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HOT SPOTS OR COMMUNITIES?

From the Refugee Camp to Productive Community Case Study: Lesvos Greece

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TABLE OF CONTEXT

Abstract	p. 4
1 Description of the Refugee Crisis	
1.1 Refugee Crisis in Europe	p. 9
1.2 Refugee Crisis in Greece	p. 10
2 Description of the Hot Spots	p. 13
3 The case of Lesvos Greece	
3.1 Territorial Analysis	p. 19
3.2 Landscape Analysis	p. 21
3.3 Architectural Elements	p. 23
3.4 Urban Analysis	p. 25
4 Theory and Inspirations	
4.1 Mat Building	p. 31
4.2 Inspiration Projects	
4.2.1 SOS The Children, INTERNATIONAL.....	p. 33
4.2.2 Children Refugee Camp in Jordan.....	p. 35
5 Site Strategy	
5.1 Site Traces	p. 41
5.2 Voids Classification.....	p. 44
6 Masterplan Composition	
6.1 Project Data	p. 47
6.2 Concept Diagrams	p. 48
6.3 Masterplan.....	p. 50

7 Architectural Composition	
7.1 Ground Floors Plan.....	p. 54
7.2 First Floor Plan	p. 55
7.3 Typologies	p. 56
8 Construction Technique.....	p. 59
9 Sustainability	p. 62
Conclusion	p. 68

ABSTRACT

The housing of refugees is one of the most urgent issues facing Europe as increasing flows of people from the Middle East, North and Central African conflict areas arrive at the EU's borders. Not since the Second World War has Europe witnessed such vast flows of migrants. Accommodating such flows of people in both temporary and permanent housing is a major challenge in the EU. With many countries under pressure to provide social and affordable housing for their own populations and varying national measures and perspectives on how to provide adequate housing for refugees, the European response is to date somewhat fragmented.

According to the UNHCR official figures in 2014 there were a total of 19.5 million refugees globally. This equates to a global refugee population just greater than the Netherlands! 51% of global refugees are aged under 18 years old and primarily originate from Syria, Afghanistan and Somalia.

By June 2015 and according to The European Commission, 213,200 asylum applications were submitted within the EU. This is an 85% increase compared to the same period in 2014, a record year in its own right with 626,000 asylum applications. There is little doubt that 2015 will trump the numbers from 2014 and recent expectations.

Greece is facing an unprecedented refugee emergency with new record arrival numbers, whilst the congestion on the islands further increased. The reception infrastructure, services and registration procedures are falling far short of needs. On all main entry points, substandard conditions result in serious hygiene, health and protection risks.

Major congestion of the islands – The increasing backlog in registration and the lack of availability of ferry tickets leads to major congestion of most islands receiving refugees and migrants, particularly on Lesbos, Kos, Chios, Samos and Leros. Average daily arrivals almost doubled from 1,600 in July to 2,900 in August. Lesbos has received the highest number of arrivals, almost half of the total in Greece, 96,000 in 2015 (as of 28 August) with 1,500 average arrivals per day. Over the last days of August, at least 12,000 refugees and migrants have been present on the island.

In this context, the project explores the question of refugee accommodation. It further explores means for the creation of a refugee community with a view to offering a design for such community. Features of this community reach beyond mere survival to include productivity and sustainability understood as necessary requirements for decent living conditions. To this end, we employ modular design units which give flexibility for future expansion as well as easy and economical construction techniques. We design a Masterplan according to real population data that responds to the needs of the refugees for survival, education, culture while offering them opportunities for employment, an essential requirement for creation of a sense of common belonging.

TABLE OF SHEETS

SHEET 01.....	Abstract
SHEET 02.....	Territorial Analysis
SHEET 03.....	Territorial Analysis
SHEET 04.....	Urban Analysis
SHEET 05.....	Urban Analysis and Strategy
SHEET 06.....	Site Analysis and Strategy
SHEET 07.....	Masterplan
SHEET 08.....	Ground Floor and Section
SHEET 09.....	First Floors and Section
SHEET 10.....	Aerial View
SHEET 11.....	Plans 1:50 and Typologies
SHEET 12.....	Sustainability

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