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Introduction

Understanding social innovation in refugee integration: actors, practices, politics in Europe

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The so-called 'refugee crisis' marked a crucial juncture in migration governance across Europe. Policy-makers and local communities face the challenge of receiving and integrating migrants (often in extremely vulnerable conditions) in a context of poor governance arrangements and rising skepticism, or even hostility. In the light of such a complex scenario, this special issue explores social innovation as a promising approach to refugee integration. Socially innovative practices are indeed based on the active engagement of policy-makers and assorted stakeholders— including target groups through co-creation. In the realm of asylum policies, social innovation can thus facilitate the meeting of refugees' needs as well as the benevolence of receiving communities, ultimately strengthening social cohesion in regions of settlement. Families hosting migrants at home, community-based cooperatives, and self-managed social spaces are all instances of socially innovative practices that are often initiated by non-state actors but that might be upscaled and transformed into fully fledged public policies—especially by policy-makers at the local and regional levels. The special issue will focus on labor, housing, and social integration of refugees (especially in the stages after their first reception) in the context of Central European cities and regions. The purpose is to develop conceptual tools for evaluating and designing socially innovative practices that might ultimately improve the social innovation capacity of local and regional governments. As the 'social innovation' concept risks to be ambiguous, the special issue will also allow researchers to develop a set of empirically grounded indicators for measuring social innovation capacity—especially based on the analysis of best practices that can be upscaled and replicated through mutual learning.

KEYWORDS: Social innovation; public governance; refugee integration; participatory governance systems; bottom-up participation; Central Europe

1. Introduction

During the last decades, scholarship in welfare policies has been showing an avid attention in the concept of 'social innovation', that is increasingly included among the buzz words used by policy-makers to frame and support local welfare reforms. Social innovative practices are increasingly considered as an ideal approach that welfare systems should incorporate to effectively tackle emerging and often wicked social problems. This approach includes a renewal in the ways of involving actors with different backgrounds with the aim of elaborating more inclusive and more participatory governance systems. Therefore,

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these practices engage multiple actors: from promoters, agents of change and social entrepreneurs, to social workers, claimants and even the service recipients. In the words of Moulaert et al. (2013) social innovation implies a governance change that improves bottom-up participation, protection of the rights of citizens and service users and collective decision-making systems.

Departing from the broad analytical framework set up by social innovation scholarship, that we present in the next section, this special issue aims at showing how innovative practices have been interpreted and then implemented in the specific realm of refugee integration, with a particular focus on the complicated transition from reception phase to an autonomous life. The articles included in this issue shed light on practices implemented both by state (e.g. local welfare department or even local courts) and non-state actors (NGOs and refugees themselves) in addressing the 'refugee crisis', in particular the time span from 2014 to 2018. Some articles also deal with the following phases of drop in arrivals and the need to start integration processes in a context of growing politicization of migration and growing issue salience. In fact, in the Eurobarometer survey of 2018, immigration was identified as one of the two most pressing concerns by 40% of EU citizens, which does not necessarily mean that they were all anti-immigration, but that the issue had an increasing salience (Geddes, Abdou, and Brumat 2020), that however finally played a paramount role in explaining the success of anti-immigration parties (Dennison and Geddes 2019).

Actually, in 2022 the war in Ukraine has substantially changed this scenario with respect to the concerns of the citizens of the European Union. In the 2022 Eurobarometer surveys, immigration dropped to sixth place among the 'most important issues facing the EU at the moment'. The increase in prices due to the energy crisis and the international and economic situation in general have taken over.

However, after the sharp drop in arrivals due to Covid-19, during 2022 and 2023 the number of asylum seekers is also increasing due to the instability in many African and Asian countries, including Tunisia (experiencing economic and democratic crisis), Afghanistan and Pakistan. Also, it must not be forgotten that the invasion of Ukraine by Russia has caused about 7 million refugees in the countries of the European Union.

This issue examines the role played by policy-makers, courts, NGOs, refugees and citizens in enhancing and, sometimes, hindering social innovative practice and governance. Therefore, the articles provide a better understanding of the actual challenge of refugee integration, of the possible sources of success and failure and of methodological and empirical tools which may support an improvement in governance dynamics.

