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Following the Balkan Migration Route: Informal Spatial Practices Created by “People on the Move”

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Abstract. Informal migrations from the Middle East and North Africa to Europe since 2015 and their social, economic, and political implications have attracted the attention of the general public and policymakers, but have also been the focus of research in numerous social and urban studies. As a region in the transitional phase, and officially in the process of EU accession, the Western Balkan countries offer a special perspective. In that sense, Serbia, as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), play important roles as countries that border the EU, and therefore suitable ground for the analysis of the practices of setting boundaries, actual state of porosity of boundaries set, both symbolic and physically at the local and global level. An increasing number of migrants has developed various informal spatial practices, as well as initiated changes in public spaces. The new dynamics emphasize these spaces' characteristics as those of public and collective participation, as well as of potential conflicts, and permanent transformation processes. On the one hand, massive migration flows have triggered increased nationalism, xenophobia, and fear, but have also increased civic engagement and led to new solidarities, not only 'from above', but also 'from below'. This article examines public spaces beyond a neoliberal discourse by highlighting their function as meeting points, offering possibilities for dialog between 'privileged' and 'unprivileged' population.

Keywords. Informal practices, public space, solidarity, discrimination practices, Balkan migration route.

1. Introduction

Massive migrations from the Middle East and North Africa to Europe in 2015, known also as the 'summer of migration', have been triggered by such obvious events as the Arab Spring and the wars in Syria and Iraq, but also by the abstruse structural settings of global power relationships, and consequently, increasing socioeconomic problems in the prior regions. Migrants who have been forced or who have decided to leave their homes in search for a safer life are frequently forced to face harsh circumstances, including trafficking and smuggling [1], to reach their desired destinations. These recent migrations are seen often as the most significant

relocation of people since the Second World War, in which a large number of migrants are attempting to reach developed European countries.

The European Union (EU) had no uniform policy on migrants at the beginning of the “migrant crisis” in 2015, when the Balkan route became an important transit area on the migrants’ way to Western Europe. Initially, certain European countries were rather hospitable to migrants, but most of the EU members established rigid border control quickly. Therefore, countries along the Balkan transit route had to develop potential accommodations for migrants who (unwillingly) had to stay there longer than planned.

Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) play significant roles along the migration route. As countries that border the EU, they are one of the last stations for migrants before they reach their desired destinations. Serbia was already a hotspot during the first wave of the migration, with more than half a million registered migrants [2]. Rigid border control in Hungary, as well as the fence that the Hungarian government installed along the border with Serbia in the middle of 2015, changed many people’s migration plans forcibly. In addition, at approximately the same time, Croatia also established rigorous control of migrants on its border with Serbia. Consequently, BiH has become a new center of humanitarian crisis and the primary station toward developed European countries since 2018, when the migrants’ progress was restricted through harsh border control and violence. Most migrants arrive in BiH from Serbia, but also through alternative routes from Albania and Montenegro [3].

Thousands of kilometers that migrants travel are marked by informality. They embark on a long and uncertain journey without really knowing what lies ahead and often with no time to wait for official channels. Migrant camps, a number of which arose along the migration route from Turkey to the EU, are official points that migrants face. Further, there are also formal and informal help and information desks NGOs, local organizations, and informal groups of volunteers organized. Informal communication among migrants, but also with locals, plays an important role in their progress to their destination. Urban regions along the migration route that are transportation hubs and socioeconomic centers offer a framework for such dynamics. Further, migrants who spend a certain time in an urban region develop particular new spatial practices and spatial representations that are largely inherently informal.

To avoid the dichotomy of refugee vs. economic migrant, we will use the term ‘migrant’ in the inclusive sense [4], which involves heterogeneous groups of people referred to as refugees, asylum seekers, economic migrants, smuggling and human trafficking victims, who are often women, minors, and other vulnerable groups, and undocumented persons [3]. As most of the migrants located in the Balkan countries are in transit to reach developed countries in Europe, rather than permanent immigrants, we address this group as ‘people on the move’. Daily practices in public spaces on the part of ‘people on the move’ are characterized necessarily as informal actions outside the formal regulated and permitted framework. According to national and international agencies’ formal regulations, practices and narratives, the scope of action in a space authorized for ‘people on the move’, are within confines enclosed within specialized camps marked by strict hierarchical power relationships. Peripheralization and expulsion from public spaces outside of the public eye leads to additional vulnerabilities and marginalization of the migrant population, what is recognized as a practice of the ‘politics of exhaustion’ [5]. On the other end of the spectrum, in contrast to national and international agencies’ exclusionary practices following the logic of ‘methodological nationalism’, the presence and practices of ‘people on the move’ in public spaces allow encounters with the settled population and trigger new dynamics and relationships that can act inclusively with more horizontal power relationships or produce conflict, but both leads to negotiation and participation.

