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Migration Governance and Asylum Crises

# Framing asylum at the local level: experts' narratives of conflictual dynamics in the post-reception period in Italy

Iraklis Dimitriadis  
and Maurizio Ambrosini

University of Milan

**MAGYC:** The MAGYC (**Migr**Ation **G**overnance and **AsYlum** **C**risis) project seeks to assess how migration governance has responded to the recent “refugee crises” and has since been influenced by it, and how crises at large shape policy responses to migration. This four-year research project (2018–2022) brings together twelve international partners: the Hugo Observatory from the University of Liège (Coordinator), Sciences Po, the University of Economics in Bratislava, the GIGA institute of Global and Area Studies, Lund University, the IDMC, SOAS University of London, the University of Milan, the Lebanese American University, the University of Macedonia, Sabanci University, IfPO/CNRS.

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**Lead authors:**

Iraklis Dimitriadis and Maurizio Ambrosini, University of Milan

**Principal reviewers:**

Hélène Thiollet, CERI/Sciences Po  
Céline Cantat, CERI/Sciences Po

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## Table of Contents

<b>1. Introduction</b>	2
<b>2. Literature Review, theoretical framework and concepts</b>	3
2.1. Framing immigration and asylum discourse: variety of different context-sensitive frame typologies	3
2.2. MLG approach and the concept of battleground	6
<b>3. Methods, context and analytical tools</b>	7
3.1. Methodology	7
3.2. Reception of refugees in Busto Arsizio (Northern Italy)	9
3.3. Analytical tools	10
<b>4. Framing conflictual asylum governance</b>	11
4.1 Frames of professional experts active at the national level (PENs)	11
4.2. Frames of locals with expert (professional) knowledge (LEKs) in a small-medium city of Northern Italy	14
<b>5. Conclusions</b>	18
When fear becomes inconvenience, and local authorities' opposition to RAS can also be passive, but harmful	18
<b>6. References</b>	20

## **MAGYC Working Paper**

Studies on the framing of refugee crisis have focused on media and political discourses revealing contrasting views, and an increasing politicization of immigration. However, framing of asylum discourse in relation to the reception and settlement of asylum seekers in local communities has so far received less attention. This article investigates the ways in which experts at different levels make sense of how the refugee crisis has unfolded in local communities in Italy. Insofar as asylum governance has become a contentious issue, it looks at conflictual situations. The research challenges the binary between humanitarian and fear frames by suggesting the prevalence of a managerialist frame focusing on a problematic implementation of asylum policies. Considering the opinions of local experts, it also reveals a shift from a fear frame to an inconvenience frame which denies xenophobic discourses on invasion or social/public disorder. The article also adds to the possible patterns concerning the relations between public and private actors, and introduces refugees as subjects who actively participate in the 'battleground' of asylum governance.

Keywords: refugees; asylum governance; local policies; Italy; political identities; civil society

## 1. Introduction

Considering migration and asylum governance at the national and European levels, studies on the discursive construction of the so-called refugee crisis have focused, on the one hand, on how media and politicians represented and interpreted events in relation to rescue operations, landing and reception of refugees and asylum seekers (RAS), and, on the other, on how such interpretations shape migration policies and processes. These works have largely relied on the analysis of policy documents, speeches of politicians, press, media and political debates, and have generally highlighted two contrasting frames, that is a humanitarian/moralistic frame and a securitization or threat frame (Castelli Gattinara, 2017; Colombo, 2018; Costerdine, 2018; Triandafyllidou 2018; Cantat et al., 2020). Referring to these events, various terms have been also used to define the kind of crisis, namely 'refugee crisis', 'migration' crisis', 'humanitarian crisis', 'crisis of the European border', 'crisis of the Schengen zone', 'refugee reception crisis', among others (Agustín & Bak Jorgensen, 2019; Cantat, Thiollet, & Pécoud, 2019; Rea et al., 2019; Dimitriadis et al., 2020).

Moreover, a burgeoning literature has concentrated on the framing and evaluation of practices of those who implemented policies and were engaged in asylum governance at the local level (Castelli Gattinara, 2017; Hinger et al., 2019; Hinger and Schäfer, 2019; Larruina et al., 2019; Pettrachin 2019; Glorius and Doomernik, 2020). Scholars have called for a local turn in migration and asylum governance, reflecting the growing relevance of the local (city) level not only in implementing migration policies, but also in drawing its own agendas related to immigrant integration (Glick-Schiller and Caglar, 2009; Glorius and Doomernik, 2020; Oomen, 2020). Recently, municipalities and non-governmental actors have assumed an active role in migration asylum governance at the local level (Ambrosini, 2018; Campomori and Ambrosini, 2020; Garkisch, et al., 2017; Spencer, 2018; Spencer and Delvino, 2019) where the reception of RAS has also been marked by contentious aspects.

Within this growing field of study, we believe that two questions deserve more attention: on the one hand, it seems crucial to shed further light on the ways in which different actors frame the unfolding of the "refugee crisis" in local communities in which asylum governance has been conflictual; on the other hand, more empirical investigation is needed to comprehend those situations where interactions between private and public stakeholders have become what we call a 'battleground', namely an arena of negotiation and conflict in which different actors engage according to their own interests, values and frameworks (Ambrosini, 2018; 2021; Campomori and Ambrosini, 2020). This means, for instance, that migration policies do not always coincide with those implemented because tensions and conflicts between institutional authorities and civil society may result in different solutions. By shedding light on the vertical and horizontal relations between different tiers, the conceptual tool of 'battleground' offers a more vivid understanding of implementation

[D3.6. Framing asylum at the local level: experts' narratives of conflictual dynamics in the post-reception period in Italy]

dynamics, thus addressing the limits of the multi-level governance (MLG) approach.