2. A brief review of literature on social innovation

Social innovation becomes an increasingly widely used concept in both scientific research and political practice. Its popularized definition considers social innovations those 'innovations that are social in both their ends and their means' (Bureau of European Policy Advisors 2010, 9), referring generally to 'new ideas (products, services and models) that simultaneously meet social needs (more effectively than alternatives) and create new social relationships or collaborations' (ibid.). This rather vague definition is being stretched in many different political directions. In neoliberal, approaches, it tends to support social entrepreneurship in quasi-markets (Jenson 2015). In more progressive approaches it aims at changing social relations and power asymmetries in satisfying social needs by empowering the most vulnerable groups (Oosterlynck, Novy, and Kazepov 2019).

The latter definition of social innovation highlights also the importance of the underlying processes that kick-off change, allowing us to refer to a broader definition of vulnerability and need, which goes beyond mere economic disadvantage and considers also the mechanisms that produce social exclusion in various spheres of life that hinder people's full participation in society. Besides, this relational understanding of social innovation goes beyond individual vulnerability and tends to embed it in structural and intersecting social processes, which produce hardship and cumulate conditions of disadvantage.

Putting forward socially innovative initiatives implies to identify unmet social needs and in doing this, often two aspects are identified as crucial: (1) the local dimension of social innovation and (2) the role of civil society. As regard the former aspect, the local dimension is identified as a key entry point. Indeed, localized practices and local policies often help socially excluded and vulnerable individuals and social groups to satisfy basic needs for which no adequate solution seem to exist in available welfare policies or on the market. For this reason, social innovation has been the subject of extensive research in local development studies and urban studies (Martinelli, Moulaert, and Novy 2013). It leads to the latter aspect: exactly these researches contributed to challenge the underlying logic of bureaucratic centralized welfare systems by highlighting also the importance of initiatives involving civil society actors, social entrepreneurs and local governments that respond to unmet social needs in innovative ways. Social innovation adds new actors (e.g. social entrepreneurs) or redefines the role of existing actors (third sector actors or local governments), introduces new instruments (e.g. based on participation of clients) and puts forward new goals (e.g. recognizing diversity in social service provision). The joint effect of these two aspects is a process of *subsidiarization* (Kazepov 2008) that is characterized by a complex process of institutional reconfiguration of welfare states, leading to a more articulated welfare mix (Ascoli and Ranci 2002) and multilevel governance arrangements (Kazepov 2010).

The challenges of social innovation

The emphasis in the social innovation literature on local and bottom-up dynamics entails manifold risks and challenges for both social research and action (Oosterlynck, Novy, and Kazepov 2019; Campomori and Casula 2022; Casula, Leonardi, and Zancanaro 2022). We can identify five main challenges.

A first challenge is given by the risk of falling into 'the local trap' by assuming that the local scale is preferable to larger scales because 'localized decision-making is inherently more socially just or ecologically sustainable' than decision-making at other scales (Purcell and Brown 2005, 280). The local trap can be avoided only by embracing a more comprehensive and relational approach on how social innovation moves between and across scales. This does not mean that the local does not play a relevant and *special* role, but it questions its uniqueness by disentangling the complex mix of multiple scales and multiple actors at the very basis of socially innovative initiatives (Kazepov, Saruis, and Colombo 2019).

A second challenge is given by the fragmentation of the multiple actors and scales involved in socially innovative initiatives. These require an increasing coordination effort, involving resources and institutional capacity to govern the emerging complex welfare mix. In order to avoid unequal access and the tension between context-bound particularism and universal rights, mainstreaming successful initiatives are a possible strategy. However, these attempts usually aimed at increasing the impact of socially

innovative initiatives are indeed deemed to fail if they do not consider their context-bound character.

A third challenge considers the need to unveil the attempts to avoid public responsibility by offloading it to civil society, whose involvement in the provision of social services and resources has been often used to justify decreasing public commitment and to reduce the financial burden on public budgets. Social innovation should not become a Trojan horse of neoliberal attempts of 'dismantling' the welfare state.

A fourth challenge is to kick-off institutional learning processes and to find enabling legal frameworks which allow socially innovative initiatives to unfold on the one side and to consolidate and upscale them on the other. A major difficulty in this process is given by the fact that the mechanisms of representative democracy and citizenship rights might be inadequate to transfer insights from social innovation initiatives geared at vulnerable groups into policy making. The weak voice and position of vulnerable groups in the political debate require strong advocacy groups in times of welfare restructuring and change.

A fifth challenge is related to the transformative potential of socially innovative initiatives involving new participatory practices and bottom-linked activities across scales in multilevel governance arrangements (Benz 2021). Does participation involve the most vulnerable ones, how are governance arrangements involving civil society accountable and improve democracy? Are they redistributive and improving equality or just reproducing power asymmetries in practice?

