

**BRIEF REPORT FROM CO-CREATION
WORKSHOPS ON LESVOS**

BUILDING BRIDGES

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The refugee crisis on Lesbos followed the Greek economical crisis but yet, the local population has worked hard to accommodate the hundreds of thousands of refugees who arrived on the island. At the same time, thousands of Greek and international volunteers have flocked to the island alongside a huge number of international NGOs. What has been the impact on the local community of all these efforts? And how may we build bridges between international NGOs, refugees and the local community now that the refugee crisis has developed from an emergency to a situation where integration becomes a key issue?

These were some of the questions we invited local and international NGOs and associations, researchers, refugee, the UNHCR and local citizens from Moria village to discuss during the Greek style workshop at Kafeneio Panagopolos in Moria on May 8th 2018. The traditional Greek cafe (Kafeneio) is a social institution that still remains alive as a meeting place for Greek coffee, ouzo, backgammon and of course debates. Close by Moria village we find the Roman aqueduct, a landmark bridge that allowed the passing of water through the valley in ancient times. What better place to hold a workshop to discuss how we can build bridges between all these stakeholders on Lesbos?

The workshop, which was organized by Changemakers Lab Lesbos, The Aegean University and Agder Research, grew out of the Lesbos Dialogues in November 2017, and forms part of a larger initiative to facilitate co-creation and creative solidarity on Lesbos. Later on the same day, another workshop on Educational Technologies was held at the same site. On May 9th, the second Changemakers summit #ConnectingCities: Creative Hubs, Social Entrepreneurship and the Future of Europe was hosted by Changemakers Lab Lesbos at the Aegean University with the support of the Municipality of Lesbos, Iliaxtida, Siniparksi and the University of Agder. These have been followed up with more practical meetings with various stakeholders. We consider these efforts the first small foundation in building bridges between the involved stakeholders on Lesbos.



**"HELP THE
REFUGEES AS MUCH
AS YOU CAN, BUT
ALSO HELP MORIA
VILLAGE."**

A cornerstone in disaster management is to involve the locals. On Lesbos, local NGOs such as Siniparksi, Lesbos Solidarity and Illiachtida have from the beginning strived to involve their fellow islanders as much as possible. The people of Lesbos have constituted a major resource during the crisis, and were nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for their efforts. But, the situation has also resulted in loss in tourism and other major challenges.

Local NGOs often take into consideration both concern for the refugees and the local population at the same time, (e.g. by purchasing items locally). The Local Support Initiative of the Starfish Foundation focuses on supporting communities around the island who have been impacted by the refugee crisis.

Among many NGOs we have seen less concern for local needs. High turnover among volunteers and professional employment of international rather than local staff during a period of economic crisis in Greece, has led to local mistrust in foreign NGOs.

The Mission statement of Movement on the Ground reads that "Protecting and contributing to local economies and environments lessens the lasting impact of a crisis and creates community". The president of Moria acknowledged local initiatives from this NGO as well as the UNHCR, reminding us to "Help the refugees as much as you can, but also help Moria village".

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

A NUMBER OF CHALLENGES AND POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS WERE IDENTIFIED DURING THESE MEETINGS:

FAKE NEWS

CHALLENGE: There are a number of myths and rumours about the refugee crisis in circulation. This has an impact on some of the local citizens' attitudes towards refugees, and on tourism.

SOLUTION: We aim to create a Mythbusting Lesvos website where myths are replaced with facts.

HEALTH HAZARDS AROUND CAMPS

CHALLENGE: The president of Moria village identified the situation around Moria camp as a primary concern for the villagers.

SOLUTION: There have been follow-up meetings with a committee from Moria. The Aegean University will conduct a scientific investigation of health hazards (e.g. sewers, water conditions) and follow up with the authorities.



TEACHERS NEED KNOWLEDGE

CHALLENGE: With a number of refugee children and youth enrolled in local schools, local teachers need more knowledge on how to work with them.

SOLUTION: There have been follow-up meetings with local teachers. We aim to organize a workshop with local and European teachers with a focus on mutual learning about proven solutions, educational technologies and learning methods. Discussions about renovating an old building and establish an education centre.

INVOLVING LOCAL COMMUNITIES

CHALLENGE: There is a need for both involving and assisting local communities

SOLUTION: Follow the lead of NGOs with local support initiatives such as purchasing items locally, providing financial support for local projects, etc. Networks of collaborating NGOs can help spread the ideas and knowledge about the local community and their needs.