This article aims to fill these gaps by investigating the ways in which different actors at different levels frame conflictual events and dynamics in relation to refugee reception at the local level. Drawing on qualitative material concerning the post-reception period<sup>1</sup> in Italy, it analyses the ways in which professional experts active at the national level (PENs) and locals with expert (professional) knowledge (LEKs) make sense of the arrival and settlement of refugees in local communities. It does so by implementing an analysis of framing, that is the act of selecting “some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (Entman, 1993: 52).

Highlighting the divergence from the typical binary between humanitarian and fear frames, this article argues that a managerialist frame enters in discourses of asylum governance at the local level that indicates problematic implementation of asylum policies. It also makes a contribution to the horizontal dynamics of the multi-level governance (MLG) approach by finding out an inactive stance by local authorities concerning asylum issues. RAS are also considered important subjects engaged in the asylum governance at the local level.

First, the article briefly reviews studies of the representation of immigration and asylum issues and introduces the MLG approach and the concept of battleground. Second, it discusses methods and tools of analysis, and it gives information on the case study of Busto Arsizio (Northern Italy) that is analysed. Third, it analyses empirical material by looking at the narratives of experts active at the national level and those at the local level. Finally, it discusses how the findings contribute to the strands of literature which this work restates.

## **2. Literature Review, theoretical framework and concepts**

### **2.1. Framing immigration and asylum discourse: variety of different context-sensitive frame typologies**

The analysis of properties of texts or talks of or about migrants is crucial in understanding migration processes. Frame analysis is one of the tools used in Discourse Studies that contributes to better understandings of discursive construction of migration and asylum questions (Van Dijk, 2018). Such an analytical tool, though, should also be connected to the social, political, material conditions that make framing processes regarding migration possible. In other words, speeches and discourses convey information on facts or representations of the speaker, but their analysis leads to understandings on

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<sup>1</sup> By ‘post-reception’ we refer to the period following the first settlement of RAS at reception facilities, that is that phase in which RAS have access to rights and services such as vocational training, labour market, language courses.

[D3.6. Framing asylum at the local level: experts' narratives of conflictual dynamics in the post-reception period in Italy]

the mental models, attitudes, power position, ideologies and contextual factors that underpin texts and talks (Nickels, 2007). Therefore, analysis of frames can reveal social and political implications of discourses on society (Van Dijk, 2018).

A large body of literature on discourses around immigration and asylum has analysed the ways in which media and politicians frame events in relation to immigration processes. Dekker and Scholten (2017) argue that there are four prevalent frames. The first is the *human-interest frame* that portrays immigrants and refugees as victims in need of compassion, help and solidarity (Nickels, 2009; Colombo, 2018; Triandafyllidou, 2018). The second one is the *threat frame* and is used by those who attribute negative connotations to the phenomenon, thus generating anxiety among the majority population which perceives immigration as a threat; to the public order (e.g. criminality, terrorism), as well as to the social order (e.g. identity, territorial cohesion) because immigrants' cultural traits are seen as incompatible with those of the majority (Castelli Gattinara, 2017; Spencer and Delvino, 2019). Third, the *economic frame* emphasizes the economic losses or gains for host countries deriving from immigrants' and refugees' settlement. Discourses here regard the pressure that immigrants put on welfare systems (Van Dijk 1991; 2018) or, contrarily, the benefits linked to immigrants' presence; those perceived as useful such as high-skilled workers, health professionals, seasonal workers (de Haas et al., 2018). Fourth, the *managerialist frame* discusses immigration as a challenge for the governance of the consequences of migratory process in de-politicized terms, that is it puts little or no emphasis on whether immigration is desirable or not (d'Haenens and de Lange, 2001). As regards RAS, Nickels (2009) also identifies a *genuineness frame* relating to the distinction between political and economic refugees, in the sense that RAS are divided into people persecuted because of their political opinions, and those who migrate for economic reasons and, therefore, do not deserve international protection, as speakers opposing immigration state (Chauvin et al., 2013; Bonizzoni, 2020). A *return home frame* also emerges in Nickel's (2009) work, that is refugees' settlement in the host country should not be permanent, but they have to return home whenever possible.

Turning now to the local level, similar frames are identified in the literature on integration approach at the city level (Campomori and Caponio, 2013; Spencer and Delvino, 2019). A *security frame* is used by those local policy makers who intend favouring national residents instead of immigrants, while requesting controls to reassure that the latter abide by the law. A second frame involving *humanitarian and human rights* discourses focuses on the vulnerability of migrants and the latter's need to be assisted. The economic dimension highlighted above is expressed through a *deserving workers frame* suggesting that migrants are needed in the local labour market (Bonizzoni, 2020); and, as such, they deserve legal status (Chauvin et al., 2013). While these three frames focus on migrants as beneficiaries, Spencer and Delvino (2019) found that framing by local policy makers may also relate to the impacts of the exclusion of (irregular) migrants on the city as a whole, that is how the

[D3.6. Framing asylum at the local level: experts' narratives of conflictual dynamics in the post-reception period in Italy]

governance of (irregular) immigration affects residents of the city and city administration. These authors introduce a *socioeconomic frame* that sees the exclusion of irregular migrants as harmful for the local economy (undeclared work, negative image of touristic destinations), the public health (exclusion from health care may endanger the whole population) and social cohesion, as well as hindering local policies to tackle homelessness and street prostitution. The *efficiency frame* is also identified and relates to the efficiency of municipalities to govern irregular immigration. In particular, it is argued that the administration of procedures that promote the exclusion of irregular migrants are more cost-effective than inclusive policies (unregistered people make it difficult for authorities to protect minors or, differently, to tackle crime) (Spencer and Delvino, 2019).