Understanding how these five challenges unfold in different welfare systems is an empirical question. In general, socially innovative initiatives that work best are relational, i.e. context-sensitive and their innovativeness derives from being embedded in specific spatial and institutional contexts. The different underlying regulatory principles give rise to different institutional architectures, which constrain and enable social entrepreneurs, local governments and civil society organizations to develop, sustain and spread socially innovative initiatives.

3. Social innovation for refugee integration in the EU

Immigrant integration policies, including refugee integration, are an EU member states competence, meaning that national laws take precedence, and the EU cannot regulate this issue through binding regulation or directives. However, since the Treaty of Amsterdam (1999), migration and asylum issues have fallen within EU's legal framework, thus paving the way for a 'soft' governance (Geddes, Abdou, and Brumat 2020, 162) on integration, with an emphasis on measures that seek to promote cooperation, coordination and sharing of ideas and best practices. Examples of this attempt to Europeanise immigrant integration through soft governance are the Common Basic Principles for Immigration and Integration policy (2004) and the Common Agenda for Integration (2005). Later, the European Commission published a European Agenda for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals (2011) and—more recently—a subsequent Action Plan (2016) for promoting the diffusion of policy ideas and creating a European Integration Network and a European Integration Forum for exchange between civil society and EU institutions. Moreover, within the Europe 2020 strategy, both the priority 'fostering a high-employment economy delivering social and territorial cohesion' and the flag initiative 'European platform against poverty' aim at designing and implementing programs to promote social innovation for the most vulnerable and to develop a new agenda for migrants' integration. As noted by Geddes, Abdou, and Brumat (2020), another pillar of EU's soft integration concerns financial support for integration measures through various funding schemes,

including the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) (20% of the budget should have been allocated to integration measures between 2014 and 2020), the European Social Fund (ESF)—which funded the project Migrantes, analyzed in Dallara et al. in this issue —and programs like Interreg Central Europe, that in the 2014–2020 period funded several projects on migrant integration, among which SIforREF (Social Innovation for Refugees), that inspired this Special Issue.

Since the 2010s the so-called civic integration turn featured integration policies in many EU countries. This approach consists in the formal obligation for immigrants to acquire the language of the receiving countries, to become familiar with its political institutions, history, values and norms in order to obtain social benefit and/or not to lose benefit or legal residence status. Civic integration has been used also as a tool for preventing immigration through the pre-entry integration test (Joppke 2017). While the civic integration turn has created a kind of convergence in the integration policies of the EU states, the arrival of a significant number of refugees following the war in Syria, and the instability in many countries of the global south, has raised new challenges for the integration. In particular, differences emerged more clearly between countries with a longer experience of welcoming refugees (such as Germany) and countries which, in addition to having less experience, also found themselves with governments that were distrustful if not hostile toward asylum seekers (such as Italy or Slovenia). In general, there is no doubt that the refugee issue affected all European countries (although not with the same intensity) and that it is a common issue of interest. Needless to say, the effectiveness of reception policies and measures has to be placed within a scenario characterized by a significantly uneven distribution of economic strength, which also implies differences between urban and industrialized areas vs rural and peripheral ones (or with less employment opportunities).

Precisely the relative novelty and unpreparedness of public actors have created fertile ground for the emergence of socially innovative practices both promoted from below by civil society actors and by public actors at the local level. Prominent examples of socially innovative practices in refugee integration include homestay accommodation for refugees. In Italy, homestay is part of the refugee reception policy decided and implemented exclusively at local level. It consists in hosting refugees or asylum seekers in domestic facilities shared with non-refugees. This practice is usually implemented by third-sector organizations which act on behalf of local authority and support all the phases of this hospitality (i.e. they maintain relations both with refugees and with the host families), but it is also a practice implemented by voluntary association by their own (like Caritas or Refugees Welcome), without any support or mandate by public actors (Bassoli and Campomori 2022). Reception in families gained momentum in the peak of the refugee crisis, but also in the first phase of reception of Ukrainian refugees in the spring of 2022 it was used as one of the main ways to deal with the emergency. Another social innovative practice implemented by NGOs in Italy is mentoring, which in part derives from the homestay. Mentoring is conceived as soft accompaniment (which does not imply co-housing) of young refugees, to support them in social integration and in the various bureaucratic practices necessary for the management of ordinary life. Mentors are people who act as volunteers and are trained by the organizations who promoted this practice.

