



AALBORG UNIVERSITY

## **What can containers tell us?**

The Geneva housing solution to accommodate migrants



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## Abstract

This thesis explores the design and typology of the migrants accommodation centres in the canton of Geneva, Switzerland and the values, cultural meanings and other symbolic messages they potentially embody, in relation to Switzerland migration management. Based on the infrastructure theory of Star (1999), combined with other scholars that built on it, this qualitative research aimed at unraveling the potential larger infrastructure projects buildings can be part of, and how their paradoxical qualities can help the researcher achieve a deeper understanding of them. To do so, narrative analysis and observations were selected as methodological tools to conduct this research. The findings are divided into two main sections. On one hand, they reveal that Geneva's accommodation centres serve the state to communicate to the audience the continuity of its reputation as land of refuge and its qualities in terms of hospitality. The symbolic message of Geneva keeping its leader role in terms of humanitarian action is thus embodied in the accommodation centres. On the other hand, the results show that the Swiss value and tradition of consensus is as well materialized in them. Indeed, the findings illustrate how the design and typology satisfy both parties of the population: the ones in favor of and against receiving migrants.

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## List of abbreviations

AS: Asylum Seeker

AsylA: Swiss Asylum Act

CFA: Centre for Asylum Seekers

EU: European Union

HG: Hospice Général

LPPCi: Loi fédérale sur la protection de la population et sur la protection civile

MCG: Geneva Citizens Movement party

NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation

PDC: Christian Democratic Party

RMNA: Requérants d'Asile Mineurs Non-Accompagnés

RTS: Radio Télévision Suisse

SC: Shelter Centre

SEM: State Secretariat for Migration

UN: United Nations

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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## Introduction

While Switzerland, more specifically the canton of Geneva, used to receive and accommodate migrants in hard-roofed buildings, a shift occurred after the so-called “refugee crisis” of 2014. At this time, 1’314 supplementary beds were suddenly needed to welcome the newcomers, but the asylum housing infrastructure capacities of Geneva were overcrowded and thus, unable to respond to the demand (Rapport annuel 2015, p.15). The institution in charge of accommodating the migrants, the *Hospice général* (HG), therefore had an urgent challenge to meet.

Its first reaction was to open the underground shelters, initially meant to receive the Swiss population in case of a nuclear disaster (Ville de Genève 2021), to allow the migrants to find a bed where to stay. Nevertheless, this housing solution provoked severe contestation from the civil society defending migrants’ rights, considering it inhumane to receive them underground (Stop bunkers 2021). To react to this polemic, the State and the HG prepared another housing solution, consisting of the construction of five new centres, with the particularity of each of them having a modular typology and being composed of a series of containers. Another peculiarity of these centers is the website that the HG has created to present them individually.

Having recently been an intern for 6 months within *Shelter Centre* (SC), a non-governmental organization (NGO) involved in the shelter and settlements community to impartially assist the relevant actors and partners in their work (Shelter Centre 2021), and being generally interested in housing solutions in emergency settings, the Geneva centres caught my attention. By being somewhat out of the ordinary, and, for once, not in far-away contexts but right home, thus offering the possibility to literally look at them closely, the incentive to investigate further what these buildings could reveal convinced me to conduct this research. So, it is with some questions in mind, such as “Why such a modular typology?”, “Why are these centres being “exhibit” online?”, “How can we understand this choice for this new housing solution?” that I started looking for an angle from which to approach this topic and contribute to the field of migration studies. I first established a literature review to address what has already been said on the topic of housing and what deserves further attention, which led me to my research question.

## Literature review

While the topic of “housing” has been formally recognized as a human right and considered “essential to the well-being and development of most societies” (Barakat 2003, p.1), it has also attracted growing academic attention, in recent times. It is mainly in the context of migration studies that researchers have addressed this topic, albeit from different angles.

From one of these angles, scholars focused on the distinction between a “House” and a “Home”. By integrating the concept of home into the discussion, these scholars have placed the attention on the human need of feeling at home somewhere (O’Mahony and Sweeney 2010, p.293) and its implications: the procurement of a sense of continuity, rootedness and permanence to the occupants of the house (Ibid., p.298), a place offering space for self-expression (Sebba and Churchman 1986, p.9) and, among other criteria, a sense of privacy (Smith 1994, p.38). While this body of literature looks closely at the “process of home-making” (Kellett and Moore 2003, p. 124) for those who do not have such a place, it focuses particularly on asylum seekers who are *per se* considered as being “doubly displaced” (...) displaced from their home state and dispossessed from their homes” (O’Mahony and Sweeney 2010, p. 286). It is therefore the migrants and their perceptions, rather than the building itself and its architecture, that are the focus of these studies.

From another perspective, housing has been studied by some scholars interested in the great range of different “roofs” that migrants may encounter during their journeys, including - to enumerate only a few: open spaces, camps, detention and reception centres - and the dynamics that come with each of them. Open spaces are understood as being any type of unregulated housing solution such as unofficial settlement of refugees on the outskirts of a city. They would be preferred by migrants over camps because their precarity and unpredictability allow migrants to keep not only some of their agency but also their hopes for a brighter future (Turner 2014, p.174). Compared to these open spaces allowing some agency to remain, camps have been considered in the literature as “technologies of power” (Malkki 1995, p.498), where care and control over the migrants happen simultaneously, trying to deliver some humanitarian aid but also immobilizing their movements. Additionally, control is also very much

present in detention centres and to some extent in what Cairns (2004) calls the “architecture-for-migrants” (p.23) in general, comprising therefore reception centres as well. These different spaces are described as being an extension of borders within the host country, “regulating who becomes a bona fide refugee and where they can go” (Ibid., p.27). While this body of literature offers some valuable insights on how this variety of migrants’ settings impact their lives and journeys, it tends to omit the design and architecture of these spaces.

By neglecting the shelter in itself (Scott-Smith and Breeze 2020, p.1) - meaning as an architectural piece - scholars have, thus far, left aside potential new understandings of its design’s impacts, roles, uses, impressions, and other interesting analytical avenues. Although humanitarian architecture started slowly to receive some recognition, it was first mainly about designing new emergency shelters for far away contexts, providing to the architects some “kind of ambassadorial role within the framework of international aid” (Cairns 2004, p.28). However, this “opportunity [for designers and architects] for generating innovative designs impossible to implement with permanent construction methods” (Kreimer 1979, p. 362) is, since the “summer of migration” (Scott-Smith 2019, p.511) and the migration influx in Europe, also present in host countries. Thus, to have these types of new designs “right here” (Scott-Smith and Breeze 2020, p.1) offers the chance to investigate them further and achieve a better understanding of the reasons why such typologies are being used and, if any, their underlying meanings.

The value of analyzing the meaning of designs is highlighted by Murphy (2013) in a paper in which he looks closely at Swedish design. Murphy affirms that the design of objects “reproduce[s] the very exemplars of an ideology” (Ibid., p.118). Indeed, he argues that the social democratic ideology of Sweden transpires in the design of objects, in the IKEA furniture for instance (Ibid., p.120). In his opinion, it is thus by deepening this “cultural geometry” that one can better perceive what are the ideological values embodied in the design of the objects and how certain political ideas are implemented through them (Ibid.).

Because “it is only by investigating the way in which buildings (*any* buildings) embody social identities, symbolic messages, cultural values, and economic relationships that a true understanding of the form, use, and meaning of architecture can be arrived at”

(Vellinga 2017, p.12), this research aims to investigate the embodiment of symbolic messages and cultural values by buildings. Having to limit the scope of this research, I decided to focus on the specific region of the canton of Geneva, Switzerland, and its asylum seeker and refugee accommodation centres. I thereby raise the following research question:

*What are the values, symbolic messages and cultural meanings embodied in the design and typology of refugee accommodation centres in Geneva and how should we understand them in relation to Switzerland's migration management?*

In order to answer this research question, I approach it with the theory of infrastructure of Susan Leigh Star and her ethnographic lens. In addition to this, other scholars are mentioned to bring into light further aspects of infrastructures, notably their paradoxical qualities which will help us apprehend potential cultural values and other meanings the accommodation centres of Geneva might embody.

## Theory

In the following section, I outline the theoretical framework on which I rely to analyze and understand the narratives and pictures collected for this research. First, I draw on the theory of infrastructures that Star (1999) offers, combined with other scholarly contributions that build on it. This theory offers a valuable theoretical framework for my research and suits my object of study for two reasons: on one hand, I consider refugees' housing centres as being architectural infrastructures *per se* and, on the other hand, these centres can be envisaged as being part of larger infrastructural projects such as the migration management infrastructure of a state, as it will be outlined in the following section. Second, I describe some paradoxes inherent to infrastructures before highlighting and presenting the most relevant ones for my case study.

## Infrastructures: theory and paradoxes

In her paper, Star (1999) argues that, although infrastructures may seem boring as an object of study at first glance, looking at them from an ethnographic perspective enables a better understanding of some of their essential aspects such as planning power, change or justice (p.379). Before looking at what ethnography can offer to the study of infrastructures, and despite the difficulty of achieving a specific definition of infrastructures (Harvey et al. 2017, p.5), I first describe how they can be understood in a general manner.

Infrastructures can, on one hand, be viewed as the invisible part of a system or, in other words, as the background structure that allows something to work (Star 1999, p.380). Star gives the example of someone who drinks water and does not see or think about the whole plumbing system behind the wall, which lets the water come out of the faucet. On the other hand, infrastructures can be rendered visible, especially when they suddenly stop working (Ibid., p.382). For instance, it is only when the electricity does not work anymore that the light bulb and wires catch one's attention. As mentioned above, however, infrastructures can also be seen from a more ethnographic perspective. Indeed, Star considers that infrastructures, even if commonly perceived as being only some kind of accumulation of "railroad lines, pipes and plumbing, electrical power plants, and wires" (Ibid., p.380), should be seen in a more relational manner, namely "as part of human organization" (Ibid.) and as having effects and influence on the people they "serve" (Ibid.). Therefore, being served or not, by infrastructures will impact our way of seeing them. She explains that an infrastructure invisible for one, can be very much visible for someone that is not served by it. As an example, stairs are visible to the person who sits in a wheelchair, while the person able to walk will not notice them (Ibid.). Therefore, the person not served by the stairs will perceive them as a barrier and as something that impacts his/her possibilities and influences his/her path.

Larkin (2013) further investigates infrastructures from this ethnographic lens, suggesting that "infrastructures also exist as forms separate from their purely technical functioning, and they need to be analyzed as concrete semiotic and aesthetic vehicles oriented to addressees" (p.329). He considers, like Star, that infrastructures should be

looked at through an ethnographic lens in order to provide valuable “insights into other domains such as practices of government, religion, or sociality” (Ibid., p.328). Thus, to study infrastructures and consider them as more than just technical networks could allow scholars to see, for instance, the politics that underlies these projects and therefore understand better what Foucault calls the “apparatus of governmentality” (Foucault 2010 in Larkin 2013, p.328). In a similar way, Collier (2011) suggests that infrastructures are a “political technology” (p.179), that can be used by the government to manage the conditions of existence - such as welfare or health - of its citizens and therefore be understood as modern mechanisms of biopolitics (Ibid.). Star (1999) illustrates this with the example made by R. Moses: in New York, an automobile bridge was purposely constructed too low, in order to prevent public buses transporting poor people from passing under it and reaching the richer area of the city (p.389). The bridge was therefore used indirectly to control who could get where and contain the poor in a certain area. Reusing Harvey et al. (2017)’s definition, infrastructures can thus be viewed as “extended material assemblages that generate effects and structure social relations, either through engineered (i.e. planned and purposefully crafted) or non-engineered (i.e. unplanned and emergent) activities” (p.5).

Although these various definitions and examples allow us to better understand infrastructures' roles and influences, an important aspect of them remains yet to be presented: their paradoxical nature (Howe et al. 2016, p.2). Besides their (in)visible nature, infrastructures possess other paradoxical qualities, enumerated not exhaustively by Howe et al. (2016) as follows: “generative and degenerative; constructive and destructive; future oriented but ultimately fleeting; fluid and mobile yet inflexible; and sometimes obdurate to retrofitting” (p.13). According to them, these opposed qualities help grasp the complexity of what infrastructures really are and it is for this reason that they assert that the study of such structures should always be about their paradoxes (Ibid.). That is why Whyte et al. (2018) approached their research on tent camps in Denmark through this perspective of paradox. Indeed, they consider that it is by paying attention to the contradictory qualities of the tent camps that they comprehend better how they actually operate and achieve a greater picture of Danish migration management (Ibid., p.143).