This article is designed to trace and study informal spatial practices triggered by the recent migration processes, as well as their following effects, in public spaces along the so-called Balkan migration route in Serbia and BiH. The article uses examples from Serbia and BiH, but attempts to draw conclusions valid in a broader international context. Our goal is to investigate beyond the official level and reflect spatial dynamics influenced by migrants along with related issues. The way these motions function, which actors are involved, the way they are interrelated with regular spatial dynamics, are some of the questions that arise. This research is based on a desk analysis of already existing data (secondary research) with the goal to reflect the topic of migration movements and the informal practices they foster. As the topic of the Balkan migration route has been very dynamic during the last years, in addition to scientific literature and official reports, our investigation uses newspaper, media and online sources to remain abreast of the changes. We apply current concepts in social and urban theory in their actual context and, to make the migrants' participation in local practices and public spaces salient, we use a threefold structure in the text. First, we present a brief retrospective of the humanitarian crisis, which is referred to in EU discourses as the "migrant crisis", and place it into the related context, then present useful theoretical concepts, and finally attempt to bridge the critical migration and urban studies related to concepts of informal spatial practices, solidarity, and citizenship.

2. The "Migrant Crisis" in Europe—A brief retrospective, developments, and issues

So-called "migrant crisis" clearly attracted public attention from the whole European continent and rose awareness to the significant geo-political and social events taking place on the borders of the continent. Hence, it is important to reconstruct the developments relevant to the issue.

The "migrant crisis" upset the EU in 2015, when approximately 1.2 million people entered the territories of largely four countries—Germany, Austria, Hungary, and Sweden [6]. At the beginning of the process, Germany, for example, generally welcomed migrants. German chancellor Angela Merkel advocated regular distribution quotas between the states' members despite resistance on the part of the governments of the UK and EU members from the Central and Eastern part of the continent [7]. That period was characterized by Merkel's well-known statement "Wir schaffen das" (We can do it), as well as by the Refugees Welcome movement [8]. On the other hand, at the same time, there was also strong anti-migrant feeling on the part of the German population, which was channeled primarily through the protests organized by PEGIDA (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident), and through actions of the right-wing party Alternative für Deutschland (Alternative for Germany), which entered the German Parliament in 2017 with a strong anti-migrant campaign. Elements of the ruling party (Christian Democrats), particularly those from Bavaria, were also opposed to massive migrations, and pro-migrant enthusiasm in Germany flagged quickly.

The Hungarian government began to build a fence on the Hungarian-Serbian border in the middle of 2015 to stop further migration. Further, several countries suspended the Schengen system in part and introduced strict controls on their borders. It was clear that European unity was put to the test, but also that basic European values, such as humanitarianism and human rights, were under threat. The "migrant crisis" raised numerous issues in Europe—from constant crises on the borders and identity questions, to the rise of populist nationalism, racialized nativism, and so-called antiterrorist securitization [9]. Incoherent and ineffective answers from European political elites pointed to complex and wider problems that European societies are facing [10]. Countries used different pro- and anti-European narratives to justify deportation or non-acceptance of "unwanted migrants", such as using EU resources (institutions, legal, financial, and political support), proclaiming that particular lands were safe, or externalizing

migrants' reception on the one hand, while on the other hand acting unilaterally when common EU decisions were not perceived to be in the national interest [6]. Political debate on the "migrant crisis" in Germany, but also in the remainder of Europe, was dominated by the following four political arguments: Liberal rationalism; anti-liberal realism; Marxist revolutionism, and Maussian solidarism [11]. Liberal rationalism addresses migrants as possible consumers and members of the workforce, as well as a potential solution for the forthcoming demographic problems in Europe. Anti-liberal realism is at the core of far-right political parties and is based on the anxiety that migrants, particularly those with an Islamic background, will alter and jeopardize traditional European society. Marxist revolutionism is on the opposite end of the political spectrum and claims that the contemporary migrations are the product of the liberal-capitalist order and offer an opportunity to change it by adjusting global inequalities. Solidarism is reflected in a welcoming culture toward migrants and gift exchange in the Maussian sense.