By exploring local media and/or politicians' discourses in relation to the events since the summer of 2015, two dominant frames are identified: the threat/victim and the humanitarian (Hinger et al., 2019; Petracchin, 2019; Ponzio and Pogliano 2019). Framing process among media and politicians at the local level shares similar characteristics with framing of immigration at the national level, as presented above (Nickels, 2009; Dekker and Scholten, 2017). Recent research though also concentrates on how civil society frames asylum questions. On the one hand, studies investigate discourses of NGO professionals, volunteers and citizens interested in immigration issues. A big part of these pro-refugee actors represent the so-called refugee crisis in humanitarian terms (Dimitriadis et al., 2021). On the other hand, several works explore the framing of set of events in relation to migration since 2015 by people opposing to immigration. For instance, Simonovits (2020) identifies two different dimensions of the "threat frame" deployed in Hungary, that is *realistic threats framing* which includes discourses on safety (e.g. crime, terrorism, diseases), labour market (e.g. laziness of refugees as workers), welfare (e.g. economic burdens due to provision of social services) and great numbers of arrivals, and a *symbolic threats framing* which relates to religion and cultural traits of new arrivals (e.g. incompatibility between Christian and Muslim values, Islam as a risk to Christianity and Western civilization, incompatibility between European and 'their' culture) (for the discursive production of crisis in the Hungarian case see also Cantat and Rajaram, 2019). In the same vein, Castelli Gattinara (2017) analyses frames articulated by people mobilizing against immigrants in Italy. He found that far-right activists deny the concept of 'refugee crisis' and denounce the corruption of the asylum and immigrant reception system, blaming NGOs for promoting their own economic interests. Despite taking distance from biological racism and avoiding the language used by traditional far right parties and movements, they present new arrivals as an invasion (see also Ambrosini, 2019; Dimitriadis et al. 2020) and they focus on threats connected to irregular migration regarding public order, citizens inconvenience and incompatibility of cultural values.

Putting together different typologies it can be said that studies on framing of migration offer valuable insights on the ways in which migration discourse is structured at both the national and local level through nine main frames: 1)

### [D3.6. Framing asylum at the local level: experts' narratives of conflictual dynamics in the post-reception period in Italy]

human-interest or humanitarian; 2) threat or fear; 3) economic; 4) managerialist; 5) genuineness; 6) deservingness; 7) return home; 8) socioeconomic; 9) efficiency. These works show that frames seem to be context-sensitive (Nickels, 2007), whereas research often looked at the interplay between framing process and MLG dynamics (Campomori and Caponio, 2013; Scholten 2013; Spencer, 2018). As argued in the next section, though, contrasting frames of the refugee issue are not fully grasped by the MLG perspective. Rather, the concept of 'battleground' (Ambrosini, 2018; 2021; Campomori and Ambrosini, 2020) can offer additional insights on asylum governance when looking at framing of conflictual events and civil society's initiatives in relation to migration issues at the local level. Analysing qualitative data, we explore whether discourses on the (conflictual) arrival and settlement of RAS in local communities reflect above frames or define the phenomenon and those engaged in asylum governance in different ways.

## 2.2. MLG approach and the concept of battleground

MLG approach rightly points out the intersection between different policy levels in the treatment of immigration and asylum questions, namely international, national and local (vertical dimension). Only in some cases, it addresses convincingly the horizontal dimension of the governance too, namely the interaction between public and non-public actors at different levels. Moreover, most scholarship on MLG emphasizes the outcome of these relations between levels and actors as a "negotiated order", neglecting the conflictual dimension of migration policies. The concept of battleground integrates such an approach placing more importance to tensions and conflicts, between different institutional levels and between different actors. In. It conceives migration and asylum policies as a contentious field in which different actors interact, sometimes cooperating, or developing complementary activities, or clashing in various ways. In the public domain, different levels of govern are involved, sometimes in tension between them on the vertical level. On one side the role of Sanctuary cities (Bauder, 2017; Oomen, 2020), opposing national restrictive policies, on the other side of local policies of exclusion (Ambrosini, 2019), can be highlighted.

On the horizontal level civil society actors play a relevant role, which the concept of battleground tries to grasp. Among these actors, various pro-migrant supporters are involved, activating a "debordering solidarity" (Ambrosini 2021). Migrants' movements can rise their voice, through demonstrations, marches, occupation of symbolic places, hunger strikes and other forms of protest. But also xenophobic movements try to mobilize public opinion and organize demonstrations against asylum seekers. Both sides can establish alliances and coalitions and try to influence public policies.

At the local level, in addition, different types of relation between municipalities and civil society can be detected: a) *closure vs. civil society activism*, when local authorities exhibit an explicit opposition against refugees' reception, whereas pro-immigrant actors mobilize and organize alternative

[D3.6. Framing asylum at the local level: experts' narratives of conflictual dynamics in the post-reception period in Italy]

services; b) *tolerance*, when local authorities do not act in favour of refugees, but do not impede civil society actors to provide some forms of support and practical help; c) *institutional activism vs. anti-immigrant mobilizations*, when on the contrary urban governments take a liberal position, engaging in refugees' reception, but they have to face the opposition of xenophobic movements and groups of citizens; d) *cooperation*, when municipalities and civil society actors establish agreements to jointly manage reception projects and pro-refugees activities (Campomori and Ambrosini, 2020).