The analysis of this thesis will thus be driven by the following working questions:

- *What are the paradoxical qualities of the Geneva accommodation centre infrastructures?*
- *What are the potential explanations for such paradoxes?*
- *How can these paradoxes help us reveal potential values and cultural meanings embodied in the centres?*

Based on infrastructures theory and its assumptions of political schemes underlying infrastructure projects, I attempt to investigate how a shift in the Geneva asylum accommodation typology can be interpreted from a political perspective and what it can tell us on Switzerland' migration management. By doing so, I hope to unravel potential meanings and cultural values embodied in the buildings. I will also explore the paradoxical qualities of these infrastructures and highlight what are, to me, the two main and most relevant ones in the context of this research. Both paradoxes are unfolded in the following subsections.

## Paradoxical Infrastructures

### Hyper-positive-visibility and restrictive asylum policy

As mentioned earlier, infrastructures are potentially (in)visible depending on their operating conditions or if they are serving the person using them or not (Star 1999, p.382). However, one can also voluntarily render infrastructures (in)visible, to serve a specific purpose. For instance, as Whyte et al. (2018) demonstrate in their research, infrastructures such as tent camps in Denmark were made visible to the public in order to discourage future asylum seekers from coming into the country (p.144). By exposing such unwelcoming settings, the camps become “infrastructures of deterrence” (Ibid.) and serve political goals aiming at reducing arrivals of refugees in Denmark.

In Geneva however, it cannot be assumed that asylum infrastructures have been made visible to the public for deterrence purposes. In fact, as it will be explained in the Context section of this thesis, accommodation centres for asylum seekers and refugees in Geneva, have been made visible in a somehow exaggerated positive manner: almost as an exemplary case.

This “hyper-positive-visibility”, as I named it, nonetheless raises some questions about its underlying political goals and the reasons for such attractive publicity. Indeed, knowing that the Swiss asylum policy has been increasingly restrictive over the years - with the explicit aim of reducing Switzerland's attractiveness (Parini and Gianni 2005, p.210) - and noticing the recent tendency of Swiss citizens to adopt right-wing opinions, or at least to be less open to differences (O’Sullivan 2021), it is relevant to ask why such positive narratives have been used to describe these centres and their architecture. This paradox of “hyper-positive-visibility” and restrictive asylum policy will therefore be developed further in the analysis.

### Unrooted roots and welcoming narratives

Among the paradoxical qualities aforementioned, mobility and inflexibility appear to be relevant to Geneva’s accommodation centres. While it is common to associate the idea of infrastructures, such as buildings and their architecture, to something grounded and part of the “constitution of places” (Cairns 2004, p.1), the typology chosen for the Geneva centres is modular or, in other terms, mobile. Although their exact design will be presented below, it is important to highlight here that each of the asylum centres is composed of a series of containers - containers which facilitate movements since they are themselves mobile (Baumann 2020, p.16). By being “literally uprooted and suspended in space” (Parsloe 2020, p.282), this type of architecture contrasts with the welcoming narratives that come with these centres. Indeed, the narratives used by the architects and other stakeholders involved in the construction of these centres, portray them as the first step in the integration of refugees and as a place where they can start to grow “new roots”.

Moreover, there is a great emphasis on the temporariness of the projects: as explained later, each centre has its own “deadline” so as to be removed after a certain amount of time. Thus, the ambiguity between the officially announced deadline of each building, coupled with the highly mobile typology of the containers they are made of, and the discourse encouraging asylum seekers and refugees to grow roots and feel at home deserves further attention. As with the first paradox, this second paradox, derived from this provisoriness and mobility mixed with a discourse of integration, which I call “unrooted roots”, will be developed further in the analysis to explore potential underlying cultural values and other meanings.

## Methodology

Having outlined the infrastructure theory, I present, in the following section, the research design that I chose for this thesis, with some reflections on my own positionality. I also describe the qualitative methods used to collect my empirical data and their limitations, as well as the ethical considerations regarding these methods.

### Research design

As already mentioned in the theoretical part, I adopt an ethnographic lens on my research topic - the Geneva accommodation centres for asylum seekers and refugees - to understand the role or influence that infrastructures and their typologies may play in a political project and the symbolic messages they may embody. In order to apprehend this potential role and interpret their paradoxical qualities, I decided to use a qualitative research method. I made this choice not only because “qualitative research is excellent for studying contexts you are personally curious about but have never before had a “valid” reason for entering” (Tracy 2012, p.29) but also because it helps the researcher achieving a greater comprehension of cultural activities, societies or institutions of the place studied (Ibid.). Additionally, qualitative methods allow a range of potential interpretations of the research subject and illustrate which ones are, theoretically speaking, more significant (Ibid., p.30). Therefore, I will investigate, through the qualitative methods selected, such as narratives and story analysis and observations which are further developed below, the underlying values, symbols and cultural meanings of the infrastructures' typology of the Geneva asylum centres and how the choice for such typology can be interpreted.

### Positionality

Since in qualitative research, the researcher itself collects the data, for instance by gathering valuable observations for the study or preparing and conducting interviews, some “self-reflexivity” (Tracy 2012, p.56) on my own positionality is needed.

When conducting this research, I first considered my own nationality as myself a Swiss woman citizen, born and raised in Geneva. I have therefore developed throughout the years my own understanding of the Canton's culture, values and practices. Moreover, I have built up my personal opinion on most of the stakeholders I am considering in this research. While this position as a native allows me to fully understand the language, sayings and historical references collected in the narratives, it also implies for me to remain as objective as possible when interpreting the data in order to not influence the results and conclusions obtained with my own thoughts and to avoid shaping the research process according to them (Lin 2015, p.21). The second aspect to which I pay attention relates to my academic background. As a Master student in Global Refugee Studies, I certainly tend to be more critical of the restrictive asylum policies or other governmental practices related to refugees and asylum seekers. Even if I am aware of this potential bias and will try to remain objective, the reader should know from which position I am writing this thesis.

## Methods

To fully grasp the infrastructures' paradoxes of the asylum accommodation centres in Geneva and achieve an interpretation for such a choice of building typology and the values they embody, the following qualitative methods for data collection were selected. Before presenting the qualitative methods that I selected for the collection of data, I outline some of the reflections that I had on the data collection process.

### Personal reflections and process

Through this research paper, I wish to focus on something else than the refugee as a subject of study as I used to have in previous projects. Furthermore, my internship experience within the NGO *Shelter Centre* last semester, along with an increased interest in housing problematics, reinforced my desire to concentrate my research on accommodation centres for asylum seekers and refugees. However, this aim for a change raised some methodological questions: How to approach an "object" rather than a "subject"? How to interrogate a building? Is there any way of making it "speak" and reveal information?

It is with such questions in mind that I decided to go in person to see each centre. By going there, I did not have any specific expectations other than making a first step closer to my research focus. The idea was not to interrogate their residents but rather approach my topic from a different angle. Below is a more detailed explanation of my observation process.

In addition to my observations, I started looking for more details on the centres and discovered that a website had been created by the Institution in charge of them - the *Hospice général (HG)* -, sharing a lot of different kinds of materials presenting the construction process of these centres. Because it seems to me valuable to take into consideration the way the HG describes and promotes these centres to understand the reasons behind their specific design, I decided to analyse the narratives they used and provided online. As for the observations, the methods of narratives and story analysis are developed more deeply below.

## Observations

The first method used for this qualitative research is *observation*. While observations are usually understood as being a process “in which the observer participates in the daily life of the people under study” (Becker and Geer 1970 p.133 In: Baker 2006, p.173), here my object of study is the typology of the asylum centres of Geneva and therefore, I have, buildings instead of people as focus of my observations.

Before leaving Geneva and going back to Copenhagen, it was essential for me to go to the field and observe each centre and their surroundings so as to familiarize myself with their architecture and design in person. Although some pictures and videos displaying the centres are available online, I greatly appreciated looking at their typology and design with my own eyes and to photograph them from my perspective. Moreover, going there helped me grasp some insights on the atmosphere of each neighbourhood and understand a little their dynamics. For instance, when I arrived at the Centre of Lancy during the “after-school parents rush-hour”, I realized how many primary schools and highschools were close to the newly built centre. And, as outlined by Mauro Poggia, State counsellor, in one of the interviews available on the website, such proximity between schools and accommodation centres would not have been

possible in the past, which shows a shift in mentalities of Geneva citizens. I was thus satisfied to have been able to observe such proximity myself.

My observations were non-participative, which means that I did not interact with anyone in the field and I stood as an observer “from an entirely different environment” (Baker 2006, p.174) - in my case, outside of the actual perimeter of the centre. While this position allowed me to not be intrusive and thus not disturb my object of study, it also prevented me from achieving a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the place itself (Ibid.).

Regarding the length of time spent in the field, I stayed at each location the time I needed to take several pictures and write down some first impressions. Because “the amount of time depends on the research problem” (Ibid., p.181), two mornings were sufficient to see the five centres since most of the data used for my research was collected through an online investigation, described below. Observations were therefore necessary only as an additional source of information and to allow me to get my own sense of the buildings.

### Narratives and story analysis

The Hospice général, the institutions in charge of the accommodation centres in Geneva for asylum seekers, shares on a website called *Histoires de constructions*<sup>1</sup> (in English: Stories of construction) a large variety of materials presenting each one of the five accommodation centres recently built: videos, interviews, newspaper articles, pictures and other documents are available on this webpage. These elements not only offer web users a great amount of information and details on these projects and their realizations, but they also provide me with the main source of data for this research. Indeed, the narratives published online by the HG served as material for the method I have chosen to employ: narratives and story analysis. While narratives and stories are sometimes understood as having the same meaning, I decided to use both terms distinctively, because in this analysis I want to pay attention, on one side, to the overall

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<sup>1</sup> accessible here: <https://www.histoires-de-constructions.ch>

Stories of construction as the name of the website says and, on the other side, to which narratives were used to tell these stories.

I acknowledge the fact that the HG stories are not stories as commonly understood, but the communication strategy chosen by the HG to present them as such appeared interesting to investigate.

Analysing the way through which people tell their stories is a methodological tool allowing the researcher to grasp how “people distill and reflect a particular understanding of social and political relations” (Feldman et al. 2004, p.148). Therefore, considering this website as gathering stories of construction will help me envisage questions such as “why the story was told that way [?] (...) what [does] the storyteller mean [?]” and “What does he or she include or exclude?” (Ibid.).

In addition to this, I wanted to analyse the narratives used to tell these stories. Narratives analysis is a qualitative method that requires the researcher to study the kind of terms and words used in the type of material of focus - here the *Histoires de constructions* website - and to form themes out of them in order to better understand the communicator’s intentions or ideologies for instance (Neuendorf 2019, p.11). Additionally, it is important to highlight that, in this type of analysis, discourse “encompasses not only written and spoken language but also visual images” (Jørgensen and Phillips 2011, p.60). Because it considers that visual semiotics and sounds are valuable to fully grasp the communicator’s aims, videos and music should also be considered during the analysis (Ibid., p.61). By analysing all types of discourses, the researcher can then “identify structures of shared meaning in a specific social context” (Aydin-Düzgit and Rumelili 2018, p.5).

It is because I wished to understand the way in which the choice of such typology is presented, communicated and justified by the HG to the public that a story and narrative analysis seemed to me the best way of approaching my data. Moreover, knowing that such a method allows me to take into consideration the variety of materials offered on the website comforts me in my choice. Through the analysis of the narratives employed on the website, I thus looked at the paradoxes of infrastructures highlighted earlier and further investigated potential interpretations for such storytelling.

### Limitations of a narratives and story analysis

Narrative analysis is however not exempt from shortcomings. On one hand, it is known for leading to one of the many potential readings and interpretations of the terms the source offers (Neuendorf 2019, p.11). It is thus important to remember when conducting this analysis that other ways of understanding the data might be possible. This shortcoming leads to the second one, which is a lack of objectivity and of potential replicability of the study (Aydin-Düzgit and Rumelili 2018, p.10). Indeed, because the researcher might have prior understandings of the topic before the study, his/her interpretations of the source will be shaped accordingly (Ibid.). Regarding my position and as mentioned above, I can expect that my own understanding of the context might shape my interpretation of the discourses found on the webpage *Histoires de Constructions*. While the reader should be aware that some subjectivity might be part of my analysis - even if I try to keep in mind my own position within this research - growing up in Geneva allowed me to unravel things that non-natives might not have noticed. Finally, some scholars highlighted the risk of studying words that may have a different meaning depending on their temporal or social context (Ibid.). However, I do not consider this shortcoming as an obstacle to my research since the analyzed narratives were produced in a social and temporal context very close to my own.

