

Resonance beyond regimes: Migrant's alternative infrastructuring practices in Athens

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Abstract

In migration studies, there is an increasing interest in understanding how migration processes are shaped by different forms of brokerage and mediation. We relate these debates to the everyday struggles of migrants in the city of Athens. In so doing, we propose a shift from the all-encompassing view on infrastructures, that is, as systematic entities of facilitation/control to the infrastructuring practices of migrants. This implies a focus on how migrants create dynamic social platforms, and how these platforms relate to formal infrastructures and industries. We analyse these infrastructuring practices through a conceptual lens of resonance that is sensitive to the constitutive (how things, people and processes are brought together) as well as travelling capacities of these practices (how the platforms shift to other places). With an ethnographic approach, we create in-depth insights into the ways in which migrants mediate im/mobility in the urban environment of Athens through infrastructuring practices. The paper concludes by reflecting on the promises and limitations of the infrastructuring practices as sites of solidarity. We thereby argue that there are many links to make within the mobile commons debate. At the same time, our findings highlight that the transformative potential of infrastructuring practices does not always go along with a clear claim on solidarity.

Keywords

EU migration regime, Greece, migration infrastructure, people as infrastructure, resonance

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摘要

在移民研究中，人们越来越有兴趣了解不同形式的经纪和中介机构对移民过程的影响。我们将这些辩论与雅典移民的日常斗争联系起来。藉此，我们建议一个转变，即从对基础设施的包罗万象的观点（将其视为促进/控制的系统）转变为观察移民基础设施实践。这意味着关注移民如何创建动态社交平台，以及这些平台与正式的基础设施和行业之间的关系。我们从共振这一概念视角来分析这些基础设施实践，这一角度对这些实践的组织功能（将事物、人和流程结合在一起）以及流动性（平台如何转移到其他地方）敏感。通过人类学方法，我们深入了解在雅典城市环境中，移民通过基础设施实践对非流动性/流动性的影响。本文最后反思了作为团结场所的基础设施实践的前景和局限性。在此基础上，我们认为在关于流动性的公共辩论中有许多联系需要建立。与此同时，我们的研究结果强调，基础设施实践的变革潜力并不总是伴随着对团结的明确主张。

关键词

欧盟移民制度、希腊、移民基础设施、人作为基础设施、共振

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Introduction

A wide range of studies, from migrants' social networks (Massey et al., 1998) to studies on actors of the migration industry (Cranston et al., 2018; Deshingkar, 2019; Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sørensen, 2013), deal with the question of how migrants' im/mobilities are shaped and differentiated by various actors. In line with the main ambition of this special issue (Cohen et al., this issue), we relate discussions on migration brokerage and mediation to the urban domain. Whereas most of the contributions in this Special Issue focus on migration industry actors, however, we relate mediation and brokerage to the less institutionalised practices employed in the everyday lives of migrants in Athens.

In this respect, 'migration infrastructures' has proven to be an attractive concept as it connects the social realm of migrant networks, the organised and often commercialised realm of migration industries and the realm of migration management. By including these dimensions, the notion of migration infrastructure articulates the interlinked processes of facilitation and control in

migration trajectories (Kleist and Bjarnesen, 2019; Xiang and Lindquist, 2014). With its focus on networks and im/material connections, studies on migration infrastructure usually move beyond scalar interpretation of space. At the same time, as Lin et al. (2017) note, infrastructures produce specific geographical sites – or moorings – where the production and politics of im/mobility are articulated. In the context of contemporary migration to Europe, the city of Athens is undoubtedly one of these sites where migration facilitation and control come together and enmesh in complex ways (e.g. Papadopoulou-Kourkoulou, 2008; Squire, 2018; Tsavdaroglou and Lalenis, 2021). Whereas most studies on migration infrastructures start from a focus on organisational and material architectures (e.g. Lin et al., 2017; Xiang and Lindquist, 2014), we use this concept to better understand the everyday practices and struggles of migrants in Athens. In line with some critical urban scholars (e.g. Berlant, 2016; Cowen, 2017; Cowen et al., 2018), we approach infrastructures as modes of control as well as transgression that emerge from people's relational practices.

This shift from architectures of migration facilitation/control to the dynamics of

migrant everyday life starts with AbdouMalik Simone's work on 'people as infrastructure' (Simone, 2004a). The urban theorist frames infrastructures as the complex conjunctions of objects, spaces, people and practices that (re-)produce life in the margins of the city (Simone, 2004a: 407–408). Inspired by Simone's concept, we not only unpack how different people and processes come together and enact informal, non-institutionalised practices of sheltering, caring and moving, but also how these platforms and operations themselves shift and move throughout Athens, as well as further along migrant trajectories in Europe. We conceptualise these shifts as forms of resonance (Simone and Pieterse, 2017). We use our ethnographic material to show how the process of (re-)producing migrant life in the city is a process that is dynamic and continuously changing. With these insights, we contribute to a better understanding of how mobility/immobility and control/transgression intersect in dynamic ways. In addition, we articulate how infrastructuring practices not only co-constitute urban environments, but also how they move beyond the territorial confines of a city (Collins, 2012).