4.   The contribution of the inter-reg project SIforREF in enhancing a socially innovative approach to refugees

The project idea of SIforREF[1] arose at the end of 2017 in response to a call on the topic of (social) innovation coming from the Interreg Central Europe program. At that time,

Europe was in the midst of the so-called refugee crisis and of the concerns created by the arrival in Europe of a significant number of asylum seekers, if compared to previous years. One of the themes that were evident in those years, and which is still a theme, was the often emergency logic with which the issue relating to refugees was addressed and, in particular, the almost total absence of post-reception measures.

Therefore, the main objective of the SIforREF project has been to overcome the short-termism of reception policies and address the issue of the medium- or long-term integration of refugees (see Campomori and Casula in this issue). Actually, the challenge that the project aimed to address is combating the risk of marginalization of refugees after the reception phases taking into account the existing social, economic and political differences in the various central European Countries, as well as the common framework, albeit very loose, given by the European Union. Overcoming the short-termism meant to engage in enhancing or to launch (where not existing at all) refugee integration policies at regional and local level in five involved cities (Vienna, Berlin, Ljubljana, Parma and Bologna), particularly addressing refugees' transition from reception phases to autonomy.

In a scenario characterized by uncertainty, emergency logics and growing anti-immigrant sentiments, social innovation seemed the most suitable approach to invest in, in order to: give greater visibility to existing practices, improve them and make them more scalable, explore specific methodologies to design innovative practices to be presented to policy-makers, showing the advantages of using this approach and the importance of the involvement of public actors together with civil society. As we have seen above, innovative practices had already arisen in many contexts (e.g. homestay accommodation for refugees), but there was a lack of systematization and, above all, the need for the development of tools to evaluate those practices emerged. The project has taken charge of this, starting from the evaluation of some good practices and above all from the implementation of seven pilot actions that have been co-designed putting into practice methodologies inspired by social innovation (see Campomori and Casula in this issue).

These seven pilot actions have been implemented in five different European cities (Vienna, Bologna, Parma and Ljubljana) that are part of four national asylum policies that display differences not only as concern the legislative framework for refugee integration and its evolution in the last decade but also as concern the multilevel dynamics of asylum. The main differences between the national asylum policies of Italy, Germany, Austria and Slovenia are summarized in Table 1, while Table 2 provides a comparative overview of the four local asylum systems included in this issue. To better understand these systems we provide a brief overview of their main characteristics as they appeared at the moment in which this research was conducted (until the middle of 2021).

Bologna and Parma have traditionally been cities open to asylum, also thanks to the coordination of a progressive authority such as the Emilia-Romagna Region and which —albeit with different nuances—have continued to be welcoming even during the refugee crisis. In this circumstance, the fundamental role of civil society organizations in guaranteeing services clearly emerged, while they also continued to maintain a high level of dialogue and collaboration with the municipal administrations. Indeed, the asylum system in Bologna is characterized by a strong collaboration between public and private actors that had facilitated the implementation of social innovative practices. In general, the long tradition of strong and stable inter-institutional collaboration, on one hand, and the great sensitivity and attention shown to the issue by civil society, on the other hand, have made the most general dysfunctionality deriving from the most recent governmental interventions. They were also able to mitigate the possible dysfunctionalities of the Bologna governance system, which represent an 'unicuum' in the

Table 1.   Comparing national asylum policies.

		Austria	Germany	Italy	Slovenia
Establishment of the first asylum policies	Year/Period	1968	1950s	2000s	2010s
	Main characteristics	Presence of an 'Integration Act', aimed: (i) to protect the state from asylum and welfare abuse; (ii) to guarantee a quick integration into the domestic labor market	Focus on reception conditions, detention and the nature of protection	As for integration policies, a Protection System for Asylum-Seekers and Refugees (SPRAR) was first enacted in 2002, but on a very limited scale	Weak system, almost not existing before 2010s
Most recent changes		Since 2016, more restrictive policies, boarder controls, the shutdown of the 'Balkan route' and limits to the share of refugees were introduced	Adoption of more restrictive measures for refugees who do not gain full protection in court	Strong politicization of immigration, with a restrictive discourse on asylum	Restrictions on access to asylum procedures
Multilevel governance of asylum	Vertical dimension	Well established, with shared competences at regional and local levels	Established, but partially conflictual	Several conflicts among institutions and levels of government	Weak, only mono-level governance of international protection exists
	Horizontal dimension	Strong, with presence of the so-called 'social partnership' (Sozialpartnerschaft)	Strong, with crucial rule for the private actors, welcoming networks and NGOs (services are contracted-out)	Reception and integration services are normally contracted-out to both for-profit and non-profit organizations & Strong diffusion of anti-immigrant groups	Partially present, NGOs and other civil associations provide outsourcing of integration and inclusion practices

Table 2. Comparing local asylum systems.