### The set of data chosen and its limitations

Regarding the source of data chosen to conduct this research, I mainly rely on one webpage of the Hospice général called *Histoires de constructions*. The videos, interviews, documents and pictures provided online constitute my set of data, which implies some limitations that I highlight in this section.

First of all, this set is constituted by primary data, which means that, even though I did not produce any of the interviews, videos and documents present on the website, this material was not data before I considered it as such. Indeed, it would have been considered secondary data if these materials had been treated as data by a previous researcher and I had decided to rely on the data s/he had created (Persaud 2012, p.1095), which is not the case here. I therefore went through a firsthand collection of data to fulfill my research goals.

Relying on primary data is sometimes considered as a “preferred choice” (Ibid, p.1096). However, having to create the data set might lead the researcher to some difficulties. As a matter of fact, I wished to conduct some interviews with the HG, more specifically with one of its employees and one person in charge of the website, to ask further questions and complement my data set, but I received no answer. While this was unfortunate, it also gave me the opportunity to envisage further reflections on the reasons behind this lack of answer, treating this absence of response and communication as potential data. Moreover, having observations to triangulate some of my findings helped me overcome this absence of interviews.

Second, the website chosen is owned and managed by the Hospice général itself. Thus, the resources shared online are likely to be carefully selected and to reflect the point of views of the Institution and the Canton since, as explained below, the former is contracted by the latter. While this set of data appears to be biased, notably by displaying construction projects as almost an exemplary solution for refugee accommodation, I do not consider it as an issue since I am willing to find out the underlying aims of such use of building typology and how the state together with the HG justify it publicly. It is therefore important to keep in mind that we deal here with a communication strategy presenting carefully selected materials for the “branding” of the housing solution and that it does not reflect the reality of the situation. But, once again, albeit biased, this data set will lead to relevant reflections on the reasons for such selection of the materials shared online and what was occulted and left aside.

Finally, the narratives on which I base my analysis on are only available in French. This means that, although French is my mother tongue, initial meanings might be altered when words are translated to English. To mitigate this alteration, I decided to adopt the “parallel translations” technic (Behr and Shishido 2017, p.269), which means that, on one side, I translated myself the narratives based on my linguistic knowledge and understanding of the context and “background information on [the] concepts” (Ibid., p.270), and on the other side, relied a translation software. Both translations were then compared and merged to achieve a better grasp of the initial meaning of the narratives.

## Ethical considerations

### Online qualitative research and its ethical considerations

In the “real” world - or “offline world” as Salmons (2018) calls it (p.57) -, research ethics are being applied to protect any human subjects involved in the study (Ibid., p.58). However, the “online” world calls for further considerations since human subjects - in my case the HG and all the different stakeholders displayed in the materials published on its webpage - are involved in a rather different way, sometimes hard to fully comprehend. Indeed, while it is relatively straightforward to determine the field and the people concerned by the research while being in the field, on the internet these elements become more vague (Ibid.). Ethical considerations are therefore even more valuable in this kind of setting.

First, when conducting research online, one should keep in mind that all information s/he will find was produced by a human subject (Ibid., p.75) and thus wonder whether a consent agreement to use the material available online should be established. In my specific case, consent is not obligatory because I rely on data that is published and shared on a public website with no access barriers like password or membership obligations (Ibid., p.86). Quoting the person behind the material provided will hence be sufficient (Ibid., p.90). To do so, I will mention the name of the stakeholder speaking for each quote used, and the Appendix A is made available at the end for the reader to see the list of materials selected and where to find them.

Second, as mentioned above, the place from where data is collected is more difficult to delimitate online because “the setting can be virtually anywhere in the online universe” (Ibid., p.90). So, in order to respect the limits and scope of my study, the platforms from which I will collect my data will be carefully selected and outlined and I will limit myself to these websites.

Third, as in offline research, the authenticity and quality of the data found on the internet should be questioned. Among the potential issues the researcher can encounter online, the following three may be mentioned and taken into account: “incomplete records”, “biased data” and “intentional incompleteness” (Guthrie 2010, p.101 In: Salmons 2018, p.118). But although in my case the data is biased, the recordings of the interviews are edited and potentially some aspects of the construction process are left aside intentionally, these issues will not affect my analysis. Indeed, my point here is not trying to see if what they say is objectively “true”

and if their housing solution is normatively good but rather to investigate the way in which they present it and how the choice for such typology is justified. My desire in this study to explore how they describe their centres reinforces the usefulness of using such a website.

## Context

In this section, I discuss the reputation of Switzerland as a land of asylum, along with its consensus “culture”. I also present Swiss asylum policy and procedure in order to better understand its politics and to obtain more background information on who gets to inhabit the accommodation centres. Finally, I introduce the institution in charge of these centres, the HG, drawing on its history, role and centres.

### Switzerland: a land of asylum?

Before presenting how Swiss asylum policy was created and is currently working, the reputation of Switzerland as a land of asylum is worth mentioning. This “myth”, as some scholars refer to it, would originate in Switzerland’s “tradition of hospitality”, mostly by welcoming people fleeing from religious or political persecutions (Parini 1997, p.51). But, this role of asylum land was more than a simple desire to help people in need. It was also a necessity for the country to ensure its “internal cohesion and foreign policy”<sup>2</sup> (Arlettaz 1991, p.140). Indeed, among other things, this hospitality and openness to the “Other” allowed Switzerland to achieve a certain stability among its “pluricultural population” (Ibid.). Furthermore, and because of the lack of internal mobility due to the sovereignty of each canton, the immigration also came as a necessity in terms of the labour force for the Swiss economic situation (Ibid.). Therefore, if the country was inclined to welcome foreigners it was partly because it was necessary for its prosperity and stability.

Throughout the years, however, the growing foreign population created some kind of identity crisis and other xenophobic reactions within the local population. This led

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<sup>2</sup> translation of the author of the following French original version: “ (...) la cohésion intérieure qu'à la politique extérieure (...)” (Arlettaz 1991, p.140)

Switzerland to adopt, during the Second World War, a sort of ambivalent behaviour balancing between encouraging temporary refuge to respect its asylum tradition but “discouraging long-term social insertion”<sup>3</sup> (Parini 1997, p.55) to avoid refugees settling for too long. The Swiss asylum policy became more restrictive, and its asylum system was regulated later on, as I explain below.

## The Swiss consensus

Before presenting the asylum policy of Switzerland, the Swiss consensus and direct democracy tools available to Swiss citizens should be briefly presented and some more details of the impact of these tools on the political system should be given. These tools are either *popular initiatives* that can be used to amend the Constitution or *referendums* to seek for citizens’ approval of acts of parliament or federal laws (Confédération suisse 2021). One should know that referendums and popular initiatives not only offer the voters a large decision-making power, but also directly influence the political behaviour of the executive coalition (Linder and Mueller 2021, p.167). Indeed, one of the reasons why Switzerland has a power-sharing political system today is because of the referendums and their “strong incentive, even a constraint, to cooperate in the form of an oversized coalition because the risk of defeat in a popular vote is too high otherwise” (Ibid., p.168). The main goal is therefore to reach a political compromise leading to a situation in which “no single winner takes all, [but] everybody wins something” (Ibid., p.181), otherwise the law or any other decision at stake would not be approved by the population and engender a referendum. Thus, this tendency to seek consensus and compromise decisions is considered by some to be part of the Swiss culture (Ibid.).

## Swiss asylum policy

Before the adoption of the Swiss Asylum Act (AsyIA) in 1981, Switzerland had no proper asylum laws. Thus, until then, the Swiss legal asylum system relied exclusively on the Refugee Convention - known as well as the Geneva Convention of 1954 - on

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<sup>3</sup> translation of the author of the following French original version: “ (...) décourageant l'insertion sociale à long terme (...)” (Parini 1997, p.55)

its definition of who is considered as a refugee and on its 1967 Protocol (Bader 2018, p.70). But when the 1980s arrived, along with waves of immigration coming from the “global south”, replacing the Italian migrant workers of 1948 or the Hungarians from the 1950s, Switzerland set up its own asylum policies (Bader 2018, p.71; Parini 1997, p.58).

Since its implementation, the AsyIA has been one of the most central topics on the Swiss political agenda (Parini and Gianni 2005, p.209), being regularly contested and usually opposing the *Swiss People’s Party* (SVP/UDC), a nationalist right-wing party, to the left-wing units, such as the *Socialist Party* (Bader 2018, p.71). For instance, within the first 27 years of its application, the asylum law has been changed, partially or entirely, about 15 times (Ibid., p.70) and these revisions keep happening nowadays. It is mainly thanks to, or because of, direct democratic tools to which Swiss citizens have access that these many revisions have been possible. Therefore, “Swiss citizens are often asked to vote on the revision of the asylum policy” (Bader 2018, p.70).

According to Parini and Gianni (2005), the objectives behind these revisions can be divided into 4 different goals (p.209). First, the AsyIA would aim to speed up the application procedure of asylum seekers (AS) in order to avoid it to last for years, potentially allowing them to integrate professionally, and thus making their deportation more difficult to happen (Ibid.). The second objective concerns the deportations and their rate of effective execution, which, because considered too low, should be increased (Ibid.). The third objective of AsyIA is to make Switzerland less attractive to potential new AS and try to fight against who might abuse from the asylum system and its social benefits (Ibid., p.210). Finally, the fourth goal is to introduce new categories of permits, such as the already in place “provisory status” which grants access to the country but does not let asylum seekers to go through the normal procedure and therefore does not give them any chances to receive the refugee status or another type of permit (Ibid.).

## The Swiss asylum procedure

The aforementioned provisory status is one of the 10 status that AS can receive when trying to enter Switzerland. But before having their status determined, the applicants have to follow the asylum procedure. Since 2019, there is an “accelerated” version of this procedure, aiming at delivering a status in 100 days maximum instead of the usual procedure that could last over a year (OSAR 2021). In order to make it as efficient as possible, the 6 Federal Centres for Asylum Seekers (CFA), spread over the country and runned by the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM), bring together all the actors involved in the procedure such as legal representatives, translators, return counselling etc. (Confédération suisse 2018a, p.1). Each applicant is therefore attributed to a CFA to first undergo the Dublin procedure to verify that s/he was not already registered in another Dublin state (Ibid., p.2). If so, the country concerned will be contacted to prepare the transfer of the applicant. However, if it is not the case, s/he will then move to the accelerated procedure and have her/his application approved (Ibid.). S/he receives an **N permit**, meaning s/he is now a recognized asylum seeker. After that, a detailed hearing will take place, during which the burden of proof lies on the AS, signifying that s/he has to provide evidence to support her/his claims (SEM 2019). If the information provided was sufficient, the SEM will give an answer in the following week (Confédération suisse 2018a, p.2). The answer being positive (**F permit or B permit**) will lead to the relocation of the AS to one canton, each canton receiving a certain number of AS according to the size of its population (Confédération suisse 2018b, p.2). If more information is needed, the SEM can choose to switch to the “extended” procedure that would last for approximately a year, and while waiting for the answer, these AS will also be placed in a canton (SEM 2019). According to the mechanism of distribution among the cantons, Geneva had therefore to welcome and house in 2020 approximately 5% of the recognized refugees (**B permit**), individuals having received provisory protection (**F permit**) or AS still waiting for the verdict (**N permit**) (Confédération suisse 2020, p.3). They were 1’012 in 2019 (Rapport annuel 2019, p.42). In this thesis, I refer to the residents of the accommodation centres as “migrants” or “refugees”, as stakeholders themselves use these terms interchangeably in their accounts.

## Different status

As in the European Union (EU) legislation, Switzerland delivers different types of permits depending on the status obtained by the AS. Nonetheless, because Switzerland is not part of the EU, some Swiss permits have no equivalent within the range of European status (Bader 2018, p. 73).

The first difference is to be found in the category of applicant considered as “dismissed” and thus not obtaining any kind of permit. Switzerland considers that “persons, who fail to cooperate without valid reason or fail to make themselves available for more than 20 days lose their right to have the procedure continued” (AsylA 2021, Art. 8 §3bis) and thus, will be dismissed. Additionally, since 1990, the government can create a list of considered “safe countries” (Bader 2018, p.74). The applicant coming from one of them will not have access to the asylum procedure if s/he cannot prove that s/he is at risk of persecution (Ibid.).

