in tackling social injustice and marginality, which often affect the dynamics of migration. Hence, the European political agenda should support new solutions that go beyond a vision of solidarity defined only in terms of "migration quotas" to be split among member states, as the new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum showed, instead embracing a vision of "egalitarian reciprocity" (Benhabib, 1992). On a regional and local level, this means considering how local processes and dynamics can influence and are influenced by migration and how the public sphere is composed both by institutional solutions and civil society's individual and local administrators. In this sense, the local community can enable social infrastructures

which can lead to the amplification of connections within groups, as well as openness to cultural systems perceived as different (Blommaert, 2014). Social infrastructure refers to the networks of spaces, structures, institutions, and groups that create opportunities for socialisation (Latham & Layton 2019). In developing the term social infrastructure, for example, Kleinenberg, (2018) draws on Oldenberg's, (1989) concept of "socially inclusive spaces", to indicate those spaces which facilitate trust and a sense of (non-exclusive) belonging to a community. The participation of civil society actors and citizens in the support and implementation of welcoming initiatives can therefore refer to the spatial and sociocultural dimensions that facilitate belonging and enable to contribute to, and shape, the responses towards migration (Khan et al., 2017). As a result, welcoming spaces often develop alongside forms of participatory democracy, co-production of services of social interest and common goods (Rifkin, 2015), and co-construction of local policies (Klein et al., 2014). The collaborative innovation (Nambisan, 2008) generated would thus concern the inclusion of all stakeholders in the management of migration, enhancing different types of creativity and capacities. There are, however, many other cases where unwelcoming policies do not allow for collaboration with welcoming initiatives. In this case, civil society actors activate spaces of resistance against the dominant frame of rejection of people on the move. Thus, thanks to forms of bottom-up solidarity and activism, sometimes some conflictual and socially polarised spaces on the topic of migration can still develop welcoming practices from below.

This leads to the second point that we believe is important to introduce when discussing welcoming spaces and sociocultural aspects that of narratives. In the last decades, pervasive and fear-driven anti-migration narratives have flourished all around the world (Smets et al., 2019). Such narratives present migrants as the scapegoats for deep-rooted societal problems related to the economy or security and contribute to creating, justifying, or dismantling physical and symbolic borders between people and between places. In recent years, in particular, we are witnessing an increase in securitarian representations (Georgiou & Zaborowski, 2018) characterised by the dehumanisation of migrant people and their representation as a radical threat to internal security, values, and identity. The securitarian paradigm is more oriented towards constructing borders within the social imaginary, legitimising cultural barriers and a stereotyped process of othering. It acts its performative power through visual and narrative rhetorics, by framing migration as an emergency phenomenon rather than as a natural and historical process and influences unwelcoming treatments both from the point of view of border militarisation policies and the restriction of freedom of movement and from the point of view of citizens' behaviour (McMahon & Sigona, 2018). Negative portrayals of migration influence public opinion (Ruhs et al., 2020), as the gap between perceptions of the number of migrants in a country and the actual number shows. Similarly, peripheral areas are also described in a distorted way. Marginalised regions are very often invisible in mainstream narratives or presented as places of immobility and lack (Carrosio, 2019). Such a process of eviction of the complexity proper to peripheral areas in according to the narratives and logics of urban centralities further isolates such areas. In particular, these urban-centric depictions impose frames of meaning and values that consequently manifest the need