Finally, different actors can be identified under the heading of 'civil society' in receiving societies: NGOs, endowed with professional staff and public or private funds; other organized actors, such as voluntary associations, trade unions, religious institutions; social movements; spontaneous mobilizations by common citizens. In some cases, migrant associations can be added to this taxonomy (Ambrosini, 2021). Before we explore different frames of conflictual events in relation to the arrival and settlement of RAS and investigate horizontal relations between social actors within the 'battleground' of asylum governance, we give some information about methods, research contexts and tools of analysis.

### **3. Methods, context and analytical tools**

#### **3.1. Methodology**

This article draws on 35 in-depth interviews with experts on questions related to immigration and asylum in Italy (Table 1). On the one hand, we conducted interviews with experts active at the national level whose knowledge is linked to their institutional and professional role (e.g. scientists or policymakers); they possess an 'institutionalized authority to construct reality' (Hitzler et al., 1994 cited by Meuser and Nagel, 2009). On the other hand, we included in our sample locals with expertise in immigration. While elected representatives, journalists in local newspapers, and managers of reception centres meet the criterion of 'institutionalized authority', other participants such as religious actors, members of pro-migrant associations and advocacy networks and those engaged in anti-refugee protests are considered experts insofar as they have privileged access to information through their activities (Meuser and Nagel, 2009: 24). One refugee who resided in the Via Dei mille reception center and participated in protests was also interviewed. The categorization of participants as 'pro-', 'neutral' or 'against' is established using as criteria their positioning in the public debate on immigration, and their affiliation/membership to specific parties and institutions which publicly state their positions on immigration. According to the initial research plan, the number of participants being in favour, neutral or against towards immigration was to be proportional. However, many potential participants opposing immigration denied to be interviewed or avoided doing so by declaring themselves very busy and repeatedly asking us to contact them in the future. Despite the fact that the sample is by no means representative, we consider

[D3.6. Framing asylum at the local level: experts' narratives of conflictual dynamics in the post-reception period in Italy]

that qualitative analysis into selected opinions can have a broader analytical value on how migration discourse is structured (Nickels, 2007; Van Dijk, 2018).

Table 1 – Our sample

Participants	Num. of Interviews	Attitude towards immigration		
		Pro	Neutral	Against
<b>Professional experts active at the national level (PENs)</b>				
Parties' representatives	2	1	1	0
Journalists	5	1	1	3
Scholars	9	6	1	2
Trade Unionists	2	2	0	0
Lawyer	1	1	0	0
Total	19	11	3	5
<b>Locals with expert (professional) knowledge (LEKs)</b>				
Local councillors	4	2	1	1
Journalists	3	2	0	1
Anti-migrant committee	1	0	0	1
Priest	1	1	0	0
CSO professionals	3	3	0	0
CSO volunteers	3	3	0	0
Refugee	1	1	0	0
Total	16	12	1	3

While most participants were contacted through personal acquaintances or via email, some LEKs were also introduced to us through other participants. Most interviews were conducted face-to-face, and few of them via telephone or Skype, from May 2019 to May 2020. Interviews lasted between 35 minutes and two hours and half, and the majority of them were conducted in private places (organization headquarters, homes). Research participants who are considered experts active at a national scale were called to frame those situations where the arrival and settlement of refugees and asylum seekers in local communities have been conflictual and were portrayed in media and policy discourses as 'local crises', 'emergency' or 'invasion' (Tronchin and De Pasquale, 2017; Pettrachin, 2019; Dimitriadis et al. 2020). In other words, they have been asked to express their opinion about cases in which local communities denied or opposed RAS' arrival and settlement, that is what the problem was about, what the role of different actors engaged in those events and what the solutions are for such situations. LEKs have been asked to reconstruct what happened in relation to the presence of RAS in Busto Arsizio since 2014 on the one hand, and what they thought about the role of local authorities, civil society and refugee themselves and the responses to the events which are described in the next section.

Answers were anonymised, coded and analysed using MAXQDA that facilitates thematic analysis of qualitative data. An informed consent form was developed to give participants all details on the research. Information

[D3.6. Framing asylum at the local level: experts' narratives of conflictual dynamics in the post-reception period in Italy]

regarded the nature, risks and potential benefits, responsibilities and confidentiality, as well as the voluntary nature of participation in the research.

### 3.2. Reception of refugees in Busto Arsizio (Northern Italy)

The city of Busto Arsizio represents one of those cases across Italy where reception of refugees has been conflictual (Lunaria 2017; Ambrosini, 2019; Dimitriadis et al., 2020). Although data do not allow for generalisations, we consider that it is a case offering valuable insights into the Italian system of reception, as argued below.

The Italian system of reception is mainly based, in principle, on the SPRAR/SIPROIMI centres which are small reception facilities or private houses aiming to offer not only accommodation, but opportunities for integration. Local authorities are responsible for running these network projects on a voluntary basis, together with Third Sector Organisations (TSOs). In 2019, however, only 1,825 municipalities (out of a total of more than 8,000) adhered to the SPRAR network, most of which were concentrated in Southern Italy where the settlement of refugees was seen as an opportunity for economic development, mainly through job creation (Ambrosini 2019). In front of the scarce willingness of local governments to run such programs, the Italian Government created an extraordinary network of reception, the so-called CAS (Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria) to provide accommodation to an increasing number of new arrived people. CAS centres are managed by various private actors (mainly TSOs, but also hotel owners and other conventional employers), bypassing local authorities. Yet, local authorities and public opinion (mainly in Northern Italy) resisted and opposed the creation of CAS centers, thus turning the asylum governance into a 'battleground' (Campomori and Ambrosini, 2020; Ambrosini, 2021).