The second status where Swiss and EU legislation do not overlap is the **F permit**, delivered to “provisionally admitted refugee (according to the Geneva convention)”, as stated in the table below:

**Table 4.1** Status and permit according to the Swiss AsylA and their equivalent in the EU legislation

Swiss permit	Status in Swiss AsylA	Status in EU legislation
None	Inadmissible application:	Inadmissible application:
	Dublin transfer	Dublin transfer
	Dismissed applicant	<i>No equivalent</i>
	Unfounded application:	Unfounded application (including manifestly unfounded application <sup>a</sup> ):
	Rejected asylum seeker	Rejected applicant
N	Asylum seeker	Person being a subject of a pending application
S	People in need of temporary protection	Person granted temporary protection status
F	Provisionally admitted person	Person granted subsidiary protection status
F	Provisionally admitted refugee (according to the Geneva convention)	<i>No equivalent</i>
B	Recognized refugee (according to the AsylA)	Person granted refugee status
B	Person granted residence permit for humanitarian reasons	Person granted authorization to stay for humanitarian reasons

Sources: EUROSTAT, Matthey (2012)

<sup>a</sup>Manifestly unfounded applications are an EU sub-category of unfounded applications (Art. 32 para. 2, Dir. 2013/32/EU) which does not exist in Swiss law. Thus, clearly fraudulent applications are likely to be considered as inadmissible applications in Switzerland without further distinction, and thereby are excluded beforehand from any ordinary asylum proceedings

(Bader 2018, p.72)

“Provisionally admitted refugees” are persons who qualify for the refugee status according to the Geneva Convention but not in the sense of the Swiss AsyIA” (Bader 2018, p.72). The AsyIA was revised by citizens’ vote in 2012, and aimed at reducing the number of Eritrean refugees arriving on the territory (Ibid. p.73). Knowing that a lot of them usually run away from the military, it was added to the refugee definition that the applicants who “have refused to perform military service or have deserted” (AsyIA 2021, Art. 3 §3) will not be recognised as refugees anymore and will receive the F permit which offers less advantages than the B one (Bader 2018, p.73).

## The Hospice général

### History of the Hospice général and the sheltering of refugees

The Hospice général is an institution founded in Geneva in 1535. Before having the mandate it has nowadays and being in charge of the 5 new accommodation centres I am looking at in this thesis, the HG was called *Hôpital général* (in English: “general hospital”) and was located in an old convent (Hospice général 2021a). As its former name indicates, its main role was to take care not only of beggars, vagrants, illegitimate children and refugees, but also sick people (Ibid.). Moreover, HG’s services were based on the values of the Christian church and its principle of charity (Ibid.). The shift in its mandate towards delivering only social services happened in 1901 with the promulgation of the law on medical public assistance: the medical care was therefore left to the cantonal hospital (Ibid.). At the same time, its name changed to *Hospice général* - and the former connexion between the HG and the Church started slowly to disappear because, with this law, charity legally became a right and was not of Church responsibility anymore (Ibid.). Finally, in 1981, the Geneva State declared the HG as being the unique institution in charge of the public assistance, which consists of delivering financial assistance for people without a sufficient income, managing a “holiday house” where elderly persons can have some relaxation space, providing social information to the population and offering accommodation to young adults in need and asylum seekers (Ibid.). Asylum seekers are also entitled to receive financial help from the HG (Ibid.).

As mentioned above, the HG was and is still today, in charge of the housing of the beneficiaries. While it was manageable to receive everyone in peaceful times within the buildings owned by the HG, wars stretched its accommodation capacities. It is for this reason that movements, such as the movement called *Action places libres* (in English: “Free places action”) initiated by the civil society, tried to make up for the lack of places for refugees fleeing because of the Second World War to Switzerland (Parini and Gianni 2005, p.202). Their aim was to convince citizens to welcome refugees in their homes (Ibid.). This movement was repeated, under another name (*Action places gratuites*), in 1973 when Chileans fled the Coup (Ibid.). The same issue of lack of rooms repeated itself when the Hungarians arrived in 1956. Other solutions were then found: holiday houses, pensions, youth hostels, hotels and barracks were made available for them to sleep in (Ibid., p.198). As it will be presented below, the “refugee crisis” of 2014 stretched once again HG’s accommodation capacities and called for new solutions.

In addition to this, and even if neither related to HG’s mandate nor to refugees, it is interesting to highlight that Geneva also experienced in the past large influxes of immigrant workers, coming on a seasonal basis. However, the Canton did not do anything to accommodate them (Mariani 2019). Indeed, Geneva was very much interested in enjoying this extra labour force without having them settled permanently (Ibid.). They were therefore only allowed to stay in what the company they worked for offered them as housing: for most of them, precarious wooden barracks for which they had to pay (Corthésy 2019). Some referred to these settings as *camps* (Ibid.).

### Hospice général today

Today HG’s main mandate, attributed by the Geneva State, is principally to offer social services to the persons entitled to them. In addition to this, the HG is in charge of all the activities related to asylum in the Canton and has to manage a real estate stock which has been constituted mostly through donations throughout the years (Hospice général 2021b). The HG therefore covers its costs thanks to these real estate possessions and to the financial contributions of the canton of Geneva (Ibid.), accounting for approximately 92’600’058 Swiss francs (equivalent to 623’452’495 DKK) for the year 2021 (Hospice général 2019, p.7).

More specifically, regarding its asylum related activities, the HG has to ensure that asylum seekers, recognised refugees and people having received other kinds of permits, are received and welcomed properly and that the cohabitation with the Swiss population will happen in harmony (Ibid., p.6). The HG also takes care of the social and professional integration of the people concerned and provides financial help to the ones entitled to it. Lastly, HG is also in charge of providing a roof to the beneficiaries (Ibid., p.6).

When it comes to this very last task of housing provision, and out of the 52 real estate properties that HG possesses, 16 locations are used to receive asylum seekers and refugees (Hospice général 2021c). Out of these 16 centres called “collective accommodation centres” (in french: centres d’hébergement collectif), different varieties of building typologies can be encountered. For the centres located in already existing buildings, it goes from old country houses, mansion and 15th century castle to multi-storey city buildings. Their locations vary as well greatly. They are spread over 9 different communes in the canton of Geneva, some situated in the urban outskirts, others in the countryside and the remaining ones close to the city centre.

However, these many centres were not sufficient enough to respond to the so-called “refugee crisis” that Switzerland experienced in 2014. As mentioned above, the Canton of Geneva is mandated by the Confederation to take in charge a certain number of asylum seekers waiting for a decision or having received a permit allowing them to stay, 5.9% of the total in 2015 (Rapport annuel 2015, p.15). Since this number increased between 2014 and 2015 with large arrivals of Afghans and Eritreans, 1’314 additional beds were needed in Geneva (Ibid.). Consequently, the already crowded centres and the fire incident that burned down the *Centre des Tattes* in November 2014, it was necessary for the HG to find rapid housing solutions. The first reaction was therefore to allow the asylum seekers to stay in the civil protection shelters (in french, abris de protection civile). These shelters are underground because they are planned to be used in case of a war or a natural or technical catastrophe such as a nuclear disaster (Ville de Genève 2021). According to the law (Loi fédérale sur la protection de la population et sur la protection civile (LPPCi)) the Confederation has to have a bed for every person living in Switzerland in these underground shelters (Loi fédérale 2002, Art.45). When necessary the city can also use them to receive homeless people or other beneficiaries in need of a roof. Thus, knowing that beds

were available, the HG decided in 2015 to receive the asylum seekers in these bunkers. Contestation arose from the civil society against this decision, arguing that these shelters offered no human dignity because depriving their occupants from receiving fresh air, light, privacy and among other things, no sufficient space (Stop bunkers 2021). The collective called “Stop Bunker” together with other associations such as Solidarité sans Frontières (in English, Solidarity without Borders) protested and finally obtained in 2018 from Geneva the closure of these shelters (Communiqué de presse 2018, p.1).

To make up for the lack of rooms in the existing buildings and be able to close the bunkers, HG worked together with a task force created especially for this by the State Council in 2015 and consisting of various departments such as the one in charge of finance, of security and economy, of employment and social affairs and the one taking care of the planning, housing and energy, to build new centres (Rapport annuel 2015, p.16). They projected to build, within 3 years, 5 new centres, which would increase the number of new housing possibilities of the HG by 70% and therefore allowing them to improve the quality of accommodation offered (Rapport annuel 2019, p.5).

Before learning more about each centre, one should be aware of the particularly severe real estate shortage in which Geneva finds itself. Indeed, even if thousands of new housing units have been built, too many people are willing to live in the city and it is therefore not sufficient to satisfy everyone (Bradley 2018). This situation makes it thus hard to find land available and, I suppose, was challenging HG’s task.

#### The construction projects

The first building of this construction project was started in 2015 in the Commune of Carouge and ready to be opened in January 2016 (Histoires de constructions 2021). The centre was named **Centre de l’Étoile** and was built to receive a maximum of 230 unaccompanied minors (Ibid.). As the picture below demonstrates, the centre is composed of two buildings made out of a series of containers and one smaller building that cannot be seen in the picture, reserved for the administration section.



(picture retrieved from <https://www.24heures.ch/suisse/suisse-romande/geneve-hospice-general-reagit-suicide-dun-jeune-migrant/story/10907191>)

The architect firm *ALHO* in charge of this creation, presents itself as being one of the pioneering companies in series production of modular constructions (ALHO 2021, p.6). It has been more than 50 years now that they are specialized in the fabrication of steel containers and produce approximately 12'000 modules per year (Ibid., p.9). This family company started in Germany but since then, expanded its production sites and offices to neighbouring countries such as France and Switzerland (Ibid., p.8).

The modularity this kind of construction offers made the finalization of the project within six months possible. Moreover, since the authorities have rented the land for a duration of 7 years, its modularity will make it easy to be removed and/or placed somewhere else (Bach 2016, p.5). The picture below shows how the containers were assembled and how easily they can be moved.



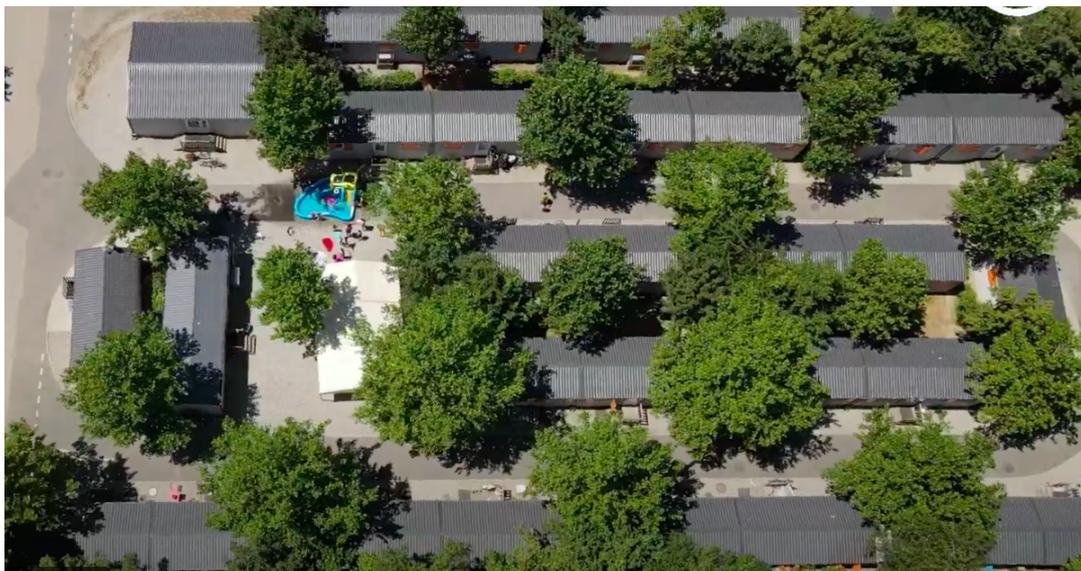
(picture retrieved from <https://www.histoires-de-constructions.ch/projets/etoile/>)

Regarding the interior of the building, the unaccompanied minors are provided with a laundry room and a kitchen that they share. Moreover, the rooms are to be occupied by two individuals and therefore are furnished with a bunk bed each and a bathroom with a sink and shower as one can see below. It is rather spartan as the Newspaper Le Courrier describes it (Ibid., p.5).