This paper begins with a conceptual discussion on migration infrastructure, infrastructuring practices and resonance. Subsequently, we situate infrastructuring practices in the context of Athens and the wider European migration regime. After having discussed our approach to the study of migrant trajectories within, and beyond, the urban spaces of Athens, we present two ethnographic vignettes that illustrate how migrants build/use/connect alternative infrastructures and how these practices resonate within and beyond the city. The paper concludes by reflecting on the promises and limitations of the infrastructuring practices as sites of solidarity. We thereby argue that there are significant connections to draw to

the mobile commons debate in citizenship studies and urban studies (Özkan and Büyüksaraç, 2020; Papadopoulos and Tsianos, 2013), which focuses on common struggles against precarity and exclusion and for social justice. At the same time, our findings indicate that the transformative potential of infrastructuring practices does not always go along with clear-cut and shared claims of solidarity.

Conceptualising migrant infrastructuring and resonance

There is a renewed interest in the urban to address questions of how migration is mediated (see Collins, 2012 for an overview). It is widely debated how cities provide particular arrival infrastructures in the material and social senses (Meeus et al., 2019) as well as how formal and informal services that facilitate mobility are concentrated and enmeshed in urban (Zack and Landau, 2021) and interurban spaces (Koh, 2021). Infrastructures as urban entities are thus key to an understanding of mobility. Xiang and Lindquist (2014) frame the concept of migration infrastructure as 'the systematically interlinked technologies, institutions and actors that facilitate and condition mobility' (p. S122). This approach to infrastructure accentuates the dynamic, and at times contradictory, processes at play in and along migration trajectories (Khan, 2019; Kleist and Bjarnesen, 2019; Leurs, 2020) and thereby enables nuanced and diverse analysis of migration facilitation and control. The conceptual framework of this paper proposes a shift from infrastructures to infrastructuring. This shift is based on two interrelated critical points regarding the notion of migration infrastructure.

First, the emphasis on the 'systematically interlinked' character of infrastructures hints at an approach that regards infrastructure as

an external, consistent and organised force that shapes migratory processes. This is difficult to reconcile with the dynamics of migrant journeying whereby improvisations, detours and unexpected events play key roles (see amongst others Brigden and Mainwaring, 2016; Schapendonk, 2020). From this perspective, migration infrastructures do not appear as cohesive systems of management, rather they consist of the contingent relations between control and transgression (see also Zack and Landau, 2021). Our second critique concerning the current migration infrastructure debate pertains to our observation that migrants¹ are not considered main actors in the making, holding and repairing of infrastructures. With the focus on the systematic architecture of migration brokerage or on the entirety of migration regimes (Lin et al., 2017), scholars tend to overlook how people build, invert, repair and re-create infrastructures. To prevent this analytical blind spot, we turn to the work of AbdouMaliq Simone.

Simone's (2004a, 2004b) concept of *people as infrastructure* articulates the transformative potential of people's everyday practices in the urban fabric. In both his earlier (Simone, 2004a; 2004b) and more recent work (Simone, 2019), he outlines how dynamic intersecting socialities of residents in the urban margins contest and transform the formal or planned uses of the city. In the field of migration, this transformative potential should not only be linked to a context of urban planning and development, as Simone's work mainly does. Instead, this transformative potential speaks to a wider regime of mobility control, borders and surveillance (Dijstelbloem and Walters, 2021; Schapendonk, 2020) that can indeed be seen as an infrastructure of empire that subjectifies migrants as racialised and securitised bodies (Cowen et al., 2018). In line with this, we approach migrants' infrastructuring

practices in Athens as modes of working towards alternative infrastructures (Cowen, 2017). This approach reflects the De Certeauian notion of tactics (De Certeau, 1984), being counterhegemonic efforts to transgress or bypass mechanisms of migration control (e.g. Gill et al., 2014).

Some alternative infrastructures in the urban fabric may facilitate migrants' place-making endeavours and processes of inclusion, while others produce mobility by opening up new avenues of mobility (see also Collins, 2012; Jørgensen and Makrygianni, 2020; Kapsali, 2020; Papadopoulos and Tsianos, 2013). Oftentimes, as we will illustrate in our empirical vignettes, practices of placemaking and mobility blend in to each other. To make this intelligible, we approach the infrastructuring practices through an analytical prism of *resonance*. Simone and Pieterse (2017) describe resonance as an:

affective process of people and things associating with each other, of having something to do with each other, of acting as components in the enactment of operations larger than themselves and their own particular functions and histories. When things resonate with each other there is a connection that proceeds, not from the impositions of some overarching map or logic, but from a process of things extending themselves to each other (p. 16).