	Vienna	Berlin	Bologna	Parma	Lijubiana
System	Although the federal level can overrule the local/city level, the city of Vienna has a special status in decision-making, which grants power to regulate and access resources, and to implement policies	Refugees are distributed throughout the country in accordance with the *Königsteiner Schlüssel* formula. Berlin's quota is a bit over 5%	Establishment, starting from the beginning of this decade, of a metropolitan-based SPRAR system, based on the idea of a reception spread in the whole territory	Institution of the SPRAR system, with the Province of Parma that played a fundamental role coordinating all actors, public and private, involved in this issue	Despite almost all the activities are in the hands of the State, creation of a local network with the involvement of various public and private actors
Inter-institutional collaboration	Strong	Present, with some disputes between the federal and the regional level	Long tradition of strong and stable inter-institutional collaboration	Relevant, with the involvement of the Province of Parma	Not well established, only one level of government is present
Collaboration between public and private actors	Strong, but to be improved to meet the specific skills required in the labor market more efficiently	Present	Strong, that had facilitated the implementation of social innovative practices	Strong	Strong
Civil society involvement	Non-permeability for new actors (such as civic associations) and non-sustainability of long-term funding that create a structural weakness, overall	Present, and strong	Strong, with great sensitivity and attention	Not relevant	Presence of a strong civilian sector implementing individual integration programs

(*Continued*)

Table 2.   Continued.

	Vienna	Berlin	Bologna	Parma	Lijubiana
City Government' political vision to follow refugees' integration and inclusion processes	More open as compared to the national government	Clear, with several initiatives and organizations set-up in the last years	Clear	Clear	Supportive of refugees on the declarative level, but the refuge question is not a city priority
Social integration	To be improved	Established, with margins of improvement	Established, with margins of improvement	Established, with margins of improvement	To be improved
Labor market integration	To be improved, in particular the process of recognition of qualifications	Established, with margins of improvement	To be improved	To be improved	To be improved
Housing integration	Highly problematic	Established, with margins of improvement	Absent, without a clear political vision	Absent, without a clear political vision	Highly problematic

national and European panorama. In fact, the originality of this system concerns the establishment, starting from the beginning of this decade, of a metropolitan-based SPRAR system began, based on the idea of a reception spread in the whole territory (metropolitan area) in flats and small spaces where migrants could better integrate with local communities. Similarly, although recent policies seem weaker, than the past ones, the will of the city government in Parma to follow refugees' integration and inclusion processes is clear. The strong collaboration between public and private actors characterizes the Parma's system and its strength is based on this assumption.

Berlin and Vienna have also traditionally been welcoming cities. Indeed, the Viennese case is characterized by the strong cooperation of public and private actors across multiple levels of government and the availability of public funding to subsidies policies and measures aimed at migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. However, the non-permeability for new actors (such as civic associations) and non-sustainability of long-term funding creates a structural weakness, overall. Internationally as well as nationally, Vienna is known as a socially responsible city, mostly because of the 'Red Vienna' history, characterized by a high share of social housing programers and accompanying social policies. As concern Berlin, instead, two main lessons may be learned from the last years. First, the administration needs to function effectively. The failure in providing good services to refugees—especially in 2015–2016—created a severe crisis. Second, the question is whether the asylum clause in the basic law can efficiently serve to solve crises facing refugees due to global wars.

As concern for Ljubljana, in this country, there is no real local reception system due to the small size of the country and the low number of refugees. However, Slovenian asylum policies are restrictive: as emerged in the field research done within SIforREF, the intentions of Slovenian government are to establish a kind of 'Boutique refugee integration system'. It is a strange combination of ignorance, cynicism, lack of responsibility, cluelessness and alienation from the realities of local and global levels.

The articles presented in this Special Issue explore the characteristics of the asylum system of these five cities. We are aware that some new elements that occurred in the last year were not considered. These are intervening factors that have undoubtedly changed the situation in more recent years, not least the already mentioned Russo-Ukrainian war. These recent factors have also introduced a geopolitical stratification among asylum seekers which highlights the very political nature of the processes, beyond procedures, statements of principles and rights. These cities reacted also differently to these more recent changes. Our analysis, however, provides the background against which future research can embed and interpret current developments.