Numerous migrants remained in reception centers in Southern Italy and the Greek islands. As ineffective political elites in the EU were unable to reach a consensus and cope with the rising humanitarian crisis, they decided to externalize the issue and set rigid borders outside or on the edges of the Union's borders. In that sense, the arrangement between the EU and Turkey played an important role. Many migrants are deported to Turkey, and in return, Turkey received EUR 6 billion in financial aid, as well as promises of political concessions, such as re-launching the EU-accession negotiations and a faster visa-liberalization process [6] (p. 109). The European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), as well as other agencies, obtained new permissions and also played a considerable role by stopping those who attempted to reach Europe by sea [12]. Today, most migrants who are not stopped on the European borders or not deported back to their country of origin are in the reception centers.

This crisis escalated in the Western Balkans countries, after further migrations became restricted. Some people, probably reluctantly, remained trapped in those countries without the possibility to advance or return. In 2015, approximately 600,000 migrants were registered in Serbia, and since then their number has fallen rapidly, as, for most, Serbia is a transitional country on their route [13]. Approximately 9,000 migrants in 2020 are located in reception centers around Serbia [14]. BiH authorities registered approximately 30,000 migrant arrivals in 2019, while it is estimated that between 7,000-8,000 migrants are in the country at any given time [15]. Migrants are not only in the reception centers, but also are occupying spaces in areas where they stay shorter or longer, which are often public spaces in urban areas, or informal camps close to the EU borders.

During the migration process some sites have a critical importance for the 'people on the move'. Urban regions, migration camps, and national borders could be recognized as the focal points because of various reasons.

Increasing number of migrants during the last years pointed out challenges towards legal frameworks, human rights, and governance, and also emphasized importance of the urban regions in promoting integration and social cohesion [16]. The importance of urban regions and using public spaces for non-citizens applies to several additional aspects. Public spaces provide resources to form social ties with the local population. These are places where non-citizens can obtain material or symbolic help, rather than hierarchical institutionalized help, places where citizens and non-citizens can meet and initiate spontaneous civic actions, which often open space for practices of inclusive citizenship and bottom-up solidarity. Finally, those places can provide a sense of freedom and connection, offer resources for economic goods, build social capital, and room for agency as publicly visible human beings.

In the name of humanitarian care, but also law, order, cleanliness, security, and the fight against informality with respect to undocumented “strangers” and public spaces’ use, migrants are pushed outside of the public spaces continuously, and confined to migrant camps. Migration camps on one hand represent formal and organized structures where migrants are registered, get shelter, food, and medical help. On the other hand, there are also negative side of such arrangement. Migrants are often deprived of the possibility of entering the stock market, their freedom of movement is limited, and the space of civil rights and legality closed. Thus, they are generally deprived of the possibility of any further individual fight, not simply to realize their life plans, but even to survive. Migrants are placed outside space and time, which is defined by the break in the usual life course where they lose their identity and depend on professional organizations’ protection: “A refugee doesn’t have any economic activity. They are taken care of by humanitarian organizations: no more land for plowing, no more jobs to be done. Their world is reduced to the daily life of a camp, and their identity equalized to the confirmation of a right to a food portion” [17] (p. 227). Abeles emphasized that, as the best example of their marginal condition, people in migrant camps are deprived of power and freedom and of all options. Migration camps are “non-places” in Augenian terms, as they are characterized by constant transition and temporality and do not allow any autonomy; therefore, persons within them lose their identity and become objects, or what corresponds to Foucault’s description of heterotopia as “...the spatial product of political will and governance, reflecting the constituting society and yet functioning according to their own rules” [18] (p. 70).

Finally, almost all European national states reacted to so-called “migrant crisis” by reintroduction and hardening border checks, and partly suspending even Schengen Agreement [19]. Thus, national borders became a critical element in the path of “people on the move”. The impossibility of crossing the border at official checkpoints has led migrants to seek informal solutions that are often accompanied by many dangers, but also by the brutal reactions of police forces.

3. Theoretical background

It is already mentioned that public urban spaces and informality are two concepts which play important role in processes related to the ‘people on the move’. Therefore, these two concepts should be clarified before moving forward.