Unfortunately, Simone and Pieterse (2017) do not further conceptualise their notion of resonance. In our view, two elements deserve more attention in the context of this paper. First, there is the claim that resonance has a constitutive quality; that the constellation of things and people indeed become operations or platforms (Collins, 2020) larger than themselves. This dimension of resonance is further explored by studies affiliated with the affective turn in anthropology (e.g. Mazzarella, 2017; Moghaddari, 2021). These studies argue that resonance is the

reverberation of affect and emotion from one person to the other, without the precondition that the people involved have an intimate relation. Through resonance mutual becoming, such as migrant solidarity (Kemp and Kfir, 2016; Moghaddari, 2021), can emerge. These mutual becomings lack a straightforward causal determination, but there are certainly mobilisations (Moghaddari, 2021) and different capacities to initiate them. In other words, while the infrastructuring practices under study may be highly contingent, and may occur suddenly, they are still partly derived from people's continuous (re-)navigations (Vigh, 2009), improvisations (Simone, 2019), networking (Schapendonk, 2015) and the entanglements of emotions (Wajsborg, 2020).

Second, the notion of resonance points to a travelling capacity. Just like a tone of music can resonate in a distant object and make it reverberate, infrastructuring practices of care, support and exchange may move throughout urban settings and further along migratory pathways to re-emerge in new places. As these processes might be difficult to trace, and impossible to fully govern, the notion of resonance indeed points to a dimension of resistance in these alternative infrastructures (Cowen, 2017). However, resonances are not always productive as re-emerging constellations. They are never simply copies of earlier platforms. It follows that the notion of resonance helps us to better understand when and how migration processes are characterised by autonomy, relationality and reciprocity (Papadopoulos and Tsianos, 2013), but also when they are not (Tazzioli et al., 2018). Before we present our vignettes, we situate migrant's infrastructuring practices in the city of Athens.

Situating infrastructuring practices in Athens

Greece has been at the centre of 'two overlapping "humanitarian crises": the economic

crisis and the crisis of refugees' (Cabot, 2019: 747) which have affected each other (Koutrolidou, 2015). The austerity politics and migration developments in recent years are central to the infrastructuring practices presented in this paper.

Following the global financial crisis in 2007/08, Greece experienced a severe financial and political crisis of its own as a consequence of which austerity measures were imposed by the EU (Hadjimichalis, 2013). In the following years, Greece slid into a deep recession with unemployment soaring and measures disproportionately affecting people living in urban areas, women, lower middle classes, youth and migrants in the cities (Hadjimichalis, 2013: 118). The economic crisis and austerity policies have thus affected Athenian lives and infrastructures in significant ways. However, as Koutrolidou (2015: 513) points out, the impact of the crisis is felt in some neighbourhoods more than others. The inner-city neighbourhoods particularly strongly affected by the economic downturn were also the more ethnically and racially diverse neighbourhoods. Thus, in public discourses social stigmatisation and spatial stigmatisation became increasingly intertwined (Koutrolidou, 2016). While the Greek economy began to experience significant decline in 2007, migrant's arrival numbers were increasing significantly since the 1990s. The lack of a coherent asylum system meant that many newly arrived migrants were unable to leave Greece, with dwindling prospects of accessing the labour market nor receiving access to the welfare system as recognised refugees.

In the wake of the 2015 'long summer of migration' in Europe (Buckel, 2016), Athens' position in contemporary European migration developments has received much scholarly attention (e.g. Arampatzi, 2017; Makrygianni, 2016; Squire, 2018). As arrival numbers in Greece increased significantly, and political discourses framing these

arrivals in terms of a crisis flourished (Cabot, 2019; Cantat, 2016; Rozakou, 2017), ad hoc measures to facilitate or contain migrants' mobilities were setup through regulatory bodies as well as humanitarian organisations (Raimondi, 2019). While Greece and its capital are often considered spaces of transit (Dimitriadi, 2015; Papadopoulou-Kourkoula, 2008), in recent years Athens has developed into an important space of placemaking in its own right (Tsavdaroglou and Lalenis, 2021; Vaiou, 2018). For many, however, this placemaking unfolds in a condition of stuckedness, being characterised not only by extended periods of waiting, but also existential blockages (Hage, 2009; Dimitriadi, 2017).