(picture retrieved from <https://www.histoires-de-constructions.ch/projets/etoile/>)

In June of the same year, the second construction project started in the Commune of Satigny. The Centre that will be called **Centre du Bois-de-Bay** opened after 8 months of work, in February 2017 (Histoires de constructions 2021). Unlike the Centre de l'Étoile, the containers used for this project were not assembled together to form a building but rather stayed separately to form a sort of village of “mobile homes”, as it can be seen on the picture below. This village of 33 containers, located nearby a camping spot, can accommodate a maximum of 126 individuals, families only (Rapport annuel 2019, p.70).



(screenshot retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4tSgy7dn0P0>)

Therefore, each family has access to one house, consisting of two bedrooms, a kitchen and a bathroom with toilets and shower (Hospice général 2020). There is also a collective laundry room, a garden where each of the residents can grow plants and a playground landed by the camping for children to play (Ibid.). For this realization, the HG received in a competition organised by the monthly magazine “Bilan” the second prize in the category “social housing”. The criteria assessed to award the prize were about environment, architecture, social and aesthetic (Histoires de constructions 2021).

According to the details shared by the HG online, each of these houses is a container with a wooden structure, three windows and a door. As shown below, they are made in a way that allows them to be easily movable. This last characteristic was certainly necessary for the project to happen since the HG declared this centre as being provisory only (Ibid.). Indeed, the Centre du Bois-de-Bay is meant to be removed in 2027 (Rapport annuel 2019, p.70).



(picture retrieved from <https://www.histoires-de-constructions.ch/projets/camping-bois-de-bay/>)

The architect firm in charge of designing this village is called *ACAU architecture*. It's a Swiss firm based in Geneva and has existed since 1963 (ACAU 2021). *ACAU* is the firm that has designed the Centre de Rigot as well, which will be presented later on in this section. However, while the Rigot project is largely described on their website, no mention is made of the Centre du Bois-de-Bay. Additionally and contrary to the architects firm of the previously described centre, *ACAU* is not specialized only in modular buildings but rather known for its projects of more “fixed” typologies carried out in the Canton.

The third centre newly constructed is the one located on the Commune of Lancy. The **Centre de Lancy** was opened during the summer 2018 and can welcome up to 80 persons, whether families or couples (Histoires de constructions 2021). As it can be seen in the picture below, the building is constituted by a series of containers, forming together a 3-storey rectangle. A fence closes the yard in front of the centre and a garden on the other side is made available for the beneficiaries to use. Inside there are 13 apartments and 7 studios, each of them having one private kitchen and bathroom (Fiche signalétique 2019, p.2). In addition to this, there are some common areas such as a laundry room, a meeting room that can also be used for children activities and a bicycle storage room (Ibid.).



(picture taken by the author, on the 13th of January 2021)

*Beric architectes* was the firm in charge of this project. This Swiss firm, based in Geneva for almost 60 years, was mandated by the HG for this modular construction (Ibid.). It is for them the first time they worked with this kind of housing typology. This particularity of being modular is due to the fact that the building's function is, like the others, meant to be provisory, for a duration of approximately 10 years (Ibid.). As the architects highlighted, once the earthworks were done and the containers ready, assembling them together took only a few days (Ibid.). Once they are no longer needed in Lancy, these prefabricated metal modules can be used for other functions elsewhere.

The fourth centre, the **Centre de Rigot**, is perhaps the one that received the most of the public's attention. Described as being an innovative project thanks to its evolutionary, social, local and recyclable characteristics, the Mayor of the town of Geneva even said during his speech for the inauguration of the centre, that this project was showing the example to follow (Hospice général 2018a). Opened in spring 2019, the centre is located in the international neighbourhood of Geneva: the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is on the other side of the street, the United Nations (UN) headquarters are at a walking distance from it and the “Maison de la Paix” is nearby.

As it can be seen below, this building is, again here, made of a series of containers assembled together to form two separated buildings, facing each other. In total, 230 modules have been used to create them. However, in comparison to the centres previously described, the containers are entirely constructed with wood. The wood was carefully selected to come from the nearby region and the Canton itself (Hospice général 2018b). Another characteristic of these containers is that they are adaptable, or as they call it “evolutive”, according to its occupants. Because Rigot can accommodate 370 persons maximum, whether families, individuals that arrived alone or persons with disabilities, there is a need for the possibility of in-/decreasing the number of rooms in the apartments depending, for instance, on the size of the family (Dossier de presse 2018, p.1). Each apartment or studio possesses its own kitchen and bathroom.



(picture taken by the author, on the 9th of January 2021)

In addition to the living areas, the residents share a laundry room, some class rooms, a nursery, a common area and a sports hall (Ibid., p.3). On the ground floor, a shop related to the residents' activities is open to the public and the garden area is also meant to be shared with the neighbours (Ibid.).

The architects who designed this building are, as already mentioned above, the same ones that created the Centre du Bois-de-Bay: *ACAU architecture*. And, unlike Bois-de-Bay, Rigot appears almost on the front page of their website and pictures, plans, videos and other information are shared online. The video they share is the one created by the HG, displaying the interview of one of their architects, Darius Golchan. He explains to the camera that this project is meant to stay for approximately 10 years and will after be deconstructed and used somewhere else (Hospice général 2018c), just like the other newly built centres.

The fifth and last one of these recent centres is the one located on the Commune de la Seymaz from which it tooks its name: **Centre de la Seymaz**. As Rigot, it can welcome 370 individuals, being families, individuals that arrived alone or persons with disabilities. Thus, the centre offers different sizes of room ranging from single to six-person apartments. However, unlike Rigot, Bois-de-Bay and Lancy, the residents of la Seymaz have to share the kitchen.

Regarding the typology of the building, once more, it is of a modular type. It is composed of several containers and when put together, they form 4 separated buildings as it can be seen below. Each block varies from one another only regarding its color and the disposition of the rooms of the ground floor (Histoires de constructions 2021). In between each block, a covered area has been set up to allow people to gather outside whatever the weather and a playground for children has also been installed.



(picture taken by the author, on the 9th of January 2021)

The architects behind this project are Swiss, like the others, and based in Geneva. Their company is called *BassiCarellaMarello* and, as one of them explained in a video interview, they were very much interested in working on a housing project for refugees, even though they are not specialized in this field (Hospice général 2018d). During the interview, the architect also mentions that the space-ratio per person is not very generous and it is for this reason that they have decided on selecting windows as big as possible to offer a sensation of space to the beneficiaries (Ibid.). Additionally, concerning the materials used for the containers, it is, like Rigot, the wood from the region that has been preferred over steel or cement (Ibid.). The only pieces of steel are to be found underground, in the foundations of the blocks. But the fact that the buildings have foundations does not mean they will not be removed. The system of foundation that has been chosen is actually known to be easily dismantled (Histoire de constructions 2021). This was a necessary criteria since, once again, everything is planned to be removed in approximately 10 years (Ibid.).

## Analysis

Having contextualized the subject of my research, I present in the following section the analysis conducted to answer the research question. I first introduce more in-depth the data set I rely on, by introducing the stakeholders displayed on the website and enumerating the materials published online. I then outline my argument through the

two paradoxes mentioned earlier - the “hyper-positive-visibility” paradox and the “unrooted roots” paradox. Each paradox allows me to unravel different aspects of my argument. Therefore, they should be considered as complementing each other to understand how infrastructures may embody cultural values and help achieving political goals. In terms of structure of my argumentation, both paradoxes will be presented as follows: first, a focus is made on the typology and design of the centres to allow us to see how each paradox takes place within the buildings. Second, attention is put on the narratives and the other material offered by the website to investigate potential explanations for such paradoxes.

### Histoires de constructions

As explained above, the website from which I created my data set is named *Histoires de constructions*. This website, created and managed by the Hospice général aims, as declared online, at documenting the several projects of construction and renovation the HG has (Histoires de constructions 2021). Through 116 pictures, 12 video-interviews, 6 video-presentations of the centres or other construction steps, 4 timelapse-videos, 6 newspaper articles and 2 informative texts, one can therefore follow the construction processes of each accommodation centre. There are, however, some imbalances regarding the quantity of materials shared for each centre. The differences in the quantities of materials shared is quite striking when one looks at Appendix A, listing all the materials published on the website. For instance, while the Centre de Rigot offers 10 video-interviews of the stakeholders involved, the Centre de l'Étoile and du Bois-de-Bay have none. The reasons for such variation will be further investigated in the analysis section.

Each building process is chronologically presented to the viewer, almost in a story manner as the title of the website evokes it: Stories of constructions. The potential intention behind this communication strategy of the HG will be included in the analysis as well. And, the pictures and music chosen to tell these “stories” will be taken into account directly in the analysis.

Regarding the stakeholders intervening in the videos, mayors, architects, state counselors and others have been interviewed by the HG. More specifically, below is a list of the main interviewees:

- Apothéloz, Thierry: State counsellor, part of the department of social cohesion
- Carella, Roberto: Architect at the BassiCarellaMarello architects firm
- Dal Busco, Serge: Vice-president of the State council, part of the department of infrastructures - member of the christian democratic party (PDC)
- Daniel Merkelbach, Ariane: Director of Migrant Aid at the Hospice General
- Ducret, Jean-Marc: Director of JPF-Ducret SA, wood construction firm
- Girod, Christophe: Director of the Hospice général
- Golchan, Darius: Architect at the Acau architects firm
- Grandi, Filippo: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
- Møller, Michael: General director of the UN Office
- Pagani, Rémi: Mayor of the town of Geneva - member of Ensemble à gauche party (in English: together on the left)
- Poget, Philippe: Director of POGET & MEYNET, forestry engineers
- Poggia, Mauro: State counsellor, member of the Geneva Citizens Movement party (MCG)
- Renevey, Frédéric: Mayor of the town of Lancy, member of the socialist party

The interview, videos and other materials they appear in have been listed in the Appendix A for the reader to easily find the source from which I selected the quotes for my analysis.

The statements they have used in their respective interviews serve as a basis for me to build my analysis and arguments. It is therefore relevant to know their professions and, for some, their political positions. One should as well keep in mind that this website is part of the strategic communication of the HG and thus present very carefully selected materials and stakeholders. It is thus not a coincidence if, as the visitors of the webpage, we have access to these particular statements they made.

This large quantity of materials and stakeholders displayed online plays a major role in the visibility of the construction projects of the HG. It allows the public to be aware of every step and other details of the buildings, although only the details the HG is

willing to render visible and share. Additionally, this website contributes to the first aforementioned paradox that I outline in the next section: the hyper-positive-visibility of the centers' infrastructure.

### Hyper-positive-visibility

As briefly presented earlier, the hyper-positive-visibility of the accommodation infrastructures in Geneva comes as a paradoxical feature when knowing that Switzerland has been trying, throughout the years, to reach a more restrictive asylum policy and make the country less attractive for asylum seekers (Parini and Gianni 2005, p.210). Setting these accommodation centres as being an exemplary solution for housing migrants hence raises some questions.

Nonetheless, the accommodation infrastructures were not always made visible in this positive manner. Indeed, while the older hard-roofed centres were not really promoted or made visible in any ways, the emergency solution of housing migrants underground in the civil protection shelters during the 2014 crisis was rendered public in a very negative way. As seen in the context section of this research, the civil society of the Geneva canton reacted with protests against such underground shelters, describing them as offering no dignity to its occupants (Stop bunkers 2021). Switzerland, and Geneva in particular, had therefore to act upon this polemic so as to not tarnish its humanitarian reputation on the international scene. Although the asylum policy remains restrictive, the image of International Geneva had to be improved.

I argue here that it is to recover its humanitarian reputation and its credibility regarding its tradition of hospitality that Geneva adopted such typology of centres, and shifted from receiving migrants underground to receiving them in these newly designed centres. To make it happen and get its notoriety of a "city of refuge" back, Geneva had not only to prove that its humanitarian values are still relevant today and that its willingness to welcome migrants is present, but also it had to rapidly come up with a decent housing solution to replace the underground shelters. This argument will be developed below.

In the following subsections, I first demonstrate how the typology and design of the centres contributes to the creation of this paradox of hyper-positive-visibility. Second, in order to see why this paradoxical quality is to be found in these infrastructures and how we can understand it, I collect and analyse the narratives and other materials made available on the website. To do so, I first outline that the narratives found on the website *Histoires de construction* very much emphasize Geneva's humanitarian reputation and highlight its qualities in asylum management. Second, I show how the website proves that a willingness to welcome migrants is still present and how these construction projects brought people together. Lastly, I present how the solution found is sold as an exemplary approach of migrant accommodation centres by emphasizing the official approval or recognition it received.

