

# Governing the European Asylum System at the Greek Border Islands

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Alexandra Bousiou

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## Abstract

This thesis provides an understanding of the governance of the European asylum regime at the Greek border islands from a multi-level governance perspective. Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Kos, and Leros are the islands which, over the period of a year between 2015 and 2016, received 80% of all refugee arrivals to the EU, and were chosen as the loci of the so-called hotspot approach. This thesis theoretically advances our understanding of the governance of asylum at border areas by elaborating on the multilevel structure in terms of actors, actors' interactions, responses, and rationales, while adding a spatial component through the introduction of the concept of peripheralization. Moreover, this thesis contributes empirically through the analysis of rich primary data collected on all five islands, in Athens, and Brussels. Analytically, I divide the asylum policy into three sub-areas: the right to seek asylum, humanitarian reception conditions, and border controls. This conceptualization has allowed me to demonstrate how these sub-policy areas are balanced in legislation and in practice. This thesis follows a qualitative case study research design. The analysis indicates how the asylum processes were severely undermined, and the reception conditions corresponded to a humanitarian crisis, while border controls increased. Moreover, the analysis showed that local actors were critical of the assemblage of EU agencies at the external borders through the hotspot approach, and that this decreased the possibility for collaborative interactions. Although it has been argued that migration policymaking within multilevel systems is geared towards solving problems, my evidence indicates that even actors from similar local contexts in equivalent hierarchical positions might have different interpretations of how to solve problems. This, in turn, results in different responses and interactions. Last, but not least, the creation of a buffer zone on the Greek islands has restricted asylum seekers from moving to the north of Europe in the name of the emergency. By introducing the concept of peripheralization, I offer a tool which can be used to bring attention to and better study the process and implications of the geographical restriction to the island of first arrival.

**Keywords:** EU asylum policies, right to seek asylum, Greek border islands, multilevel governance, externalization of asylum, peripheralization

## Articles:

Bousiou, Alexandra, and Evie Papada. "Introducing the EC Hotspot Approach: A Framing Analysis of EU's Most Authoritative Crisis Policy Response". *International Migration*. First published online: 08 January 2020  
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Bousiou, Alexandra "Peripheralization and Externalization of the EU Asylum Regime: Implications for the Right to Seek Asylum on the Southeastern EU Border Islands" (unpublished work)