In this context of stuckedness (Hage, 2009), access to formal infrastructures of care and economy, particularly access to adequate and sustainable housing, are among the most pressing issues for migrants in Athens. In 2020, the government evicted around 11,000 recognised refugees who had been living in camps and reception facilities around the country. Many of these people remain homeless as official housing projects that recognised refugees are able to apply for do not have capacity to provide shelter for the number of people in need of it (Info Migrants, 2020). Moreover, the devastating fires that destroyed the infamous Moria camp on Lesbos left more than 12,000 people without shelter and forced many to relocate to Athens without the prospect of accessing housing (Konstantinidis and Papadimas, 2020). The lack of sufficient shelter and housing facilities for refugees have thus intensified dramatically since we conducted our fieldwork in 2017 and 2019. Moreover, while unemployment affects large parts of Greek society, migrants are particularly at risk of unemployment because of language barriers, lack of information and administrative challenges (Asylum Information

Database [AIDA], 2019). It is against this backdrop of precarity as well as the insufficiency of formal support infrastructures available to migrants that the alternative infrastructuring practices unfold.

Methodological notes

This paper is based on two related research projects that both aim to gain insight into the ways in which migrants encounter, navigate and contest Europe's restrictive migration regimes. The first project focuses on the mobility trajectories of West Africans in the EU and how im/mobility shapes arrival and navigation within the EU. The second project also focuses on how refugees experience im/mobility in the EU, but specifically asks how these experiences are negotiated and resisted through forms of refugee-led activism in Germany and Greece. The second project adopts a patchwork ethnographic approach (Günel et al., 2020) which draws on feminist and decolonial theory and is well-suited for research on the continuously shifting and often opaque conditions that govern migration in Europe. Our projects combine participant observations, recorded interviews, informal conversations and personal reflections. With this approach to migrant's infrastructuring practices, we aim to contribute to a better understanding of how 'migration gets to *become*' (Lin et al., 2017: 169, emphasis in original).

It is important to note that these research projects are not urban studies *on* the city of Athens. They instead share a trajectory approach that seeks to understand the evolution of trajectories – involving both moments of mobility *and* immobility (Schapendonk et al., 2021). For the first project, Athens was not pre-selected as a fieldwork site, but the researcher went there in 2017 because some of the people he engaged with in other field sites moved to

this particular city. Athens, thus, emerged along the way as a research location (Schapendonk, 2020). The first case presented is based on several visits, telephone calls and online communications with this particular interlocutor. In the second case, the Greek capital was selected as a main field site. From 2019 onwards, the researcher spent several months in Athens to elucidate migrant infrastructuring practices and activism around refugee rights. The case below is based on her collection of personal narratives, informal conversations and observations with migrants.

We use vignettes to portray illustrative moments of our respective fieldwork. These aim to create depth through detail concerning the situations we encountered. The vignettes are not mere phenomenological descriptions, and they do not per definition intend to ‘represent’ the lifeworld of the Other/the migrant. Rather they are products of the relations we built through our fieldwork and reflect an intersubjective space. The vignettes can best be considered collages that seek to draw the reader in and let the reader be part of the analysis (Langer, 2016). As researchers drawing on ethnographic methods, we need to reflect explicitly on our positionality in the continuously shifting field of politicised discourses on and governance of migration. First and foremost, this means that, as relative outsiders in Athens, we strive to adopt an ethnographic position of humility, as suggested by Cabot (2016). It follows that we recognise that our knowledge of the city is limited and informed through our engagement with interlocutors who are also navigating the city as foreigners, albeit under very different circumstance. Thus, while we write about the infrastructuring practices that we encountered, we do not claim to inhabit them.

Finally, we acknowledge that invisibility is vital for these infrastructuring practices to

emerge and exist (Cowen, 2017). Hence, we argue that there are aspects of the infrastructuring practices that researchers should not reveal and write about. Thus, we conceal the identities of people and also of specific places in Athens. In addition, while sticking to ethnography’s authority of striving for depth, we are cautious to disclose specific details of the practices under study. What is more interesting to us than the specific ways these infrastructures play out is to reflect on the meaning of their existence to begin with.

Infrastructuring Athens

The two vignettes below highlight different ways that migrants construct alternative infrastructures to both allow for renewed mobility as well as to facilitate placemaking in Athens. We discuss how these infrastructures are anchored in the city through people’s practices, but also how these practices simultaneously appear to be elusive, ephemeral and mobile.

Vignette I: Infrastructuring around care and mobility

One of the coordinators of the Greek civil society organisation had asked André and his friends to be on time for the food distribution. When the truck arrived, the four African men and myself made a human chain across the two stairs to bring the fresh food leftovers of a supermarket to the room. In so doing, we put the notion of people as infrastructure literally into practice.