5.   This issue: understanding social innovation in refugee policies

As mentioned above, collectively the articles in the issue show concrete applications of social innovation practices in the realm of refugee reception and integration. They also examine a range of factors that can enhance or hinder the success of these practices. Ultimately, this issue provides a greater understanding of the actors involved in social innovation practices with a particular focus on examining the role and interactions between public and private actors.

The issue starts with the contribution of Francesca Campomori and Mattia Casula, who present an analytical framework for analyzing the governance dimension of innovation, which is at the heart of all contributions to the issue. This article fits into the debate on the evaluation of social innovation, which is here considered in its processual

dimension, contributing in the outline of a methodology for designing a socially innovative governance system. In outlining a three-step framework for a socially innovative oriented governance, the authors underline the prominent role that the state should assume, maintaining its non-delegable role of overseeing the rights and duties of citizens and an equal distribution of opportunities, also protecting vulnerable people and minorities in their access to welfare. The proposed method is then applied to refugee integration drawing from the activities implemented in SIforREF.

In their contribution, Dallara, Lacchei and Verzelloni outline how a social innovation practice can upscale from a specific context (local court) to the national level, thanks to the role of a 'scale-keeper'. In this case, the scale-keeper is a judge, who managed to make the leap from locally implemented practice to national the national level: he in fact managed to raise awareness of influential policy-makers about the ingredients of success in solving problems (to improve the judicial procedures con asylum claims) which are far from being just local. A particular aspect of the practice described in this article is that the innovation started from a sui generis actor such as a court, normally considered as an actor not inclined to innovations. Furthermore, the entire project was born with a strong desire for scalability and therefore the analysis of its evolution provides a contribution to a still underdeveloped literature (up-scaling of SI).

Elisabetta Mocca, Pamela Pasian and Byeongsun Ahn continue to analyze social innovation practices that arise from public actors, focusing in this case on the local governments of Vienna and Bologna. Authors' aim is to set out whether, how and to what extent institutional actors trigger Social Innovation at the local level in relation to the enhancement of labor market and social integration of refugees and asylum seekers. In describing similarities and differences in the paths of the two cities (with particular reference to the role of civil society organizations and their relations with local administration), the article provides insights on the factors that influence the development of social innovative practices and it usefully connects them with the findings of the scholarship on social innovation.

Judith Schnelzer, Yvonne Franz, Elisabetta Mocca and Yuri Kazepov continue to keep the focus on the institutional actors, highlighting the characteristics of the Austrian multi-level system that tend to act as a barrier for the integration of refugees, also due to a national approach to refugee integration long characterized by welfare chauvinism. Authors show the discrepancy between the increasingly strict migration and asylum policy at the central government level and the integration system of the city of Vienna, which enjoys a dual status of federal state and municipality (therefore has a significant level of autonomy in the multilevel governance framework) and can count on a tradition of social democratic political culture. Mobilizing the heuristic tool of Actor-centred institutionalism the article shows many strengths and some weaknesses of Vienna's institutional systems. The main elements on which the assessment is based concern vertical and horizontal multi-governance relationships and in part the dynamics of politics.

Barbara Beznec and Jure Gomcac in continuing to reflect on the integration of refugees departing from the 2015–2017 crisis, shift the focus to integration policies and practices in less experienced Slovenia, where the first official government strategy on integration was adopted only very recently. The article shows how, despite a political system generally hostile to refugees and the almost total absence of public policies, a system of practices of solidarity and 'acts of citizenship' has developed from below (Isin and Nielsen 2008). Authors also present a selection of these practices using the analytical lens of social innovation.

From a beginner in refugee policies to an experienced country: Tobias Biehle and Czarina Wilpert describe a bottom-up process of social innovation in Berlin, with a

particular focus on the labor market inclusion of refugee women. By adopting the perspective of social innovation as a process and the three-step framework proposed by Campomori and Casula (in this issue), they explicitly refer to the SiforREf's activities. In particular, their article is based on the two Berlin pilot actions that had as target-group refugee women (in most cases over 35 years of age) in search of training to enter the labor market. These practices have been implemented by two NGOs well experienced in social work with refugees, with the support of the Technical University of Berlin, who granted skills in citizen engagement, technology and assessment of social innovation practices. According to the goal of SIforREF the implementation of these practices also foresaw the search of interaction with policy-makers in the attempt of influencing local policies, i.e. up-scaling innovation.

Note

1. SIforRef, Integrating Refugees in Society and Labor Market through Social Innovation—CE1527.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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