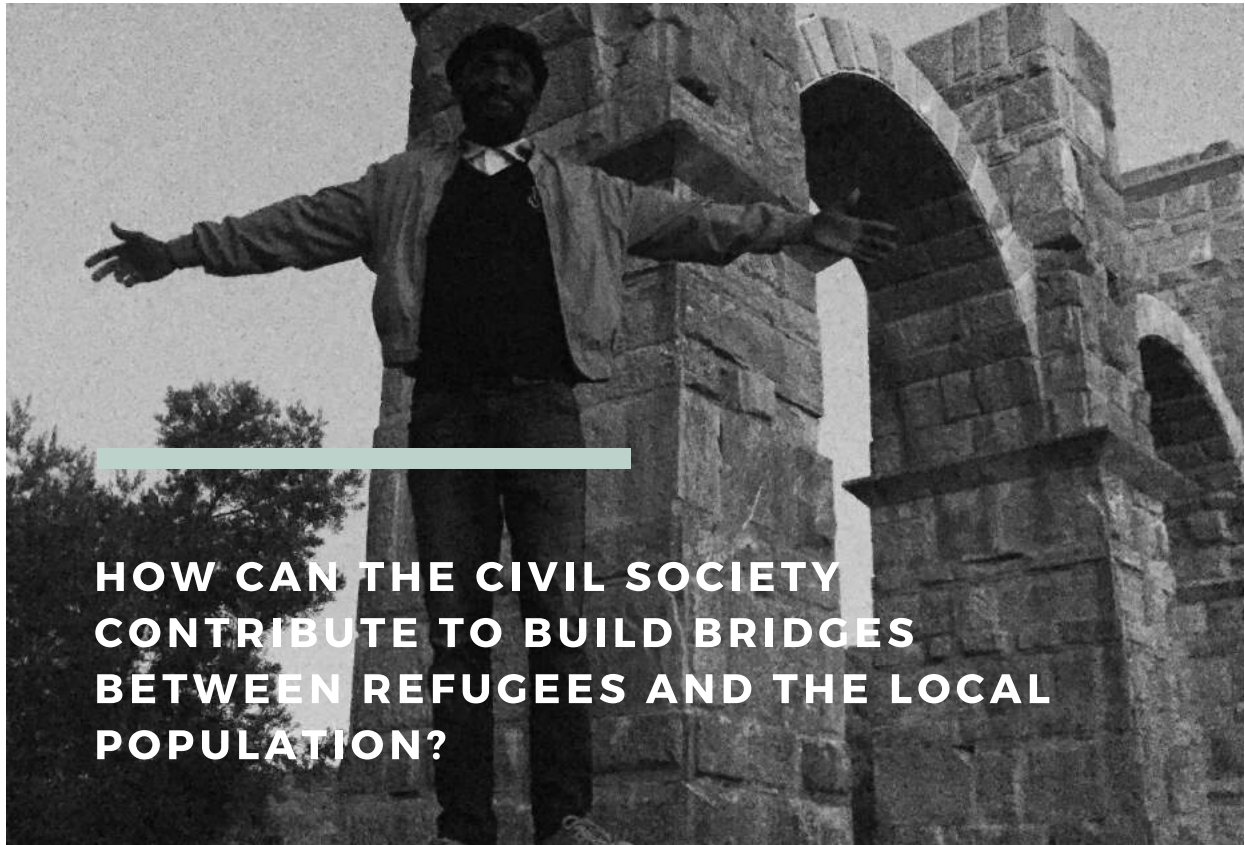
INVOLVING THE UNIVERSITY

CHALLENGE: There is a need for stronger involvement of the Aegean University to ensure knowledge-based solutions and analysis of challenges.

SOLUTION: The University is getting involved in the issues of health hazards, fake news and other concerns. Meetings between local stakeholders and students are organized. Stakeholders collaborate with the University to apply for funding for a project on Creative Solidarity. The aim is to develop smart systems that will collaboratively use all the available individual, family and public resources as a new form of Co-creation in order to cope with existing social and cultural traumas and to foster youth integration, based on action and mutual empowerment with community members, taking advantage of existing social bonds, as well as fostering self-employment in social economy and start-ups.



MIND THE GAP



HOW CAN THE CIVIL SOCIETY CONTRIBUTE TO BUILD BRIDGES BETWEEN REFUGEES AND THE LOCAL POPULATION?

Now that the refugee crisis has evolved into a situation where many refugees have been granted asylums to live and stay in Greece and on Lesbos, there is a need to build bridges between the local population and refugees.

This task requires the collaboration between the municipality and the civil society. While the municipal and state authorities work on tasks such as drafting an integration plan and ensuring access to the education system and qualification for the labour market, there are many ideas and initiatives in the civil society as well.

This involves recognizing that the refugees bring with them important human resources as well. Some suggestions for ways to build bridges were suggested by workshop participants:

- International Food Festival
- Inviting local students to cultural events at One Happy Family and elsewhere
- Beach/Monetary cleanups with local citizens, volunteers and refugees
- Involving refugees in local voluntary work
- Events to facilitate meetings between people, such as as The Human Library
- Assist the municipality in developing a good integration plan
- Learn systematically from experiences elsewhere in Europe

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GET IN TOUCH!

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