The way public spaces are defined has social effects within a city, but before that, dominant discourses and ideologies about public goods, citizens’ interests, and legal and illegal actors derived from social structures influence the definition of public space. The common narrative of public spaces describes them as democratic places where pluralism, heterogeneous groups, and activities are embraced, and such an understanding is characterized by collective use. De facto, either in Ancient Greece, for example, or in modern society, public space with the idea of openness and inclusiveness was never achieved genuinely [20]. Although public and collective participation characterize public space, some groups have limited or no access to it at all, such as slaves, women, or common people in the ancient agora, or people of certain socioeconomic status in the contemporary world (e.g., the homeless [21,22]). However, public urban space is one where people of different social and economic classes meet regardless of whether it is desired, which therefore creates potential conflicts [23]. It is also evident that in the past several decades, these spaces have transformed commonly into areas of commerce, consumption, and political surveillance [24]. Recognizing the complex structure of urban public spaces leads to recognizing also informal influences which affects them. Scholars view informality in public spaces as representations of agency, creativity, and ingenuity [25]. Following that rationale, it is important to extend beyond the usual research framework that

focuses on the “legal” resident population and investigate informality through the lens of illegality and marginalization, i.e., to localize and present the point of intersection between economic, social, and spatial informality.

Discussion about ‘informality’ changes the focus throughout the time—from informality as an economic sector, to informal urban development, and finally, to informality as a ‘way of life’—all of which are associated with tolerated and systematic violation of regulations, unclear responsibilities, illegal markets, nontransparent decision-making procedures, and similar occurrences [26]. The regional focus of ‘informality’ studies is directed largely to the Global South, where forms of informality (e.g., street hawking) offer the locals affordable alternatives in the form of “long-term temporariness” [27]. We argue that in Global North, characterized by the practices of high-level bureaucratization and legal regulation of almost all social activities, informality happens within the gray area which is created as a consequence of the discrepancy between the demands of universal human rights on the one hand and the renationalization of nation-states on the other [28]. In this context, informality occurs precisely within the unregulated use of resources of the national territory. Nation states of Europe ignores the requirement to socially protect everyone in the territory of the state, or insufficiently meets these requirements, but at the same time they cannot bureaucratize, regulate and fully find legitimacy for such practices, primarily because they are contrary to the requirements of universal human rights. The only solution is to tolerate violation of regulations, unclear responsibilities, illegal markets, nontransparent decision-making procedures as the informality in the national territory by those who have no legal status, and at the same time to fight against that also by informal practices of their own which can lead to brutality.

Informal public spaces are not only unplanned parts of the city, but also are an antipode to the official (and privatized) public spaces that are convenient only for certain groups. ‘Marginal groups’ appropriate informal spaces, which are a form of ‘social breathing spaces’ [29]. These are places in which either official policymakers (still) are not interested or that planners have failed to incorporate into their development plans. Informal groups or people who do not fit into official frameworks define the practices in these urban spaces. Informal and temporary urbanism adds elements of flexibility and resilience in urban structures [27], which is of crucial importance in our contemporary turbulent global environment.

In past decades, we have been witnesses to a rise in the capitalist system on a global scale, in which there is continuous market deregulation that results in uneven distribution, deepened inequalities, and a greater gap between the rich and poor. Globalization has produced the growth in the migrant population, both of economic reasons and those searching for refuge, as violence and wars in developing countries are not ahistorical events, but rather depend on global world occurrences. Increased inequality is one of the most visible consequences of globalization [17] (p. 197), which leads those who feel devalued to try to escape the circle of poverty and uncertainty by attempting to reach an economically and socially safer environment.

The neoliberal influence on urban governance and development concentrates primarily on profits, as well as on protecting and increasing capital. In that sense, social policies appear largely when socioeconomic issues jeopardize the interests of capital. It is necessary to resolve socioeconomic problems that are legacies of welfare governance models, but their negligence is obvious. Vulnerable groups are often pushed not only to socioeconomic margins, but also geographic margins through different mechanisms, thus removing those problems from the public spotlight. This has a significant effect on the most vulnerable members of the population, including those whose voices are usually silenced, unheard, or simply ignored.

Observed from the local perspective, globalization reveals certain new and ambiguous aspects. A more detailed understanding of the processes that situate the global in the local will

show the articulations of the different economic, political, cultural, and social influences at different levels that intersect in the local context. Even though globalization strongly influences developments in the contemporary world, states still represent main research unit in social science, as there are many assumptions that the state (or nation and society) is the natural social and political form of contemporary society. Such perspective is termed as “methodological nationalism” [30]. A faster-paced life, the intense flow of information, and the comprehensive interconnection between people and capital through the global stock market and modern technologies have led to a reexamination of the traditional definitions of space, place, and time in social sciences [28,31]. At the same time, classical migration theories become questionable. The question of “methodological nationalism” has been discussed for many years and criticized in the expert literature [32–34]. Moreover, Eurocentrism, dominance of the economic perspective, and gender imbalance are significant stumbling blocks in the research on migrations [35–39].