“An innovative construction concept”

In this first subsection, I want to outline that if Geneva can recover its humanitarian image and reputation it is thanks to the design and typology selected for the refugees' accommodation centres. On one hand, it is through their design and efforts that architects put into the projects that this hyper-positive-visibility can take place. On the other hand, it is thanks to their typology that the process for Geneva to recover its hospitality reputation can start.

First and foremost, although these centres are made of containers, their aesthetic and innovative configuration allowed them to look more than just a pile of containers - except maybe for the Centre de l'Étoile which remains somewhat “raw” in my own opinion. One of the reasons that could explain such an impression on the aesthetic of l'Étoile is that it is the only centre created by a big firm specialized in modular constructions. Indeed, the other four centres were designed by local Genevan architect firms and therefore more attention has probably been put on the design and appearance of the buildings. For instance, they have been careful about the materials chosen. This can be noticed when the architect Carella said in his interview that, if wood has been chosen, it is because “*the presence of wood humanises the housing*”. By selecting wood and caring about its impact on the residents, it is clear that the architects sought to provide quality in this housing solution.

The architect also said that they had been paying attention to the size of the windows used for the centre in order to “*have generosity in space*” and give the residents the feeling of having more spacious rooms. Once again, attention is put on certain elements of the building to improve the comfort it offers.

In addition to this, on the website of the architect firms of the Lancy centre, we can read that “*the building's facade is marked by an innovative construction concept with organic tones*” (Beric 2018, p.1). The fact that they have chosen organic colours for the facade is one more proof of some reflection on the design of these centres because these colours are meant to give an impression of equilibrium between the nature surrounding the centre and the building itself (Hisour 2021). With these designs and thoughts on the architecture of the accommodation centres we are therefore far away from the prison-like shelters refugees are often being received in. The architects, by playing with the design, colours and different materials, even allowed the HG to obtain an award in social housing, as mentioned in the context.

Although their design seemed to me unusual, my personal impression when going to see each centre was that efforts had been made to arrive at this aesthetic and offer more than simple emergency shelters. Indeed, when looking at the centres, it is not obvious at first glance that they are made of containers. The innovative design of the centres is thus one of the key features to arrive at such positive visibility. With the help of local architects, the HG is therefore able to render these centres visible and be sure that the image display is positive.

Thanks to their design, the centres can be made visible in a positive manner and, as it will be demonstrated through the narratives below, this visibility allows the HG to communicate other messages to the audience to recover its reputation of hospitality land. But before looking closer at the narratives of the website, it will be shown that the typology itself of the centres help the Canton recover its humanitarian credibility.

First, the modular typology of the centres allowed Geneva to counter, in a rapid manner, the protests made against the underground shelters offered during the “migration crisis” Switzerland experienced in 2014. Thanks to its potential of rapid assemblage on site, the first two centres - Centre de l'Étoile and Bois-de-Bay - were open already in 2015 and 2016. This specific modular typology each of the centres

has, allowed the Canton to react fast and thus, to demonstrate to the protestors that their voices had been heard and efforts were undertaken to provide above-ground centres to migrants. By calming the controversy, Geneva made therefore a first step towards recovering its humanitarian reputation and this, thanks to the typology chosen.

Second, one should remember how complicated the housing situation is in Geneva, as outlined in the context section of this research. The modular typology of the centres is therefore an asset since it gives the opportunity to be removed easily and thus rent the land for a specific amount of years only. As shown before, each building has its own “expiration date”. I therefore assume that if the HG had to ask for permanent construction permissions, obtaining the land would have been slightly more complicated. This temporary aspect of the buildings is thus an advantage when trying to find a location in overcrowded Geneva. However, I do not wish to expand here too much on the temporariness of these constructions since it will be discussed further in the second part of my analysis.

Having seen that the design of the housing solution allows this paradoxical quality of hyper-positive-visibility to take place, attention is put now on the narratives and other materials of the website *Histoires de constructions*, which reinforces the visibility of the construction project and gives the opportunity to the HG and the Canton to communicate other “messages”. These different “messages” shared on the website are presented below and help us understand why the accommodation centres are made visible while the asylum policies of Switzerland remain restrictive and trying to reduce Switzerland's attractiveness.

“Geneva, city of refuge”

The first “message” shared online by the different stakeholders concerns Switzerland's reputation as a land of asylum. Geneva's humanitarian reputation is recalled on the HG website by various stakeholders in different ways. On one side, one architect makes reference to the history of the Canton to say that if Geneva receives and welcomes migrants nowadays it is because the city is used to doing so. In an interview, Roberto Carella, the architect of the Centre de la Seymaz, said the following:

*“We're all refugees to some extent in Geneva, even some of the important families. So I found it interesting to go into this [project] because sheds like that, maybe even worse, our parents were entitled to them. In Geneva it's part of our history.”*

On the video of the interview, right before his statement, we could see the following title appearing on the screen: *“Geneva, city of refuge”*. Additionally, while Roberto mentions the “sheds”, some old pictures of the shelters in which seasonal workers were received in the past are shown.

This title, together with the pictures and the architect’s statement, show to the viewer that if Geneva is today welcoming refugees it is, not only because it is part of its history, but also because everyone in the Canton has a “refugee origin”, even the “important families”! From what Carella says, it can be therefore deduced that he participated in the construction project because of this link that reunites migrants with Geneva citizens: a common history of migration and need for a refuge. It is thus almost in our blood - us, Geneva people - to offer hospitality to someone in need.

As shortly presented above in the Context section, Geneva has a history of having been an asylum land, whether receiving migrants or seasonal workers (Arlettaz 1991, p.140). But, instead of trying to find out whether or not it is true that this common past makes the Canton potentially more welcoming than others, it is relevant to say that such a statement can be of help when trying to recover some humanitarian values in the eyes of the public. Through this first assertion, the architect Carella thus sets the basis for the audience to believe that Geneva is a city of refuge. This view shared by Carella here is commonly held among the other interviewees appearing on the website.

Indeed, another stakeholder contributes to this idea of hospitality with the following statement written in a newspaper article describing the inauguration ceremony of the Centre de Rigot, published on the HG website:

*“During their various speeches, the representatives of the Geneva authorities recalled Geneva's tradition of hospitality.”*

With these words, Céline Garcin, the author of the article, highlights that the idea of Geneva having a hospitality tradition was reinforced by everyone during the inauguration of the centre. And, knowing that this tradition was recalled by each

representative of the Geneva authorities during their ceremony speeches emphasizes the common effort of the state to recover its humanitarian credibility.

This insistence of reminding everyone of such values is therefore clearly noticeable in the speech of Rémi Pagani, mayor of the town of Geneva, given during the same ceremony:

*“All these gestures show that Geneva remains a city of solidarity that is always moving forward in humanitarian action and that must constantly set the example.”*

More than assessing the continuity of Geneva’s solidarity, his statement places Geneva in the position of having to set the example, almost having some kind of ambassadorial role or leading position in the humanitarian field. Consequently, to fulfill this role of humanitarian leader, Geneva has to recover its hospitality credibility and erase these polemics around the underground shelters. Promoting the centres with such speeches helps in doing so.

Finally, the general director of the UN Office Michael Møller said as well some words that deserve further attention:

*“The location of this centre for refugees and migrants is therefore a strong symbol, certainly of the commitment of Geneva and of International Geneva to the most deprived of this world, but also the sign that their voices deserve to be heard, their fate placed at the centre of international relations and at the centre of our efforts here in Geneva.”*

What is interesting here is that Møller makes the distinction between Geneva and International Geneva. Although there is no official explanation of the differences between both Geneva, as a local, I understand the distinction as follows: Geneva alone is understood as being a Swiss city as any other Swiss cities and International Geneva as being the place welcoming the UN headquarters, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the UNHCR and many other humanitarian organisation, and therefore representing Switzerland on the international scene. Thus, by highlighting that both Genevas have a strong commitment to help “the most deprived of this world”, Møller contributes to this process of convincing the public of the continuity of Geneva and Switzerland’s values.

In addition to this, he uses the symbolic of the location of the Centre de Rigot, located in the international neighbourhood, to emphasize that the Canton not only welcomes the ones in need, but by accommodating them there, as neighbours of the UN and

UNHCR, it places the migrants at the centre of its attention. Through this speech, further proof of Geneva's hospitality tradition is thus given to the viewers.

This emphasis on the symbolism and central aspect of the Centre de Rigot is made thanks to a careful selection of the materials shown on the website. Indeed, there is no mention of the far-away location of the Bois-de-Bay centre nor of the Centre de l'Étoile situated on the side of the highway, to only give a few examples of what was occulted. By outlying only its "good" examples, Geneva differentiates itself from other hosting nations that decide to "spatially exclude migrants from mainstream (...) society" (Achnich 2020, p.48) by receiving them on islands or in the outskirts of the city. Highlighting the Rigot localisation thus promotes the Canton's hospitality towards migrants.

"There is a desire for solidarity"

Now that it has been demonstrated that the website aims at reassuring that Geneva's tradition of hospitality is still relevant nowadays, a second aspect of its narratives should be mentioned. Indeed, more than proving that the humanitarian values are maintained, the HG emphasizes online that this solidarity is desired not only by the authorities, but also by the citizens.

Regarding the Canton's willingness to help, it has been mentioned on several occasions that the creation of these five new accommodation centres is the symbol of such desire. For instance, in a newspaper article, the words of the Hospice général director, Christophe Girod, were repeated as follows:

*"It [the project] reflects the State Council's desire to provide decent housing for migrants."*

In addition to this, Mauro Poggia, state counsellor, said something similar in his speech during the inauguration of Rigot:

*"What I want to emphasise is the fight that is being led by the State of Geneva, with the Hospice Générale at its side, to offer a permanent solution to human situations that we are increasingly faced with."*

This desire to provide assistance, described as a fight that the Canton and the HG are ready to undertake, is made obvious in the words they have both chosen. This "*political*

*will*", as Poggia said later on, is thus underlined in various materials available on the website to convince the web user interested in these projects that this willingness to help is very much present within State authorities.

More than a desire to accommodate these migrants, Thierry Apothéloz, state counsellor, says in his speech for the ceremony of the opening of Lancy centre that he wishes to offer the migrants a place where they can live:

*"A place to live in the heart of the city, a place to live in the heart of the people. (...) I called it a centre of life and not a shelter because I wanted to make it clear to both the municipal authorities and the guests that, for me, what was important was to enable families, especially Syrian ones, to live."*

This disposition on the part of the mayor to go beyond the provision of a simple shelter by proposing a "*centre of life*" for migrants arriving in the Canton is highlighted on the website to tell the viewer that the authorities care, not only about helping, but also about the hospitality quality they offer.

To complement and continue convincing the public opinion, the citizens' desire to accommodate migrants is also outlined on the website on several occasions. Filippo Grandi, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, said in one of his speeches that it is "*true local solidarity*" one can notice in these building projects.

Moreover, in one article presenting a music activity offered at the Centre du Bois-de-Bay, Alexa Montani, manager of the association Espace Musical, said the following:

*"There is a desire for solidarity (...) all the instruments arrived from the four corners of Switzerland, [were] collected thanks to an appeal for generosity."*

According to her, it is therefore thanks to the generosity of Swiss people and their desire to help these children that "*have nothing*", that such projects can happen.

To emphasize even more this citizens' approval for receiving migrants, Mauro Poggia mentioned a change in the mentalities of the population in the following statement made during his interview:

*"Lancy is offering us land near schools for 10 years, where even a few years ago this would have been unthinkable. So there is a willingness to collaborate."*

By saying so, the state counsellor attest of a change towards more acceptance of the local population to welcome the migrants closer to them and share the school where their kids go, which would not have been possible in the past.

Lastly, the architect of Rigot, Darius Golchan, contributes to this series of examples of citizen's desire to help by mentioning the following during his interview:

*“When we talked about this housing project for refugees, we were always well received. There were emotions that appeared in the relations because this question of migration preoccupies everyone. And we realised that when we had an opportunity, through our skills, our profession, to intervene, in our own way, in this issue of welcoming migrants, we were always well received. The project was facilitated by the generosity of people. The fate of the project is important for everyone and that was very important in the history of the project.”*

The emphasis on the emotions perceived during the project process, the “*generosity of people*” that facilitated it and the fact that everyone is concerned by the migration issue underlines once again the willingness of the population to welcome migrants. The words of Thierry Apothéloz when talking about the Lancy centre reinforce what Golchan just highlighted:

*“(…) the intelligence of the project was to put the partners together, to co-construct solutions: Hospice général, the Canton in terms of the land on which we are, but above all the residents and the City of Lancy, which also made it possible to be quick in the construction.”*

According to him, it is “*above all*” thanks to the citizens if the construction process went that fast. With this statement, we can understand that he considers the residents of Lancy as the ones playing a key role in the construction process, which allowed a rapid result.