I (Joris) revisited André in Athens in a period that was incredibly hard for him. Some weeks after his arrival in Greece, he received the devastating news that his son passed away in his country of origin. A decade earlier, when I first met him, I saw him being confronted with stuckedness when he vainly waited in the Algerian-Moroccan borderland for his chance to reach Spain.

These days in Athens, however, the stuckness he faced was more intense and indeed existential (Hage, 2009). He did not only feel lost in the urban setting. He also lost Europe in the sense that the reasons for his departure – to become a man, as they say; to create a future for his family – collapsed so suddenly with the loss of his son. His state of having lost Europe is crucial to understand how infrastructuring practices emerge.

In Athens, André needed to get back on his feet again. He relied on the services of *Médecins Sans Frontières* who provided the necessary pain killers and tranquillisers. As much as he appreciated the support of the Greek civil society organisation above, and as much as he needed the medication that he received, these formal infrastructures could only provide snippets of the care he needed. Finding shelter, for example, was a continuous challenge for him. His former living place had recently been dissolved by the landlord who could no longer stand that about 25 men made use of his small apartment. The landlord's decision to evict the residents was well understood by André, as he stated: 'This place has only one toilet, no shower. So how can this man accept this?! ... How can 25 people live in peace in this small place, how can we live there? If one man gets sick, we all get sick'. The lack of proper material infrastructure is telling in the context of everyday migrant struggles. From then on, André called himself an *SDF* (*sans-domicile-fixe*), the French expression for a homeless person.

Some days he slept in an apartment of a befriended Congolese couple, and sometimes he went to another friend's place. However, one of the most significant places for comfort and support was a particular basement of an apartment building, close to Athens' urban centre. This place was literally and figuratively an underground place – a micro-cosmos enacted by the constant coming and going of African people. Through a loose holding of

different services, needs, initiatives and interests, this place created a social platform – or indeed infrastructure – that appeared to be a bar, restaurant, guesthouse, brothel and travel centre at the same time. I saw people enjoying their food in the middle of financial transactions. I saw big hugs, and heard great laughter. I saw a *passeur* (migration facilitator) showing his tablet to some of his clients, and I saw a man entering a door to paid sex. In this dynamic setting, André told me how he spread the word about his religious services in this social node. He used another communal place nearby to craft a church-setting and inspire co-migrants with his interpretations of biblical texts. I saw him distributing small pieces of paper by which he advertised these bible sessions. With this infrastructuring practice, he hoped to gain a bit more money.

While this basement remains invisible to most residents of Athens, I came across many equivalents of such platforms in other places in Europe, varying from a Gambian traveller's lodge in Lombardy, a Ghanaian safehouse in Amsterdam and a Senegalese catering service for street vendors in Barcelona (see Schapendonk, 2020). The geographical locations do seldom appear on signposts, and they are likely to shift over time. But through mobile solidarities (Squire, 2018) and dynamic networks (Papadopoulos and Tsianos, 2013) these platforms together create an alternative map of Europe. Such maps, as also suggested by Simone and Pieterse (2017) for the urban context, are not overarching visualisations of territories that one can buy or download. However, like most maps, this alternative map of Europe assists people on the move to find their way (Schapendonk, 2020).

At the same time, André's case also highlights that infrastructuring practices are not necessarily always positive contributors to migratory projects. After all, in this basement in Athens, leisure and sociability intersected with business and debt. It was a 'hot

place', as André called it, because the businesses had the potential to create tensions, conflicts and exploitation. The 'hot' character of this social environment articulates the relational politics of im/mobility in the sense that the mobility of one person may rely on the immobilisation of others.

Once André and I left the basement and entered the streets again, André was stopped by a man who asked whether André could pay back his money. At a later instance, André told me that he knew this man from his time in Istanbul. The man had paid André 200 euros for a particular service that would help him to reach Greek mainland. In the end, André's service did not work out for the man, and now the man claimed his money. In this conversation, I wondered about André's active role in this mobility infrastructure and asked whether he considered himself a *pas-seur*. 'Not yet', he replied, 'but if I arrive there, I would do a much better job than the people you have just seen'. André was well aware that his imagined career path may also create debts and involuntary immobility among his compatriots. But for him this was the fastest way to leave Athens.

Gradually, André indeed built more knowledge about how to depart from Greece. With this knowledge, the right connections and some money saved, he reached France some two years after my visit to Athens. In France, he connected to people he got to know through the befriended Congolese couple in Athens, and he also connected to migrants he knew from his time in Morocco. Through these connections, he started to navigate and co-create similar infrastructuring practices as the ones we saw in this particular basement in Athens.