A telling example of how asylum governance may become a 'battleground upon which different actors engage with their own interests, values and frames' (Campomori and Ambrosini, 2020: 3) is found in the case of Busto Arsizio, a city in Northern Italy at a 35km distance north of Milan. Its population is around 83,000 people and its economy is mainly based on industry and commerce. Local governments have been traditionally elected with the support of right wing parties, as the city is part of the Province of Varese where the right-wing and xenophobic (Northern) League party was founded and has politically prevailed in the last decades.

During the summer of 2014, twenty-five asylum seekers originating from Western Africa arrived to Busto Arsizio and were hosted within a CAS reception center at Via Dei Mille (street), close to the city center. The decision of the Prefect of the Province of Varese to enable the opening of a reception structure had not been previously communicated to the local government. Two weeks after the opening of the CAS center the mayor reacted by sending a formal letter to the Prefect arguing that the building that hosted RAS was not adequate, thus asking its closure. This request was not approved and, after

[D3.6. Framing asylum at the local level: experts' narratives of conflictual dynamics in the post-reception period in Italy]

some months, more than 200 refugees and asylum seekers were residing in the Via dei mille CAS.

On September 2016, almost one hundred refugees protested in the city center by halting the traffic. Protesters requested the issuing of identity cards by the municipality and denounced the poor conditions offered by the managing entity KB (TSO). Although, on the one hand, the Prefecture vowed to intervene for the issuance of identity cards, and the mayor declared his interest in adhering to the SPRAR system and taking responsibility for the reception center, on the other hand, nothing happened. In the meanwhile, anti-refugee mobilizations were organized by a committee called 'Enough with fake refugees' (Comitato Basta Finti Profughi). According to the goals of the committee, citizens should have been informed about the bad mismanagement of the reception center. It also aimed to pressure the Prefecture to intervene in favour of two Italian families which lived in the same building where the CAS center was located. One year after the first protest, asylum seekers hosted in the CAS center abandoned the building and protested in front of the Prefecture headquarters, asking to meet the Prefect. Even if these protests seemed to bear some fruits as first identity cards were issued some weeks later, it was not efficient in improving living conditions at the Via Dei Mille CAS. The center closed in 2018 and all its inhabitants moved to other reception centers. Last but not least, the managers of the organization (KB) which ran the Via dei Mille CAS center are currently under investigation for counterfeit and fraud linked to the management of other CAS centers since 2017.

### 3.3. Analytical tools

Starting from the national level, PENs were asked to frame conflictual events in relation to the arrival and settlement of RAS in local communities across Italy, whereas LEKs were asked questions in relation to the events unfolded in Busto Arsizio, namely the functioning of the Via dei Mille CAS, RAS' protests and the question of the issuing of identity cards. To investigate participants' narratives, we used a qualitative frame analysis following Entman's (1993) conceptualization of framing. First, frames involve the definition of problems, that is the determination of what a subject is doing and the relative costs and benefits of this action. The definition of problems is based upon common cultural values. The second feature of a frame is the diagnosis of causes that relates to the identification of the forces that create a specific problem. Third, frames entail the discursive construction of moral judgement that relates to an evaluation of social actors' action and its effects. The fourth feature of frames regards the suggestion of remedies, that is recommendations or justification of solutions (treatments) for the defined problems, and eventually prediction of their effects. A frame in a particular text performs these four framing functions, although some texts may not relate to all four of them. The selective element characterizing the process of framing involves the exertion of power by the communicators and, as such, has political effects or affects public policies.

[D3.6. Framing asylum at the local level: experts' narratives of conflictual dynamics in the post-reception period in Italy]

Politicians, for instance, may omit or highlight specific elements of a situation in order to promote their own interests.

## 4. Framing conflictual asylum governance

### 4.1. Frames of professional experts active at the national level (PENs)

The analysis reveals a high degree of convergence among PENs with contrasting attitudes towards immigration in 'defining the problem' through a *managerialist frame*, although using different arguments or vocabulary. Looking at PENs' narrative, five frames emerge to refer to the asylum governance at the local level: managerialist, fear, economic, human rights and deservingness, as Table 2 shows.

Table 2 – Framing of asylum governance among PENs

Framing process: problem, causes, moral evaluations, remedies		In Favour	Neutral	Against
<b>Fear frame</b>	New arrivals to small villages can be perceived as invasion, due to differences between them and local population			X
	Anxiety, fear and discomfort for the unknown	(X) <sup>2</sup>	(X)	X
<b>Economic frame</b>	Local people oppose due to poor availability of job opportunities			X
	Migration provide cheap labour force, thus penalizing locals			X
	(Some) TSOs make profit out of reception of migrants	X	X	X
<b>Human rights frame</b>	Reception of refugees is a value	X	X	(X) <sup>3</sup>
<b>Deservingness frame</b>	Differentiation between genuine and false asylum seekers		X	X
<b>Managerialist frame</b>	Problematic integration for new arrivals settled into isolated (mountainous) places	X	X	
	Negation of local authority to adhere the SPRAR system	X	X	
	Problematic distribution mechanisms and logistics	X	X	
	Mismanagement by national and European authorities	X	X	X
	Decisions for arrivals imposed violently by Prefectures, without previous dialogue with local communities	X	X	X

<sup>2</sup> Although participants favourable or neutral to immigration argue that new arrivals to small villages might cause anxiety and discomfort, they often found such reactions exaggerated.

<sup>3</sup> As previous works showed (Castelli Gattinara 2017), far-right people often avoid extreme-right discourse and tend to invoke liberal values and defend democracy. This is a way to gain sympathy in the public discourse or/and highlight incompatibility between European and Muslims' values.