The manner in which the generosity and solidarity of the citizens and the Canton is displayed on the website is almost overwhelming. Indeed, this profusion of welcoming discourses is at no time counterbalanced by rhetorics less positive towards refugees and less inclined to receive them. The fact that the HG selected on its website only pro-solidarity statements is one further proof of its willingness to present only one side of the story to the public. The aim is about convincing everyone that there is a willingness to help and nothing else.

However, it has been shown earlier that xenophobic reactions of the Swiss population towards migrants were exacerbated already during the Second World War and continue nowadays through even more restrictive asylum policies. It is thus clear that not all the population is in favor of migrant reception. But presenting the country as such is for sure an asset in terms of humanitarian image.

"The press is talking about it..."

As it has just been shown, the website emphasizes the continuity of Swiss humanitarian values and both the authorities and the citizens desire for solidarity. However, the visibility of the housing solution offered by the Canton would not be complete if it was not also accompanied by some "official" recognition and approval of the project.

Demonstrations of some "official" approval of these centres are of different kinds on the website. On one side, the HG publishes online the award received for the Centre du Bois-de-Bay. Under the title "*The Bois-de-Bay centre has been awarded*", the website offers details on the reasons for receiving such an award:

*"The Hospice General received the 2nd prize in the "social housing" category for the Bois-de-Bay accommodation center. (...) rewarded at the 3rd edition of the Real Estate Awards organized by Bilan. (...) awarded by a jury of experts on the basis of multidisciplinary criteria. Aesthetic, architectural, functional, environmental and social qualities were taken into account."*

This shows that the project has various recognized qualities. It can be assumed that this award is displayed online to give some legitimacy and official recognition to the public of the quality of the building. Stating that a "*jury of experts*" has approved it and validated its quality gives further confirmation to the visitors of the website of the legitimacy of HG's projects.

Another proof of official recognition for this housing solution, maybe more subtle, is made through the sharing of newspaper articles. "*The press is talking about it...*" says one of the headlines preceding the article of La Tribune, thus underlining the fact that the centres are interesting or newsworthy enough to attract press attention. In total, six newspaper articles are published on *Histoires de constructions* and a report

broadcast produced by the local television Radio Télévision Suisse (RTS) is also linked to the same website for the viewers to see it. Therefore, these articles and videos not only contribute to the visibility of the centres, but also demonstrate to the public some kind of press approval. Of course the press does not offer the same validation as experts, but the language the press has chosen to talk about the centres transmit a positive message to the audience and readers. Indeed, the press uses terms such as: "*The center meets the needs of the canton*" (Rigot, RTS presentator), "*Rigot: an innovative project in multiple ways.*" (Rigot, Press file), "*In terms of comfort, the new center is better adapted than the old premises (...)*" (Étoile, Newspaper Le Courrier). With these rather flattering sentences, the press publicly shares its approval for the centres. This press attention therefore gives further recognition to the projects.

Regarding the press selected for the website, it is once again easy to notice that the HG decided to show to the web users only one side of the story. Indeed, articles such as the one titled "*A shelter for asylum seekers causes controversy in Geneva*" (Amos 2019) talking about the Centre de l'Étoile are not part of the selection for the web page. This article presents the suicide of one unaccompanied minor while he was leaving at l'Étoile, together with sentences such as "*a place not adapted for minors*" (Ibid.) or direct quotes from the residents saying "*the centre, it's a prison*" (Ibid.). This bad press obviously cannot be used to reinforce Geneva's hospitality image and thus, does not appear on the website to follow the strategic communication put in place by the HG.

Lastly, it is the different stakeholders, more specifically their status, that contributes to the legitimacy of the housing solution proposed by Geneva. Indeed, and apart from the actors directly involved in the projects such as the state counsellors, the HG members or the architects, there are the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the General Director of the UN Office and the director of the Europe Office (UNHCR) who praised the virtues of this project. Having them supporting this housing solution greatly reinforces its legitimacy. Filippo Grandi, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, said the following in a video recorded by the UNHCR for the website:

*"The UNHCR is proud to be one of the neighbours of the Rigot collective accommodation centre. We feel very close to the Hospice général, one of whose missions is the reception of asylum seekers."*

In this statement, Grandi gives a strong signal: the UNHCR is proud to be located nearby the Rigot centre and thus, approves it. More than his speech, the setting in which the video has been recorded gives the impression he gives an official statement: the statement has been recorded inside, probably in front of a green screen displaying behind him a blurred picture of the centre, and he wears a fancy suit. Moreover, the way he delivers his speech and the title of the video - "*Message from Filippo Grandi*" - makes the viewer understand it is an official statement. Consequently, this UNHCR official approval reinforces the legitimacy of the HG project and complements the other proofs of official recognition mentioned earlier.

Before moving on to the second section of this analysis, focusing on the paradox I named "unrooted roots", I wish here to offer a brief recapitulation of this first argument. It has been demonstrated that even if Switzerland did not change its restrictive asylum policy, there is a potential rational explanation behind the hyper-positive-visibility the refugees' accommodation centres receive. I argue here that it is the willingness of the Canton to recover its humanitarian reputation and remind everyone of its hospitality values that such positive visibility was created. On one side, the typology chosen for these centres helped calm the polemic in a rapid manner and thanks to its innovative features allowed the HG not only to show everyone efforts had been put in the design, but also to receive an award and other official recognition of the quality of the projects. On the other side, the platform used to make the centres visible was also clearly used to remind everyone of the history of Swiss solidarity and emphasize the willingness of its people to welcome refugees, by carefully selecting the materials made available online: negative press was not a part of it and the less convincing centres received less attention.

So, such as the social democratic ideology and other Swedish values transpire in the IKEA furniture design, we could argue here that the humanitarian tradition and hospitality values of Switzerland are embodied in the design and architecture of these newly built centres. Indeed as Murphy (2013) writes "the effects that objects exert are the direct result of their designers' intentions, looking, feeling, or working as their creators envisioned" (p.120). Knowing that the HG, the state and the architects have been planning together these construction projects, we can assume that their intentions were about displaying a positive image of refugee reception and revalorize

Switzerland's reputation of asylum land. These buildings are therefore "things, serving a sociopolitical purpose beyond their surface functions" (Ibid.).

## Unrooted roots

As outlined in the theory section of my research, another paradoxical feature of the accommodation centres' infrastructure is the one I called "unrooted roots". This paradox arises from the contradiction going on between the narratives of the stakeholders displayed on the website, outlying how the integration of the migrants is encouraged and enhanced by the typology of these centres, and the narratives highlighting the fact that their typology is modular and temporary and therefore not meant to stay. Pushing the migrants to grow "new roots" and settle in Geneva, but offering them only a temporary setting to do so, hence raises some questions.

I argue here that it is the Swiss tradition and culture of always aiming to reach a consensus that leads to such a paradox. Indeed, as explained in the context section, the direct democracy established in Switzerland gives to the citizens a great decision power and a large range of tools they can use to express their opinions, like referendums and popular initiatives. Because referendums do not allow majority decisions to happen, compromises and consensual decisions have to be taken by the political actors (Linder and Mueller 2021, p.182). My argument here is thus that the paradox of "unrooted roots" can be seen in part as the result of the "Swiss culture" (Ibid.) of compromises. What I want to demonstrate is that consensus is achieved through this accommodation solution because on one hand, by encouraging migrants to start a new life in Geneva, the defenders of refugees' rights are pleased and, on the other hand, by providing them accommodations meant to disappear satisfies the other side, which I refer to as the opposition.

In the following subsections, I first demonstrate how the "pro-migrants" are being convinced by the typology itself of the building, presented as being beneficial for the residents and enhancing their integration. Then, I also show that the "pro-migrants" side is persuaded, on one hand, by narratives of migrants integration and their future in Switzerland and, on the other hand, by pictures and videos displaying migrants'

satisfaction with their new accommodation centre. Second, I present what could be considered the arguments to satisfy the opposition. To begin with, the modular typology is highlighted in order to emphasize the temporariness of these construction projects. Then, within the narratives of the website, a discourse of emergency and crisis has been developed to make the opposition understand the urgency in which Switzerland finds itself regarding the migratory phenomenon. Finally, to further convince the opposition, the advantages for the Swiss local economy that offer these buildings are highlighted.

### Convincing the pro-migrants

“It helps building new roots”

The first aspect of the narratives participating in this discourse of persuasion concerns the emphasis made on how the typology of the centres itself is beneficial to their residents and their integration.

On one hand, the modularity of the centres is praised through the narratives exemplifying how their flexibility can easily answer the various needs of migrants. Indeed, the centres are not only practical and adapted for disabled persons as it can be seen in the video of the Centre de Rigot filming a man in a wheelchair moving around the building, they are also modular depending on whether they are intended to accommodate a family or a single person. The press file of Rigot explains how the system works as follows:

*“As the expected population does not have a typical profile and can vary rapidly with the arrivals, the architects proposed modules in which, by a set of fire doors, the apartments can vary from 2, 3 or 4 rooms.”*

Therefore, the modularity of the buildings helps the Canton to be ready for any kind of arrivals and allow it to be flexible depending on the type of profile of the newcomers. Moreover, the state counselor Poggia added that, more than just answering the current needs, this modular typology can be rearranged according to future needs of the residents. He said in one of his interviews:

*“They [centres] are innovative because they are modular, recoverable dwellings that can be adapted to needs. (...) And even among migrants, what is today a need for*

*single people can become tomorrow a need for families. So we need to have housing that can adapt to the immediate needs of the people we have to house.”*

This possibility of answering to future needs is thus one of the qualities this building typology possesses.

On the other hand, the narratives also highlight how the accommodation centres help and allow connections between their residents and the local population to happen. More specifically, it is the infrastructures complementing these buildings, such as the gardens, the commercial arcade and the sports area, that are said to be encouraging and reinforcing the integration of the migrants. This can be noticed in the press file shared on the Centre de Rigot, saying the following:

*“The project also foresees a commercial arcade for integration activities in connection with the public and urban vegetable gardens that could be exploited with the neighborhood.”*

These infrastructures have thus been made available for the use of both the residents and the neighbours of the centre to create connections between them. The same idea is repeated in the Centre de la Seymaz with a sports area *“not only reserved for the residents, but also open to the inhabitants of the neighborhood and the patients of Belle-Idée”*.

To add on this, Serge Dal Busco reinforces once more how the Centre de Rigot and its structures help the migrants integrate:

*“The fact that this structure is open to the city, with magnificent collaborations with the neighbours, the school next door, the inhabitants, all of this means that finally what must lead us is the welcome. In particular with people who come here after difficult experiences, we have to make sure that they are integrated. And this centre allows us to do that, I am convinced.”*

These shared spaces and open structures offered by the centres are thus considered an essential element for migrants to integrate.

Concerning the gardens, they also have been used as a symbolic message by Thierry Apothéloz, state counsellor, in his speech, to communicate further their role in migrants' integration. When referring to the urban gardens of the Centre de Lancy, he stated:

*"Outside I was really amazed at how clever it was to put in a piece of vegetable garden. This return to the land for people who have lost it is essential. It helps build new roots in this commune of Lancy and in Geneva in particular."*

With these words, the person listening to his interview may then visualize clearly how the gardens can serve as a starting point to integrate in the Canton. By offering them land, the Canton offers to the migrants the possibility to literally grow new roots and settle in Geneva.

This metaphor of roots is quite common in the literature to refer to the relationship of people with the place where they live. As Malkki (1992) notes, "the naturalizing of the links between people and place is routinely conceived in specifically botanical metaphors" (p.27). Regarding these roots, from a nation-state perspective, every native should be rooted in the soil of his/her country of origin (Ibid, p.30). So, according to this conception of the world, refugees are once again seen as a problem in the system and their lack of roots as a "pathology" (Ibid., p.31). Encouraging refugees to grow roots in the host country indirectly means that they are now meant to belong here and go out of the liminal position that comes with the status of refugees, "sign of the ultimate temporariness of exile" (Ibid., p.35). It also has been assumed that a loss of roots and connections with the homeland could lead to the "loss of moral bearings" (Ibid., p.32) and thus, could be problematic for the host country. Whether this is true or not, the following paragraph illustrates how links have been created through the newly built centres and how the HG is fulfilling its mission of integration.