Vignette 2: Cooking up an infrastructure

I (Mirjam) stood in a spacious living room in an inner-Athens apartment to join Poya

who had invited me here. He was standing by a large dining table carefully packing salad and rice into take-away plastic containers. Rohaan, whose apartment we were in, was walking back and forth between the kitchen and the living room, each time bringing out rice, salad and a lentil stew or plastic containers. Poya instructed me to help him and without knowing the specificities of what was happening around me, I began copying his movements, filling containers with food and arranging them in neat rows. Once we had packed several portions of food, Poya's friend Allen, a Belgian volunteer who I had also met on several occasions, arrived at the apartment. He had come by to pick up the food. Poya handed Allen the packaged food and Allen handed Poya money in return. Then Allen headed out taking the meals with him.

Once Allen left with the food Poya explained the actual practices to me. His friends, a group of refugees and international volunteers in Athens, wanted to help a refugee family living in one of the squatted buildings in the city. The family aspired to open their own restaurant in Athens to gain independence and improve their precarious housing and living situation. Initially, Poya and his friends set up an online crowdfunding project to generate starting capital so that the restaurant could support itself for the first few months. In the beginning, people from all over the world who had learned of the project made contributions, but over time the incoming money dwindled and the project struggled to raise the amount needed to effectively support the family in starting their restaurant.

The group of friends tried a new approach: what I had just witnessed had been the first catering commission the family had performed. Poya explained the logistics: at the beginning of the week, Poya, would send out a message on behalf of the family outlining that week's homecooked menu via

a messenger app to a wide list of contacts. People could submit their orders to him by a given day and once a week the family would prepare the pre-ordered food in Rohaan's kitchen. The profits of this catering business went directly to the family.

The catering business revealed a complex infrastructure involving a variety of social and material relations. These relations are locally embedded in the apartment and inner-Athens urban spaces as well as transnational through the virtual community of supporters to the crowdfunding project. In response to the under-provision of services that facilitate access to the formal labour and housing market for migrants in Athens, the family and their extended network developed alternative infrastructures (Cowen, 2017) aimed to achieve financial and social stability (Meuss et al., 2019). This migrant-built infrastructure is as such also a social enterprise that fosters new relations, like my own introduction to the family through Poya, and spaces of exchange for people otherwise pushed the margins of society (Simone, 2004a). Through a flexible network of friends and acquaintances, messages about the catering business and its weekly menu resonate with people in- and outside Athens through a digital and physical thread. Many members of the wider audience of the virtual crowdfunding were not directly connected to the family, yet they supported their project financially. The infrastructure thus encompassed a wider social realm than the people in the room in Athens that evening. Through their infrastructuring practices, this group assembled a space in which business, community, solidarity and friendship intersected. The crowdfunding project and the catering business were created as stepping stones, not towards mobility as in André's example above, but towards a future in which the family could establish themselves as citizens of the city. In other words, the infrastructure was explicitly

future-oriented and 'assembled in the service of worlds to come' (Cowen, 2017: n.p.).

However, those future-making process facilitated by migrant infrastructuring practices are always entangled and often at odds with formal infrastructures of the state. This became evident when I returned to Athens after a period of being away in Autumn 2019. A few months before my return to Athens, Greece had elected a new government that had run on a campaign of 'cleaning up the city'. The government swiftly evicted most of the informal housing structures and squats in inner-Athens, which had housed hundreds of migrants (King and Manoussaki-Adamopoulou, 2019) forcing many to move into camps outside of Athens or remain homeless in the city. The squat evictions meant that the family lost their housing in inner-Athens. However, upon asking about the whereabouts of the family whom I had not seen since returning to Athens, Poya told me that they had been assigned a flat in the outskirts. On the one hand, this was a positive development as the family now had their own living space. Yet, this change in accommodation also disrupted their catering business. The new space was far away from inner-city Athens and customers were unwilling and/or unable to make their way to the family's address to pick up food orders. Without a car or scooter, delivering the food to the customers was not a feasible alternative. Additionally, Rohaan, from whose kitchen the catering business had operated until then, had also moved and the space was no longer available for food preparation and distribution. The catering business as support platform stagnated and so had donations through the crowdfunding project. The formal infrastructures of control, for example, the government's decision to evict most of the informal housing sites and squats, entangled in an antagonistic tension with the alternative infrastructures that were built to

navigate everyday life in the city. Comparisons to this case can be drawn to other alternative, community-organised infrastructures such as the PIKPA camp on Lesbos (European Council on Refugees and Exiles [ECRE], 2020) or the meeting point of the protest movement ‘Lampedusa in Hamburg’ (NDR, 2020), which were dismantled by the respective local authorities in 2020 on the basis of public health and safety claims. What the catering business highlights, however, is that infrastructuring can function as a tactic for placemaking and settlement in urban spaces, despite the antagonisms of governments. Migrant infrastructures are constantly (re-)made in relation *and* opposition to infrastructures of control. The example of the catering service thus underlines the ‘tentative and often precarious process of remaking the city’ (Simone, 2004a: 411) for marginalised communities.