for a redistribution of the capacity for expression for the territories on the margins (Ormond, 2006). Even more rarely, marginalised regions are presented in relation to the building of new communities, the cultural dynamism that sometimes characterises them, or through innovative initiatives that are created by local communities (Vercher et al., 2021). This double mediatic uncritical approach not only contributes to underrepresenting the presence of people on the move in peripheral areas, but it also reduces its complex narrative into simple dichotomies and distorted images that have an effect on welcoming processes. Given the high level of political distortion, it is very important to understand the discursive context within which the categories of meaning concerning migration, shrinking areas and the topic of welcoming spaces are created, because as many authors, from Castoriadis, (1997) onwards, have pointed out that narratives also have a performative character and influence social reality (Brown, 2006). The concept of media hospitality (Musarò & Parmiggiani, 2022), for example, calls for the development of a more comprehensive and plural representation of the other and the elsewhere, free from stereotypical and prejudicial images. For this reason, it is important to develop an alternative imaginary of migration in shrinking areas that highlights the "place-making" character of migration, underlying the complex and multidimensional aspects of welcoming spaces. The very presence of welcoming (or unwelcoming) initiatives in marginalised areas clearly shows the need to envisage a different image of migration in terms of mutual recognition (Fraser & Honneth, 2004) and the possibility of including spaces for self-expression of people on the move (Moralli et al., 2021). This issue is even more important considering that some European marginal areas are characterised by forms of cultural resistance to newcomers and anti-migration movements. For this reason, it is crucial that welcoming spaces also work at the level of the imaginary, supporting counter-narratives that include the voice of the local community in the broadest sense.

Together with the political dimension, considering these two sociocultural aspects of welcoming spaces (that of the variety of actors involved and that of narratives) is the only way to recognise and value the collective dimension of hospitality and to create the basis for re-imagining spaces of conviviality also in non-urban areas. Welcoming spaces, then, become political and relational devices to enhance collective action towards fairer and more inclusive societies.

## "Welcoming Spaces": Migration and New Communities in Marginalised Regions

The Special Issue consists of eight papers, seven of which are contributions drawing on cases of welcoming spaces and initiatives in diverse geographical contexts. Each of these papers offers its own conceptual perspective, rich descriptions, and contextualised analyses of its respective case-study/-studies. Juxtaposed in this collection, the papers provide a foundation for interdisciplinary and international perspectives on welcoming (or unwelcoming) spaces. We then conclude with a reflexive commentary developing further paths for future research on shrinking areas and migration processes.

Four of the papers present findings from the "Welcoming Spaces" research programme, a 4-year[1] (2020–2024) project funded by the EU Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme. With academic and non-academic partners in each partner country, the project "Welcoming Spaces" examines exemplary cases of welcoming spaces and initiatives in Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, and Spain. In order to generate more global perspectives, the Special Issue contains also three non-EU cases from Canada, Turkey, and Georgia.

As shown in this introduction, the issue of governance is central when reflecting on the relationship between migration and peripheral areas. Governance, in fact, refers both to the political relevance of the topic and the networks of relations that are created at the local level between the different stakeholders involved in local development and/or migration. Marlies Meijer, Joanna Zuzanna Popławska, and Bianca Szytniewski, for example, deliberate the concept of decoupling as a mode of migration governance in the first paper. They chart how tensions between national migration governance policies and local integration strategies manifest in diverging local-level policy discourses in the Netherlands (Het Hogeland and Berkellandand) and Poland (Łomża and Łuków). The authors examine varied spaces of decoupling and observed the formation of alternative, cross-regional governance and alternative local governance networks that host migrant newcomers. Among diverse actors in these networks, non-governmental organisations and volunteers are found to stand out and play more prominent roles than in peripherised municipalities. Also focusing on governance, the second paper by José Ricardo Martins and Chiara Davino illustrates the role of and interrelation among key state and non-state stakeholders in managing refugee migration and local reception. Drawing on case studies in Altenburg, Germany, and Breno, Italy, the authors compare their findings and conclude that the socio-economic and political contexts and "shrinking" trajectories in the two countries are quite different. However, they share the main challenges of housing and employment for newcomers. Their comparison also concludes some differences in governance between the two countries. While the governance system is more structured and coordinated in Germany, leadership is sometimes contested mainly due to political instability at the national level in Italy.

