

## **London Royal Geographical Society, Annual Conference, 2017**

Session: Destabilising knowledges of refugee reception, settlement and integration

### **Interrogating Urban Refugees Spatialities - The case of Palermo**

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In recent years, there has been an unprecedented exodus of persons displaced from conflict torn regions. In the third quarter of 2016, about 183,000 of such persons were granted protection status by EU Member states (Eurostat, 2017) that allowed them become refugees; and this is by far the most significant influx of people the Continent has experienced since WWII. Current European public urban management, planning models, and urban design methodologies have proven to be unable to give resilient and dynamic responses to this complex and rapidly evolving crisis.

Most refugees settle in urban areas based on an allure of better living opportunities; and such unforeseen participations place greater demands on urban service infrastructure and influences urban culture, which in turn has created multitudes of challenges for both locals and the refugee community. These issues and the potential solutions for managing them are topical debates, however their associated spatialities - from an urban design/morphological perspective - have been under-explored.

Palermo presents a unique opportunity to study such tensions in a European city. Leoluca Orlando, its long serving Mayor has propagated the "Charter of Palermo" - that frames migration as an inalienable human right - as an ideology to overcome the exclusionary logic of current international law which dictates the treatment of refugees by states. This paper proposes to explore how the dilapidated urban fabric around the historic city centre of Palermo could be reactivated through the social integration processes of both migrants and the local community.

The aim of our current research is to search for innovative urban and architectural design strategies that can respond to such emergency contexts, by building on Palermo's city vision of welcoming refugee and their subsequent social integration.