While the material prerequisites for the catering business were dismantled, the relational infrastructure still exists and can in principle be reactivated. The catering business resonates in the friendship networks forged in the Athenian kitchen, as well as in the online realm of the crowdfunding platform and has left its marks on people and spaces. Although the project may be inactive for the initial entrepreneurs, its resonance may inspire other digital or physical communities towards similar infrastructuring projects. In other words, we should not look for overarching maps or intentional agency in understanding these practices. Instead, it is through proceeding connections and created traces that these practices enact the everyday urban platforms (Simone and Pieterse, 2017). These traces are important in understanding urban Europe despite various European states’ propensity towards erasure of migrants’ physical and discursive presence. While the mobile nature of migration

may indeed imply a material and physical temporariness, this vignette illustrates that migrant infrastructuring practices also leave socio-spatial traces that remain.

Synthesis and discussion

The vignettes illustrate that the infrastructuring practices are enacted by, and at the same time facilitate, the flexible configurations (Simone, 2004a) of our interlocutors’ everyday life in Athens. Putting the everyday practices central focus is, for us, a productive way to move away from rather mechanical observations that cities are simply magnets or gateway for migrants (see also Collins, 2012). In line with this, the two vignettes stress the constant remaking of urban spaces such as turning a basement into a place of community and future-making or operating a catering business from a friend’s kitchen. They show how migrants build their own platforms (e.g. the catering service) and how they are incorporated by pre-existing infrastructures. In terms of the latter, the active role of André in the Greek civil society organization is just one example. In our studies, we have also come across migrants who acted as interpreters in asylum hearings, worked as guards in shelter organisations or fulfilled the role of cultural brokers in refugee support organisations. In these various roles, migrants coproduce institutionalised infrastructures.

The social platforms under study here, however, emphasise informality and improvisation. Yet, they also speak to institutionalised infrastructures of support. It is in relation to the lack of these official infrastructures that alternative infrastructures become crucial for survival and mobility. As Cowen (2017: n.p.) highlights, such alternative infrastructures ‘are assembled to do different things, for different people, and according to different systems of value. In

doing so, they offer a different orientation to space, time and legality'. In Athens such alternative infrastructures shaping the urban space are, however, not only found in relation to migration specific projects, but can also be seen in many examples of grassroots initiatives created to counter the impact of austerity politics (Arampatzi, 2017; Cabot, 2016). Moreover, such counter-austerity infrastructures have often developed to also support the increasing number of newly arrived refugees in Athens. Cabot (2016), for example, shows how social solidarity clinics and pharmacies, being set-up in 2011 as grassroots initiatives to support Greek citizens who had lost access to health insurance, supported newly arrived refugees who lacked access to the health care system. The social clinics and pharmacies also underline the entanglement of 'crises' that play out in Athens's urban context and that affect both Greek citizens and refugees. Moreover, it speaks to how 'people as infrastructure' carve out alternative infrastructures in the city to support the everyday lives of its inhabitants. This became visible most recently during the ongoing Covid-19 crisis. During online and phone conversations with interlocutors, we learned that different Athens-based refugee and diaspora organisations organised local food banks to support people in their neighbourhoods affected by the lockdowns, oftentimes providing support to both refugees and Greek citizens. The infrastructuring practices discussed in this paper also serve different interests in terms of migrant trajectories. Some platforms, like the catering business and the basement with its sociality, are designed to feel in place. Other infrastructuring actors and practices, such as the *passeur* sitting with his clients in the basement, are designed for people wanting to leave the city as soon as possible. It is telling that the physical infrastructure of the basement is relatively static, yet it is 'housing' André's infrastructuring practices that

are part of his aim towards moving out of the city. In other words, the anchorage of the basement provides the space for André to reclaim his own mobility suggesting productive relation between mobility and locality (Dahinden, 2010; Schapendonk et al., 2021). Mobility shapes and makes places, but place also facilitates movement. Thus, even if this basement dissolved, it might re-emerge elsewhere. This resonance intensifies as a result of the continuously changing social and political urban environment that is co-produced by the stringent and shifting contexts of European migration regimes that governs migrants' everyday mobility and placemaking (Cowen et al., 2018; Wagner Tsoni, 2019).