Recent so-called “migrant crisis” revealed serious issues regarding governing and management of this new migration wave. Ineffective solutions are often associated with violence and are obstructing further mobility of migrants on one hand. On the other hand ‘people on the move’ and their struggle for mobility are developing practices which are challenging actually accepted perceptions of state and citizenship [5].

4. Experiences from the Balkan migration route

The experience related to “people on the move” on the Balkan route has shown several trends. Among others, multilayered discrimination, and necessity of creative and informal solutions are noticeable. This part of the article elaborates on them.

We are interested in challenging the discourses that legitimize the practices of pushing non-citizens out of public spaces by focusing on people on the move who are not considered to belong. Along the so-called Balkan route, primarily a transit route for migrants, different actions on the part of citizens were visible in the previous period, some acting in solidarity with migrants, others acting or mobilizing against them. Unlike confining the migrant population in camps, where they depend on the protection of the system and therefore, are obligated to follow the rules of the dominant exclusionary migrant regimes, they do have a chance to become visible and active subjects in pursuing their lives in public spaces. Frequently, places where citizens and ‘non-citizens’ meet in public spaces, e.g., in the park next to the main railway and main bus station in Belgrade and at the bus station in Tuzla, trigger and elicit spontaneous actions and gradually an infrastructure of support, as places in which acts of solidarity occur outside the logic of ethno-national citizenship. We argue that, when the legal use of national space is restricted, public spaces and informality has potential to develop as a meeting point to engage in inclusive acts of solidarity. The informal interactions of citizens and ‘non-citizens’ who are deemed illegal migrants according to national states’ logic, in several cases along so-called Balkan route produced structures of helping and supporting through more inclusive and horizontal relationships than in hierarchical institutionally organized aid. Such spontaneous support on the part of citizens for “illegal” non-citizens transforms often into political actions against the “politics of exhaustion” [5] practiced toward the migrant population.

Discrimination occurs at the gates of the EU, where Serbia and BiH have become suitable points to control the massive influx of migrants into the developed EU countries. Discrimination occurs primarily because of the denial of their right to seek asylum and protection in the EU countries by preventing their entry into EU territory, and in doing so, endangering them (known as the Asylum paradox). Film footage and migrants’ testimonies have confirmed the violence and brutality on the borders of the EU countries (e.g., experiences at the Hungarian and Croatian

borders) [40], and adequate reactions are still lacking, which shows that breaches of international provisions are tolerated because of national interests.

Discriminatory differentiations derive from the social structures themselves, and find their echo in the discourses and ideologies that shape the political actions and relationships within the society, but also space use. Hence, the national states, as well as political and economic organizations, are key factors that produce and maintain discriminatory attitudes and relationships in society, as those very attitudes and relationships are the result of social structures and processes [41,42].

Group and individual categories are determined through assumptions of similarities and differences, alleged typical characteristics, or of belonging and non-belonging, to the socially constructed groups, where such assumptions are associated closely with the decisions about different groups' permissible locations in social hierarchies. These decisions confirm the relations between power and socioeconomic inequality by underlining the borders [41,42]. It is also significant that the very physical space is associated closely with the concepts of permissible locations in social hierarchies, where those groups that are suffering disadvantage are pushed out of the public eye to the peripheral and deprived spaces. An intriguing example is the city of Bihać (BiH, near the Croatian border) where the turmoil of the local population has been reduced greatly since the migrants were transferred to the periphery of the city because they were labeled outsiders who posed a potential danger in public discourses. These reactions of local populations are consistent with dominant migration politics, in which the common practice of national states is to exclude migrants from the solidarity practices that are institutionalized in relation to a nationalized community of citizens. Solidarity with non-citizens is articulated rarely because it means sharing welfare provision and equality with 'outsiders'. The concept of solidarity associated with the EU's migration policies allows solidarity to function mostly only among national Member States, as they recognize solidarity as the distribution of refugees' problems and 'burden sharing'. From this perspective, what is actually a human crisis is labeled a migrant crisis. On the other end of the spectrum is the solidarity designed to overcome forms of exclusion on the national level by creating links and feelings of closeness between people with very different origins, interests, perspectives, and life pursuits. This type of solidarity is distinguished analytically as solidarity 'from below', in contrast to the hierarchical solidarity 'from above' mentioned previously.