[D3.6. Framing asylum at the local level: experts' narratives of conflictual dynamics in the post-reception period in Italy]

*Fear frame.* Conflictual situations at the local level are defined by PENs opposing immigration through a fear frame. This frame mostly concerns cases in which refugees and asylum seekers settled in localities (small villages in mountainous areas) with few residents. The latter's fear is attributed to the fact that new arrivals are perceived as diverse; their anxieties and fear of the unknown are legitimate and have to do with threats related more to social cohesion and moral order than to public order. Under this lens, PENs opposing immigration consider the opening and functioning of reception centres in these areas as morally unfair for the locals.

When the local density increases, neighbours from ten become twenty; population doubles. [...] (New arrivals) are perceived as different. There is a cultural impact, there is an impact of discomfort, certainly from the point of view perceptive, cultural and relational. [...] fears emerge from the cultural distance (between locals and migrants) (Scholar opposing immigration)

*Economic Frame.* Conflictual cases of reception at the local level are also narrated in economic terms. On the one hand, this frame concerns the operation of TSOs engaged in the reception of refugees, but it is expressed in different terms based on participants' attitudes towards immigration. PENs who are in favour of immigration argue that economically despicable actions of few corrupted TSOs insensible to the respect of human rights cause tensions in local communities and hinder the integration of refugees. Participants opposing immigration generalize such events claiming that TSOs are engaged in the so-called 'business of hospitality' and make part of a corrupted reception system (see also Castelli Gattinara 2017). This framing is different from that of those favourable to migrants:

Hospitality is not a business. Yes, where there is money, everything can become business, even care facilities for elderly people or kindergartens. I find it absolutely improper to correlate the whole world (TSOs) to something negative. [...] Business in itself is not even a bad word, business means making profit [...] It is the opposite, if anything, what happens in the SPRAR system: with all this reporting and auditing mechanisms it is impossible to do business. (Scholar favourable towards immigration).

On the other hand, the *economic frame* discusses the arrival of RAS in terms of economic losses for locals due to limited job opportunities and the fact that new arrivals accept lower wages.

You put people (RAS in local communities) - who will accept anything (working terms/conditions)- in competition with people (locals) who have lost their rights, although they are Europeans. (Journalist opposing immigration)

[D3.6. Framing asylum at the local level: experts' narratives of conflictual dynamics in the post-reception period in Italy]

*Human rights frame.* PENs favourable or neutral to immigration portrayed RAS as people who have right to reception. Regardless of what happened in specific cases in which settlement of RAS' arrival created tensions in local communities, RAS' right to reception is considered an undeniable value. In addition, some experts argued that conflicts at the local level are triggered because locals do not know how migration process and policies work. Considering what local crises consist of, a journalist argues that:

It's not only a crisis of logistics - even if 'crisis' is a bit slippery as a term - but it is also a moral crisis, in the sense that reception is not obviously only a logistical factor, but also, in my vision, a value. [...] sometimes, though, some people do not understand how migration works (Journalist neutral towards immigration)

*Deservingness frame.* This frame used in asylum governance discourses relates to the differentiation between refugees and economic migrants. PENs opposing immigration or those with moderate views used discourses on deserving refugees to distinguish between a minority of those arriving to Italy being in need of international protection, and those who try to cheat the system of reception and get a stay permit. The latter do not meet any requirement to be attributed a refugee status.

It is not true that they flee from wars; they rather flee from unexciting situations where they live in their country. There are also those who flee from wars; in this way you also have difficulty in distinguishing one from the other (genuine – false asylum seekers) (Scholar opposing immigration)

*Managerialist frame.* This frame has been used by all PENs to define problems in relation to the arrival and settlement of refugees at the local level and what caused conflictual events. National asylum policies were considered as inefficient as they do not take into consideration the needs of asylum seekers (framing of those favourable to immigration), and/or opinions of local communities (framing mainly among those opposed to immigration). However, lack of coordination between different levels of governance also concerns denial of adherence to the SIPROMI system by local authorities or the latter's participation in / support to protests against reception centres (see also Pettrachin 2019). In general, local 'crises' are seen as the result of mismanagement of asylum issues by national and European institutions. The following example is telling about this frame:

[...] there are cases of twelve migrants settled into a tiny district of six people [...]; or another example is that of one hundred migrants arriving to a mountainous village of eighty residents having an average age of 78, who do not even speak Italian (they speak local dialects) [...], where the Prefecture ordered gendarmerie to accompany the arrival of migrants over the night. [...] the problem, therefore, is the lack of dialogue between local administrations and national government and such cases do not favour a serene dialogue between authorities. (Journalist neutral towards immigration)

[D3.6. Framing asylum at the local level: experts' narratives of conflictual dynamics in the post-reception period in Italy]

#### 4.2. Frames of locals with expert (professional) knowledge (LEKs) in a small-medium city of Northern Italy

The analysis of discursive framing of conflictual asylum governance patterns in Busto Arsizio by locals with expertise in immigration reveals the use of the same four out five frames as PENs did to refer to the emergence of conflictual situations at the local level. As Table 3 shows, managerialist, economic, human rights and deservingness frames emerge from the analysis of LEKs narratives. Instead of a fear frame, though, an inconvenience frame is used by those actors opposing immigration.