Traces of improvised and temporary infrastructures created by migrants emerge through the vignettes, even when the people who created them may have moved to the peripheries of the urban space or to other countries. These traces can be material changes in the built environment of a basement and the social infrastructures established in Athens as well as digital, relational traces such as the crowdfunding project that the family created to finance their dream of a restaurant. Certain initiatives can also 'move with' migrants to other places. While the infrastructuring practices in this paper share a certain practical application, our understanding of these practices is shaped by the notion of the subversive potentials against dominant political rationalities in infrastructuring practices (Cowen, 2017; Cowen et al., 2018).

This focus on the subversive potentials is very much represented in discussions on 'mobile commons' (Papadopoulos and Tsianos, 2013), which also often has a strong urban connotation (Jørgensen and Makrygianni, 2020; Montagna and Grazioli, 2019; Nordling et al., 2017). Papadopoulos and Tsianos (2013) define mobile commons as information, tactics, services, care, social

relations and solidarity shared between people. The notions of infrastructuring practices and mobile commons share a focus on sociality and relationality, mobility and informality in highly governed and often precarious migration experiences. However, our approach differs in not attending explicitly to questions of class structuring and struggle in a similar consistent Marxist or Neo-Marxist manner as the literature on mobile commons suggest. Evidently, the infrastructuring practices appearing throughout our research are inherently political, as they address the right to the urban domain and the right to mobility. As the second vignette shows, elements of solidarity and commoning are also present in infrastructuring practices when friends and strangers initiated a project to support a family's dream of building their own restaurant infrastructure. However, a common agenda or, as Simone and Pieterse (2017) put it, 'an overarching map' as one might read into commoning practices is often absent. At times, as André's confrontation with the man who lost his money, infrastructuring practices reflect not only a common interest or solidarity motive, but they may actually serve self-interest and, in as a result, create financial indebtedments or confinement for others.

Conclusion

In this paper, we related discussions on migration industries and infrastructures to the everyday lives of migrants in the city of Athens. We shifted from a systematic interpretation of the mediation of migration to a focus on migrant infrastructuring practices. The concept of resonance helped us to scrutinise the constitutive and travelling capacity of these practices. In this light, migrant infrastructuring practices certainly have a transformative potential in response to exclusionary European migration policies in general, and processes of precaritisation in

the city of Athens, in particular. We would also like to note that, although our examples are embedded in the urban spaces of Athens, these infrastructures are not unique to this particular city. Similar alternative migrant infrastructuring practices can be found all over – and in between – European cities, from Calais to Hamburg and from Naples to Stockholm. They appear where migrants struggle with, transgress, bypass and try to live with Europe's migration regimes. In this respect, we argued that the infrastructuring practices themselves are transient, while they alter the material and social fabric of the places they are entwined with. This resonance is a powerful source that can be hard to contain or border, however strict and repressive migration regimes attempt to be. At the same time, different places also shape the possibilities for infrastructuring in different ways, depending on how migration control practices are employed by governments.

Migrant infrastructuring practices in Athens can be both an attempt to bridge gaps in the city's formal infrastructure *as well as* a stepping stone towards further movement. In other words, these practices simultaneously produce locality and mobility in migrants' relational geographies. In so doing, the notion of infrastructuring practices creates a much more diffuse and nuanced understanding of migration facilitation/control compared to the notion of the urban migration industry offering commercialised services to migrants (AIDA, 2019; Cohen, this issue; Cranston et al., 2018). At the same time, we indicated that the commercialised dimension central to migration industries is also reflected in the infrastructuring practices we discussed. Here we can think of the catering services set up by Poya and his friends, the religious services offered by André in exchange for money or his role in facilitating mobility. These practices are still seen as platforms (Collins, 2020), and there might even be strong elements of

solidarity in these commercial activities. At the same time, the commercialised aspect of infrastructuring practices moves away from the ‘common’, that is central in the mobile commons debate. It complicates the notion of a shared goal or ideal by also including narratives of self-interest, individualised attempts in creating escape routes and financial and social indebtedness, which are also part of migratory trajectories.

To conclude, our findings illustrate that, regardless of whether people stay in the city or depart from it, moving through Europe’s migration regime is a continuous process of navigation (Schapendonk, 2018; Vigh, 2009). Infrastructuring practices, as we approach them, are intimately entangled with this notion of navigational tactics. On the one hand, they are produced by people’s attempts to navigate the restrictive migration regime of Europe. On the other hand, they can also form constitutive elements of the ‘uncertain and changing terrain’ of migration facilitation and control that requires careful navigation in and of itself.

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Note

1. In this paper, we use the terms ‘migrant’ and ‘refugee’ interchangeably. Cantat (2016) points out that although the state differentiates and assigns different legal categories to these mobilities, the lived mobility experiences share many commonalities.

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