The encounter with the massive migration flows through the Balkan countries has triggered a rise in nationalism, fear, and the perception of being threatened, but even in the Bosnian Krajina's cities and in Belgrade, where the largest number of migrants lived on the streets, there is an explicit invitation for the local population to mobilize to 'protect property and cleanse cities'. On the other hand, these encounters also have stimulated new waves of civic engagement and new solidarities. At the peak of the crisis, when numerous migrants were located in the parks around the central bus station in Belgrade, civic organizations in the neighboring streets arranged informal help-desks [43] (p. 8). A similar situation was found in Tuzla, where hundreds of migrants spent nights in tents regularly [44].

From an analytical perspective, informal practices of encounter in public spaces and solidarity should be perceived in their particular context, as the same practice of encounter can have a fundamentally different outcome and meaning in one situation than in another. Exclusionary or inclusionary outcome they indeed serve as a starting point to relate differences to one another.

Solidarity and help in institutionalized camps that international and national institutions govern are characterized by vertical power relationships and limited spaces, where their identities are reduced to the number of beverages and amount of food distributed and funds

spent. The ethno-national logic is unable to consider different approaches, but different models have proven possible [45], as alternative squad-camps show, for example, the PIKPA camp, a self-organized squat-camp for migrants that proves that vulnerable people can be housed and treated in a more thoughtful and compassionate way if ‘communities and resources were brought together’.

Occurrences in the migrant camp, Vučjak, in BiH are an illustrative example of the practices of exclusion and setting borders at the national and international level. Local authorities in Bihać, the town directly on the border area between BiH and EU countries, opened Vučjak in 2019 on a former waste dump on the outskirts of the town. The camp was established because international organizations hesitated for a long while to accept new locations the city authorities offered for the construction of new official camps in BiH. The camp’s opening was an attempt to respond to the massive influx of migrants in that area. Given that migrant camps in BiH are established and run by international organizations (mostly UN International Organization for Migration), as they also control and manage financial resources allocated from EU funds to address the ‘migrant crisis’ in BiH, Vučjak is referred to as a ‘wild’ camp in public discourses, although local authorities established it. The fact is that the camp was constructed in a very short time outside the standards prescribed and was improvised and ill-prepared. In speaking about Vučjak, the mayor of Bihać, Fazlić, commented that the EU and Croatia have shown the peak of hypocrisy with respect to the camp and at the same time highlighted that Vučjak’s purpose is to remove migrants from the urban core: “Here we choose whether the urban part with 10,000 inhabitants will be overrun by 2,000 migrants or we will have Vučjak” [46]. This shows the chain reaction in the practices of exclusion. As “transit”, “undocumented”, or “illegal” migrants have no right to speak, act autonomously, or be present, this is also reflected in the right to use public spaces freely.

The issue discussed most in public, which resulted in the final closing of Vučjak, was the poor living conditions and the problem that the camp was placed in the immediate vicinity of the EU external border. In the end, the migrants were transferred to newly established camps near Sarajevo, far from the border area and Bihać. Fazlić warned repeatedly that migrants will continue to come to the city, and that migrant camps in Sarajevo did not solve the problem, but only threatened to open new ‘wild’ camps.

While on the one hand, international organizations insist on building new migrant camps far from the border area, as the decision to relocate migrants from Vučjak far from the EU border area to the new migrant camps established near Sarajevo made clear, local authorities and part of the local population insist on expelling migrants from the city, public spaces, and therefore, from the public eye. When the local population in Velika Kladuša and Bihać noticed that the new camps near Sarajevo did not prevent migrants from entering their cities they called for the ‘cleaning of the cities’ through social networks and mobilized a the group of locals to destroy migrants’ informal settlements on the streets, and stop buses coming from Sarajevo and check for migrants inside to prevent them from entering the city [47]. Fazlić’s threats to open new ‘wild’ camps did not materialize, but as a result of this chain of events in international and local exclusionary practices, now migrants have made improvised and ill-prepared camps in the woods of BiH outside of the city and encounter in the public.

One reaction and poor decision continued the line of exclusionary practices and triggered a reaction on the part of the local population in the cities that endangered the migrants further. In the discourses about ‘cleaning the cities and making them safe’, the main culprits were either migrants or local politicians’ inability to manage the situation, while very little is discussed about policies international organizations on local soil pursue. The Serbian public was familiar with the appearance of so-called ‘people’s patrols’, groups who intercepted migrants and tried

to restrict their mobility in Belgrade. There were also examples of groups and individuals (often close to right and nationalist circles) who attempted to intimidate migrants and threaten them because of alleged security concerns [48–50].