The third paper takes us to local experiences in Italy. Maurizio Bergamaschi, Alice Lomonaco, Pierluigi Musarò, and Paola Parmiggiani focus on the municipality of Camini, located in Locride (Calabria), one of the most shrinking areas in Southern Italy. Their rich narrative of the social cooperative "JungiMundu", its migrant reception centre and the numerous activities developed for the welfare of the whole community (from the handcraft workshops to the renovation of old houses with local and recycled materials to host responsible tourists), highlights how in-migration can lead to local development and rural regeneration processes, not least shown through the reactivation of key public services such as the post office and school. They conclude that the increase in population due to in-migration of newcomers and Italian returnees has also contributed to

[1] For more information, please see the official information about the project on the European Commission website: https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/870952, and the project website developed by the consortium: https://www.welcomingspaces.eu/.

the economic and social regeneration of the village, creating connections between different cultures and traditions that had almost disappeared. Also focusing on the local perspective, Ayhan Kaya's contribution offers us insight into the situation in Karacabey in Bursa Province, Turkey. Kaya illustrates the social, economic, and territorial impacts of the in-migration of a large number of Syrians in the past decade. While acknowledging the role of the local actors and opportunities that arise, Kaya critiques the "neoliberal face of the local turn" in the governance of refugee migration in Turkey. He argues that delegation of responsibilities without financial and administrative support from the central state imposes challenges to the local municipalities, NGOs, and refugees. In this situation, Kaya concludes that Karacabey and other welcoming spaces can hardly offer migrants and refugees genuine sanctuary conditions. Melissa Kelly also engages with the flaws of the neoliberal logic. Kelly describes some of the welcoming programmes and initiatives that aim to attract and welcome international migrants to rural Saskatchewan in Canada and the problem of poor retention. She argues that the economistic rationale, such as viewing migrants primarily as economic actors, is the key reason for their lack of motivation to stay. She argues that the predominant focus on economic benefits also poses political, discursive, and practical challenges. Kelly concludes with her call for more attention to the centrality of the rights for temporary migrant workers, the support for migrants' settlement in rural regions, and measures to address systemic challenges (such as lack of meaningful employment, amenities, and social opportunities) in these regions.

Martin Geiger and Vera Syrakvash's contribution focuses on Georgia and the influx of thousands of Russian and Belarusian IT specialists following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. For decades, Georgia has been a country of emigration; the influxes of 2022 have profoundly changed the country's overall migration situation. Drawing on the discussion of "transient spaces", the authors trace the arrival and evolving inclusion of Russian and Belarusian specialists in the local society and IT economy. Their analysis presents Georgia as an important hub and gateway for people leaving Russia and Belarus and a space characterised by socio-political anxieties, resistance, and untapped economic opportunities. Rather than reflecting merely on depopulation and shrinkage, Paula Alonso, Laura Oso, and Leticia Santaballa focus on Spain to stretch common spatial and temporal boundaries to consider interlinked, chained mobilities. They chart the interrelations between internal/international, historical/recent/intergenerational migrations, and shrinking/revitalisation processes in Galicia, Andalusia, and Castilla-La Mancha. They illustrate how diverse migration patterns have contributed to sustaining life in rural areas in complementary ways. Furthermore, they provide evidence that migrations of newcomers, returnees, or root migrants (those who return to their ancestral roots) have contributed to the revitalisation of shrinking areas in demographic, economic, and social terms. These in turn produce more migratory networks that feed back into the dialectical relationship between migration and (de)vitalisation.

Finally, the epilogue by Annelies Zoomers questions the common assumptions and practices in hosting newcomers for revitalisation of depopulated, remote, and disinvested places. She argues that while newcomers can contribute to new socio-economic vitality in these marginalised areas, they should not be taken as the only

or main solution. Drawing on the debate surrounding the migration-development nexus, which has mainly been applied in Global South contexts, Zoomers advocates demigrantising our thinking and debunking the divide between newcomers and the locals. Rather than focusing on the integration of migrants, emphasis should be put on how diverse members, regardless of their length of residence, of these changing communities can attract the right (e.g. sustainable and inclusive) projects and investors. She argues that the reallocation of public funding, new (translocal) solidarities and people-based investment plans are imperative in solving the problems of growing poverty and inequalities in Europe.

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