Table 3 – Framing of asylum governance among LEKs

Framing process: problems, causes, moral evaluations and remedies		In favour	Neutral	Against
<b>Inconvenience frame</b>	Grouping of RAS in public spaces is negative, as they do nothing all day long			X
	RAS' protests created problems in the city			X
	It was impossible for Italian families to continue residing in the same building with hundreds of RAS. It is not fair that Italian families had to be evicted.			X
	RAS get drunk, become beggars wandering around the city			X
	Neighbours got annoyed by the presence of RAS			
<b>Economic frame</b>	It is unfair that RAS receive generous benefits			X
	New arrivals' insertion in the labour market penalize not only Italians, but also settled migrants			X
	The organisation that managed the local CAS made big profits and was corrupted	X	X	X
<b>Human rights frame</b>	The right of RAS to obtain an identity card claim by protesting	X		
	The right of refugees to good conditions at the structure	X	X	X
<b>Deservingness frame</b>	Differentiation between genuine and false asylum seekers		X	X
<b>Managerialist frame</b>	Mismanagement by the TSO in charge of the CAS center	X	X	X
	Bad/Oppportunistic management by the Prefecture	X	X	X
	Reception center hosting numerous RAS are problematic	X	X	X
	Local authorities remained rather inactive	X		
	Local authorities delayed the issuing of identity cards, thus feeding tensions	X		

[D3.6. Framing asylum at the local level: experts' narratives of conflictual dynamics in the post-reception period in Italy]

*Inconvenience frame.* Instead of a threat frame, LEKs opposing immigration used an inconvenience frame to refer to the settlement of numerous migrants in a large reception facility, and to protests and mobilizations from RAS. Poor living conditions in the reception center and inability to offer other services to RAS (e.g. language course, job opportunities) 'lead them to group together and spend their time in public spaces chattering and doing nothing', as one member of the anti-refugee committee explains. This kind of grouping is 'negative and inconvenient for locals and neighbours close to the reception facility'. Inconvenience also means annoyance to two Italian families who lived in the same building as almost two hundred people did.

We (municipality) tried to intermediate between the family and the cooperative; there were heavy daily quarrels (among RAS) harming the health of this family. (Local representative opposing immigration)

Concerning the protests of refugees claiming their right to better living conditions and to hold an ID document, mobilizations are portrayed in negative terms and are considered to have triggered the birth of the anti-refugee movement in the city as explained by one participant:

The Committee was born after the protest of the guys of that CAS. They had around the squares making a bit of mess, complaining about various things, including why the Municipality did not issue identity cards (Member of the anti-refugee committee)

*Economic Frame.* Our findings suggest an economic frame that relates to the functioning of the managing organisation and the financial benefits from the hospitality offered to RAS and the negative effects of the insertion of RAS in the local economy. On the one hand, KB organisation is defined as a corrupted organization that constitutes a case of the so-called 'business of hospitality'. This is because TSO abuse funds entitled to RAS .

I'm convinced that the famous 35 euro per day pocket money is not dedicated to them (RAS); only some euro go to their essentials (Member of the anti-refugee committee)

On the other hand, the insertion of RAS in the labour market create distortions as they are eager to work for very little or no money. The acceptance of low wages or volunteering creates social dumping, that is low-wage competition leads to wage depression and poor labour conditions for locals; even for settled migrants:

Some people argued that they (RAS) had to work for free as painters for the municipality, or as cleaners or gardeners. We're against this either because of the wage dumping discourse [...] or because of the fact that you (municipality) can give some money to painters of the city. Why do we have to deprive locals, or even the Tunisian guy who lives here, of this money? Let's also consider that

[D3.6. Framing asylum at the local level: experts' narratives of conflictual dynamics in the post-reception period in Italy]

business owners have to pay thousand euros for taxes, vocational training, security and so on. (Member of the anti-refugee committee)

*Human rights Frame.* This frame emphasizes the respect of the rights of RSAs. LEKs perceive that refugees hosted at the Via dei Mille CAS as abandoned and neglected people by the system of reception. RAS enjoyed poor living conditions and services even though these are considered basic rights. These perceptions were also common among those opposing immigration as other research highlighted (Castelli Gattinara, 2017). It seems that defence of democracy and European values among far right people does not only serve to highlight incompatibility between Europeans and Muslims, but also to justify their aversion against and uncritically discredit the reception system. In the words of a member of the anti-refugee committee:

Those guys (RAS) crowded in a building to do nothing; with cold or hot weather; the food was disgusting. They (TSO) made them live bad. They (RAS) do not have to be put in a building in this way: they were persons! (Member of the anti-refugee committee)

LEKs in favour of immigration portrayed RAS as citizens who have rights to identification documents. This was feasible only after RAS' protesting and meeting with the Prefect. Such protests were considered as 'the only way to obtain something (ID cards) which asylum seekers have right to' as an elected representative claimed. These protests were organised by RAS themselves as a refugee and other participants favourable to them claimed. Locals seem to have given them some advices when needed:

There have been protests of RAS who went to the Busto Arsizio station and then to Varese to meet the Prefect. There were all some locals there. I remember that I advised them to return to the structure, because if they wanted to obtain their rights, they had to respect the rules imposed by the TSO. [...] However, it is true that they freely organised the protests by their own. (Volunteer at a CAS facility favourable to immigrants)

*Deservingness Frame.* One reason why LEKs with neutral or negative attitudes towards immigration recommended that national policies should adopt a stricter definition of the notion of refugee is that they differentiated between genuine and bogus RAS. Economic migrants are seen as not deserving reception services. This element is also found at the core of the birth of the anti-refugee committee aiming to inform citizens about the falsity of economic migrants' requests.