5. General outcomes

As Schwiertz and Schwenken [51] proposed in introducing the concept of solidarity citizenship, they distinguished analytically between the concept of solidarity ‘from above’ as institutionalized solidarity with vertical power relationships and one-sided relationships, and solidarity ‘from below’ with horizontal and reciprocal ways to relate to each other. We argue that different practices of solidarity can be found in different places, ‘from above’ in institutionalized refugee camps with vertical power relationships where the status quo is treasured, as it allows migrants’ political and personal autonomy to be neglected, which abolishes their subjectivity and identity, and ‘from below’ in spontaneous encounters in public spaces and support initiatives that arise. We find this concept very useful, as it is able to link non-essentialist concepts of solidarity and citizenship to migration in different empirical contexts.

This concept places solidarity outside the notion of ‘solidarity’ in the EU, which refers to solidarity between Member States, and therefore, against the discourses that operate in the logic of national solidarity and ethno-national citizenship in the welfare state [52]. Schwiertz and Schwenken [51] associated the proposed concept with Mohanty [53], Yuval-Davis [54], and Brunkhorst’s [55] theoretical view and emphasized that practices of solidarity do not necessarily lead to unification, as they often neither suspend nor level differences, but they do serve as a starting point to relate differences to one another. Transversal and inclusive solidarity are considered two components that interrelate to challenge exclusive solidarities.

Practices of solidarity that emerge as spontaneous encounters in public spaces operate outside the logic of national solidarity, in which the exclusion of noncitizens is constitutive and reproduced repeatedly through practices of solidarity restricted to a closed community. As Schwiertz and Schwenken stated when they proposed the concept of solidarity citizenship, a praxeological perspective offers a contextual analysis where we can study the way solidarities create their own infrastructures by observing everyday interpersonal encounters and practices in public places, as well as the political struggles for and about solidarity that arise from these encounters [51]. A city is a particularly interesting phenomenon in social sciences, as it is a place where one can observe modern society’s development in the context of social interactions. In a city, there are encounters between persons with different attitudes and life goals, as well as the intersection of the local and the global. Dominant power relationships affect the interactions between different agents, and this determines the very tenets, the different anchor points, in interactions.

Theories that focus on power relationships offer the potential to understand space as a significant subject of analysis, as it comprises and emphasizes social structure and its influence on social relationships. The social structure constructed through lines of separations and hierarchies determines the constellation of the groups in a social space. In the approach that focuses on the everyday practices and interactions in space, it is important to see the significance of the notions in Bourdieu’s theory that refer to ‘adopting’ the space [56], and which situate us at the point where the city, migrations, and the social agents’ encounters intersect. The focus in the analyses of cities’ social and adopted space and strategies of exclusion are Bourdieu’s concepts of social space, capital, and social field, as well as those of habitus and social practice. Because Bourdieu was a strong opponent of the artificial separation of disciplines, his concepts are applicable to nearly all fields of social sciences and multidisciplinary research on daily

practices. As Reed-Danahay [57] emphasized, spatiality is integral to the development of Bourdieu's theory of practice and impossible to separate from the concept of habitus. She argued that Bourdieu's most significant contribution to spatial and mobility studies is his development of a conceptual framework to associate social practices and modes of sociality with physical space.

In the context of international and local actors' pursuit of the 'politics of exhaustion' [5], we recognize all of the humanitarian support and civil initiatives in which citizens stand in (inclusive) solidarity with migrants as political actions. As Vandevordt argued [58,59], although formal or informal civil initiatives may portray their actions as apolitical or purely humanitarian, within the specific context of the politics of exhaustion, simple humanitarian acts become political, as they seek to include those who are excluded from the national order. We argue that spontaneous practices of helping and supporting migrants in public places necessarily becomes a political act in the context of the Balkan countries. It does so because of the policy of criminalizing assistance and of relocating migrants from the public spaces, out of the public eye. It also becomes a political act at the international level, as these initiatives fight against the politics of exhaustion EU migration regimes conduct, as these practices allow migrants to pursue their life goals.

It is necessary to find a different framing of the humanitarian initiative in different contexts. A hybrid arose in the German context in the form of migrant support, in which actors combined the strategic employment of a predominantly depoliticizing, narrow, and humanitarian framing with a contentious repertoire of action that Schwiertz and Steinhilper [60] referred to as 'strategic humanitarianism'. In this frame, depoliticizing is designed deliberately to reach and mobilize a broader spectrum of supporters in 'Save Me' and 'Seebrücke', two cases of pro-migrant activism in Germany that offered migrants safe passage to the EU. In the Balkan context, where the attitude toward migrants who are passing through the country to EU states is still under development and in the negotiation phase, spontaneous pure humanitarian acts have become political unwittingly. Similar to what Vandevordt [58] noticed, in and around Brussels, the "politics of exhaustion" has elicited specific forms of resistance from such collectives as the 'Citizen Platform'. He argued that what were simple acts of minimalist material support for suffering subjects initially, developed gradually into a more maximalist solidarity with a particular group of migrants, attributable in part to increasingly repressive border policies. In BiH and Serbia, cases of the border police's violent push backs, humiliating and stealing and robbing from migrants triggered different initiatives and reactions on the part of activists who had an opportunity to learn about this mistreatment and other experiences in the places of encounter. The Belgium Citizen Platform's initiatives began precisely at the meeting points in migrants' informal settlements in public parks.

Public spaces characterized by public and collective participation in the past decades are transformed commonly into spaces of commerce, consumption, and political surveillance [24], which is illustrated by numerous examples of removing non-citizens deemed illegal from public spaces, not only in the Balkans, but also as a common practice in developed EU countries, e. g., from parks in cities in France and Belgium [59,61].

Political surveillance and imposition in these public spaces are regulated through marginalization and exclusion and therefore, the migrant population has limited or no access to them. To foster inclusive practices and participation, it is very important to open urban spaces as those where different social and economic classes meet. Marginalized groups are visible and present in public spaces, under the public eye, and at the same time in the process of dialogue with the 'privileged'. As activists recommend filming as a way to protect migrants from police persecution, what is happening in public spaces is difficult to hide. As research has shown,

actions of migrant, state, and civil actors subvert and shape each other constantly [58,62,63], but this interaction is difficult to find behind the closed doors of the migrant camps set up on the far periphery and governed by international and national organizations that pursue the ethno-national logic that leads to exclusionary practices. The tendency to expel migrants from public spaces and imprison them in camps is a particularly pronounced policy along the Balkan route, e.g. when the borders were closed totally in the initial phase of the fight against the Coronavirus, migrants in Serbia and BiH were prohibited completely from leaving the camps.

6. Conclusions

Although urban informality is often associated with poverty and illegality, we argue that it is (also) an answer to inadequate official practices that discriminate against vulnerable groups. New developments at the global level, which cause significant changes at the local level, and particularly in spatial practices, should be respected, not neglected. Massive migrations toward Europe that have occurred in the past years are among the major trends in contemporary society. Still, it should not be forgotten that (probably) “most refugees don’t want to live in Europe, they want a decent life back home” [64] (p. 19). If a radical change in the system that supports the creation of inequality in certain parts of the world as a solution to the problem of migration is prevented currently (or in the short term), it is necessary to dedicate ourselves to concrete current solutions to the problem of large numbers of migrants arriving in Europe. It is likely that in the case that formal solutions are ineffective, informal developments play a part in the dominant narrative. Although official authorities in Europe are trying to remove migrants from public spaces and ‘close’ them in camps away from the public eye, public spaces remain important meeting places between the migrants themselves, as well as between them and locals.

Democratization of the city today is not focused on formal governance, but rather on citizenship and participation [65]. Cities should open up opportunities and deepen experience, should allow to connect people to each other, but opposite to that, as Sennett argues [66], modern cities produce urban inequality and restricts opportunity under the masks of rationalization and planning. Rationalization and planning in modern cities mean control, segregation regime-imposing and restrictions, and this is most visible in the planning and regulation of the permitted use of the space in “national” territory for non-citizens. In this work recognized tendency to isolate people on the move spatially, outside of the public eye, urban area, follows the discourses which promotes the segregation and isolation of the people into homogeneous class, racial, and ethnic groups with strict and clear boundaries without porosity, the clarity created by bureaucratic determination, and in the case of the Balkans determinations imposed by international migrant regimes. Sennett [66] concludes in his analysis of relation between how cities are planned and built and how people live in them that modern cities are not places for political innovation. Following Jane Jacobs, Sennett argues for the 'open city as an alternative,' where citizens actively hash out their differences and where informal practices occur.

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