We decided to set up this Committee [...] which had different characteristics than the usual anti-refugee Committee, because ours was first and foremost called 'That's enough with fake refugees'. It expressed a criticism against those who received all these refugees and asylum seekers who were supposed to flee from wars, but they actually they could not qualify to be asylum seekers,

[D3.6. Framing asylum at the local level: experts' narratives of conflictual dynamics in the post-reception period in Italy]

because there was no war in their countries of origin. (Member of the anti-refugee committee)

*Managerialist frame.* LEKs frame the arrival and settlement of RAS in their city by using a management frame. First, all participants refer to the mismanagement of the Via Dei Mille CAS by the TSO which was in charge of. As was also the case among PENs, while those opposing immigration locate this case of mismanagement in the general framework of a corrupted reception system engaging inadequate and fraudulent TSOs (Castelli Gattinara 2017), participants in favour of immigration (and those with neutral stances) portrayed the specific TSO as corrupted, placing though responsibility on the Prefecture. Although KB association had been accused of misconduct in the past, the Prefect is blamed for having acted in an erroneous way. A journalist in favour of immigration claimed that 'the choice of the Prefect was very opportunistic, because the manager of the KB cooperative was notorious for bankruptcies in the 1990s and 2000s'.

Another common issue in all narratives regards the capacity of reception facilities. By either recognizing that reception centers with limited number of applicants offer more opportunities in terms of integration (pro-migrant participants), or denouncing inefficiencies of reception centers hosting large number of applicants (participant opposing immigration), the latter type of facilities is considered as inadequate to provide beneficiaries good living conditions and opportunities to integrate in the local community. In addition, pro-migrants participants claimed that the problem also lied in the stance of local authorities. On the one hand, municipality did not take any responsibility regarding the reception of refugees as it did not adhere to the SPRAR system. On the other, municipality is considered to remain rather inactive or to delay the issuing of ID cards. Here, it is telling the following example regarding the issuing of identity cards for RAS:

None of them (local government) said: "We don't give them (RAS) identity cards because we don't want to". They (local government) said: 'We'll figure out it; we're doing so. there were some problems; we're not sure if it's up to us to issue the ID cards. (Local representative favourable to immigration)

## 5. Conclusions

When *fear* becomes *inconvenience*, and local authorities' opposition to RAS can also be passive, but harmful

This article aimed to study the ways in which experts frame conflictual situations in relation to the arrival and settlement of refugees and asylum seekers in local communities. It revealed that experts at the national and local levels insist on a *managerialist frame* that regards the way in which either private or public actors managed asylum issues. Even though previous works indicated that a left/right cleavage (pro/against migrants views) corresponded to a humanitarian or threat/security frames, our research showed that conflictual situations are identified mainly in management and governance terms by participants, despite different vocabulary and arguments used by each part. In contrast with previous research suggesting that a *managerialist frame* approaches immigration in depoliticized terms (Dekker and Scholten, 2017), our participants' narratives reflect the politicization of the migration/refugees issue that has been highlighted in other works (Colombo, 2018; Ambrosini, 2019). The *managerialist frame* is about inefficiency in implementing policies, lack of design; thoughtless/imprudent decisions that do not take into consideration migrants' and local communities needs and interests. This confirms views suggesting a crisis of the reception system, rather than other types of crisis (Rea et al., 2019).

Delving into the narratives of locals with expertise on immigration, we also found an *inconvenience frame* instead of a *fear frame* used by experts at the national scale, that is also common in the framing literature on immigration by those opposing immigration. This actually means that discourses on invasion, insecurity or fears connected to the presence of RAS may find little resonance when one actually delves into what happens in local communities. In other words, fears of invasion, terrorism, criminality or violence against women who are represented anxious about their safety (Dimitriadis et al., 2020) appear to be unfounded when it comes to concrete conflictual cases of settlement of RAS in local communities. Fears are reduced to inconvenience or discomfort for the residents because RAS group together and spend all day in the parks or squares. Such discourses are also in contrast with views against RAS' engagement in volunteering, thus weakening even more the argumentation of people opposing immigration. Other frames such as *socioeconomic, efficiency* (Spencer and Delvino, 2019) or *return home* (Nickels, 2009) did not emerge, which confirms that framing process is context-sensitive.

By focusing on the case study of Busto Arsizio, this article also added to the horizontal dimension of the MLG approach / battleground concept in two ways. On the one hand, apart from NGOs and specialized organizations, other TSOs, social movement and common citizens, refugees and asylum seekers themselves are engaged in fights related to the asylum process. As identified by several participants, obtaining identification documents seems to be an outcome achieved through the protests of RAS in Busto Arsizio and Varese,

[D3.6. Framing asylum at the local level: experts' narratives of conflictual dynamics in the post-reception period in Italy]

although assisted to a limited extent by locals sympathising them. On the other hand, the findings revealed a new form of interplay between public power and civil society / RAS that is located close to closure. We argue that local authorities may remain inactive in relation to asylum issues by not contributing to solve conflictual situations or by lingering and delaying the provision of services towards RAS. By not providing RAS with necessary services and rights, it can be claimed that this stance is a kind of 'passive opposition'. This attitude could be seen as efficient by those opposing immigration, but it can be also considered harmful to RAS, as the latter are deprived of public support, despite being a vulnerable population. All in all, we can argue that the question of RAS does not only regard the functioning of reception centers, but also a series of rights which RAS should access. Since their settlement, RAS interact with local public services because they have to follow several bureaucratic procedures. Therefore, interactions between RAS and public services may become another battleground in which civil society actors can also intervene as intermediaries to support RAS' rights (Ambrosini 2021).

Future research should focus more on case studies to identify the framing of immigration issues and dynamics in relations between public and private actors at the local level. This is becoming of increasing importance given the situation created due to the COVID-19 pandemic that is expected to have an impact on migrants and the reception of RAS.

[D3.6. Framing asylum at the local level: experts' narratives of conflictual dynamics in the post-reception period in Italy]

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