Regarding this section on how some narratives try to show that the typology of the buildings is beneficial to their residents and their integration, one last aspect should be mentioned. More than saying that the typology helps migrants to integrate, various narratives appear as proof that where the projects had been already implemented, integration and links between the local population and the residents of the centres had happened. Indeed, Mauro Poggia said the following in one of his interviews:

*"Then, we had some nice surprises because we realised that where the work had finally been carried out, where people had settled, links had been forged between the migrant and resident populations. I think that these beautiful stories must be repeated (...)."*

This statement is reinforced on one side, by the title “*Beautiful stories*” appearing on the screen right before he speaks, and on the other side, by the pictures shared while he continues with his statement. Below are some of the pictures shared to exemplify these “*Beautiful stories*”.



(screenshots retrieved from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=1&v=T-91kzQMPO0&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=T-91kzQMPO0&feature=emb_logo) )

Mauro’s statement, combined with the words on the screen and the pictures, finishes to convince the pro-migrants of the rightness and qualities of the centres to welcome and integrate the newcomers. Links have been made between the migrants and the Swiss population and this thanks to the new buildings’ structure.

“These young people are becoming our young people”

Another way through which pro-migrants are being convinced is through the emphasis made on the intention of providing an “*harmonious*” integration process to the migrants. Highlighting the willingness of the Canton to allow such a process to happen

can be understood as a way of proving to the “pro-migrants” that Geneva is taking care of the quality of migrants’ integration. This is made clear in the statement of Mauro Poggia, appearing in a newspaper article from LE COURRIER:

*"About 60% of the migrants will stay in Switzerland, that's what the statistics tell us; we have to make sure that this happens in a harmonious way. These young people are becoming our young people."*

This statement gives a strong message to the reader: it is not only about making sure the migrants integrate, it also means that more than half of the residents of these accommodation centres are being considered as future members of the Swiss population by the State counsellor. According to him, they are meant to stay. This idea is reinforced in another interview he gave:

*"Today, the greatest challenge is to integrate these people, since more than 60% will stay with us. These are the future Swiss and Genevans of tomorrow."*

By considering them on their way of becoming “like us” - Genevan people - this statement implies clearly that this 60% will settle in the Canton for good. Thus, through these narratives no mention of temporariness is made, rather the opposite. This is rather unusual when one looks at the literature on State sovereignty and refugees. Indeed, when looking at the international system through a nation-state perspective, refugees are the “outsiders”, the “others” that do not belong to the country (Betts 2009, p.56). Within this logic, the hosting countries will not offer them citizenship in the hope that, one day, these refugees will be “reintegrated within the “normal” logic of the state system” (Ibid.), meaning their country of origin. It is therefore a strong statement to say that the refugees arriving in Geneva will be, in the future, Swiss citizens.

To ensure that the residents of the centres become the “*Genevans of tomorrow*”, various steps leading to their integration are highlighted on the website. For instance, learning French is considered as “*an essential step for a good social integration*” (Bois-de-Bay, Mandement Accueil) and therefore, it is outlined that workshops have been organized “*for migrants [to] get the basics of the language*” (Ibid.). Additionally, it is also said that the “*department of Public Education intervenes through “reception classes<sup>4</sup>”*” (Étoile, Ariane Daniel Merkelbach) which are rooms within highschools reserved for young migrants to go to school. I do remember that my highschool

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<sup>4</sup> in French “classe d’accueil”

establishment was offering such classes and that other structures were put into place in case of literacy issues. Finally, the narratives of the website also highlight the fact that public transport infrastructures were *“reinforced in order to facilitate the transportation of the children between the school and the Centre du Bois-de-Bay”* (Bois-de-Bay, Mandement Accueille) and that *“bicycle repair workshops to facilitate their mobility”* (Ibid.) were organised. Facilitating their language learning and their mobility attests the efforts made by the Canton to offer a functioning infrastructure outside of the centres to facilitate migrants' integration.

This second subsection shows that an emphasis is made on the future of the migrants in Switzerland and on the infrastructures put into place to facilitate it. These narratives are certainly what the defenders of migrants want to read. For them to read that Ariana Daniel Merkelbach (directrice of the Aid for Migrants Department of the HG) considers that *“the most important thing is of course to build them [unaccompanied minors] a future”* is reassuring as to the HG's willingness to welcome and integrate these newcomers. And, by hearing the following speech of Frédéric Renevey, mayor of the town of Lancy, one can only be convinced of the good intentions of the stakeholders involved in this construction project:

*“I therefore hope that the new inhabitants will feel integrated as soon as possible in the commune. The town of Lancy is working hard on this and we hope that they will adopt our slogan “You feel good in Lancy” as soon as possible.”*

“How well they feel in their new accommodation”

One last way through which pro-migrants are being convinced is through the narratives communicating migrants' approval on the accommodation centres. This approval is either outlined directly through the narratives of the stakeholders interviewed or through the pictures and videos published on the website.

Concerning the narratives promoting migrants' satisfaction with the centres, Serge Dal Busco, vice-president of the State council, makes the following statement in his interview at the Centre de Rigot:

*“It represents a certain emotion because to see the residents we have met and for them to tell us how well they feel in their new accommodation is heartwarming.”*

With these words, Serge Dal Busco states clearly that the migrants he has talked to are happy with the centre they are in. The viewer can thus conclude that the centres respond to the needs of their residents and allow them to “feel well”.

Apart from the interviews, it is through numerous pictures and videos that the visitor of the website attest migrants’ approval on their accommodation structures. Indeed, for some of the centres, presentation-videos have been created to offer to the web user the possibility of taking a virtual tour of the centre and get more information about the buildings. More specifically, a social worker is being filmed while s/he walks around the building and gives details on the centre. Some music is played in the background and additional information is shared directly on the screen. Apart from all the colorful images displayed in the video, it is the scenes of migrants’ happiness that convince the viewer of their well-being. For instance, in the video of the Centre du Bois-de-Bay, the viewer can see children playing in a swimming pool brought to the centre by an association. The children play together in the water and one can hear their voices in the background while the social worker speaks. Moreover, other scenes of happiness can be noticed in the video. For example, after having seen the interior of one apartment, the couple living in it stands at the front door, smiles and gives a thumbs up to the camera as the screenshot below shows:



(screenshot retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4tSgy7dn0P0&t=89s> )

These thumbs up appear like a confirmation of their well-being in this new environment the Centre du Bois-de-Bay offers them. Finally, it is as well the music played in the

background that contributes to the positive atmosphere displayed on the video. In my opinion, the music chosen for this video sounds somehow childlike, very positive and light. Out of curiosity, I asked a couple of friends to listen to it as well in order to get their own impressions on the music. Both of them said that the music gives the impression the video deals with a happy, “non-sensitive-at-all” topic. It can therefore be concluded that the music selected for the video helps in communicating a happy and peaceful environment. These types of videos were also created for Rigot and Seymaz centres and both present beautiful scenes of life that can be found in these centres.

For the Centre de Lancy, it is not a video but a series of pictures showing migrants' arrival to the centre that emphasizes their happiness about the centre. Pictures of happy families such as the ones below can be found online:



(pictures taken from <https://www.histoires-de-constructions.ch/projets/centre-de-lancy/>)

Once again, seeing smiles on migrants' faces demonstrates to the viewer that these families are happy with their new accommodation and satisfied with what the centre provides.

Regarding migrants' satisfaction with their accommodation centres, there is one last thing worth mentioning here. An emphasis in the narratives is made on the freedom or *laissez-faire* the migrants have to organize themselves within their apartment. Two stakeholders in particular highlight it in their respective videos. Jérôme, the manager of the Centre du Bois-de-Bay, said, after showing the interior of one apartment, that “*each family organizes itself as it wants*”. The architect Carella follows the same idea when he said in his interview that “*once it is designed (...) it will belong to the users and they will be the ones in charge of making it an element of life that best suits them.*”

According to the architect, it is thanks to this freedom to settle as they wish that the migrants will make the centre a place where they feel at ease. Acknowledging online that such a flexibility is given to the residents reinforces once more the possibility for the migrants to feel well in these centres.

Nonetheless, one should remember that, although these pictures, videos and statements might be convincing, these materials are very much selected by the HG and “staged” according to what they want to show the viewers. There is indeed, no resident speaking directly to the camera to “confirm” their well-being in the centres and the press quoting unaccompanied minors unhappy about the centre de l’Etoile is as well occulted. For instance, the video taken by a minor filming the security guards from this centre biting up the residents is not shared on *Histoires de constructions*, but can be found online on the website of the national Television RTS<sup>5</sup>. Consequently, it is rather clear that the HG tells us its own version of the story, by displaying on the website carefully selected materials and omitting the “undesired” ones.

However, the pro-migrants are not the only ones to be satisfied and convinced by the housing solution offered by Geneva. Indeed, as seen at the beginning of this section, consensus and compromises have to be found in order to respect the Swiss tradition and avoid a part of the citizens to go against state decisions. To achieve this balance, the people against welcoming migrants, whom I called the opposition, should also have their opinions taken into account and be content with the construction project. In the following subsections I first demonstrate how the modularity of the buildings is used to emphasize its temporariness. Second, I present how the narratives of the website try to convince the opposition by formulating a discourse of crisis and creating some compassion regarding the migrants arriving in Canton. Third, I show how other advantages the centres have are outlined in the narratives to win opposition’s approval.

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<sup>5</sup> The video is available on the following link: <https://www.rts.ch/info/regions/geneve/10365172-un-centre-dhebergement-pour-requerants-fait-polemique-a-geneve.html>

## Convincing the opposition

### “Easily recyclable and removable”

To begin with, the opposition is being convinced of the advantages of the housing solution offered by the HG with the emphasis made on the modular typology of the buildings and the temporariness that comes with it. Indeed, when navigating on the website, one can notice that for each centre recently built, a deadline for its deconstruction is already scheduled. For instance, in the newspaper article shared online about the Centre de l'Étoile, the following title appears: “*A plot of land leased for seven years*”. And, other sentences such as “*Lancy is offering us land near schools for 10 years*” (Rigot, Mauro Poggia) and “*The [Seymaz] project proposes the construction of 4 buildings (...) over a provisional period of 10 years*” (Seymaz, Hospice général) can be found regarding the other centres. However, these “deadlines”, even if participating in the emphasis on their short-term nature, are not the only way through which the idea of temporariness of these projects is accentuated.

The limited lifetime of the centres is as well expressed through the presentation of their typology. Their recyclable and modular character is outlined to make it clear to the public that removing each centre is very much possible and relatively easy. The presentation of Rigot centre in the HG press file goes as follows:

*“Recyclable: replacing concrete with wood, the principles of recycling have been integrated at all scales, even the foundations. Wood is a material with low grey energy consumption and produces a minimum of waste during the dismantling of the buildings. The modules can be dismantled and reused: they can be assembled at a lower cost and in a variable way depending on the available sites.”*

More than the narratives expressing their “reusability”, it is the videos and pictures of each centre that illustrate how easy it is to move the containers around and thus, send the message that they can be dismantled without difficulties. The picture below is part of the series of pictures taken the day the containers of the Bois-de-Bay centre arrived:



(picture retrieved from <https://www.histoires-de-constructions.ch/projets/camping-bois-de-bay/>)

In this picture, the viewer can therefore see that a simple car is enough to move the container around and that, even through a narrow path, the container makes its way to the desired location. Consequently, apart from understanding that these buildings are effortlessly built, the opposition understands that the process of deconstruction will as well be uncomplicated since the containers are easily transportable.

What greatly contributes to this idea of removability is also simply the fact that the public knows these centres are made of containers. So, because it is broadly recognized that “containers are used to transport objects seamlessly across borders” (Scott-Smith and Breeze 2020, p.6), their mobility and transportability is not even put into question.

Timelapse videos have also been created for four centres out of five, to convince the viewer of the rapidity of the process. Timelapse are, by definition, accelerated sequences of pictures. Presenting the construction process in such an accelerated way emphasizes clearly a desire to highlight the construction speed of such a typology. By exposing how fast it was to construct the buildings, the videos not only show the pro-migrants that the government reacted in a rapid manner to the accommodation crisis and their protests, but also to the opposition that it will not last long to remove these centres. The music chosen for the background of each timelapse contributes as well to this aspect of rapidity. Indeed, the accelerated rhythm of the music gives the

impression that such buildings can be de-/constructed in no time. When I asked a couple of friends their impression on this music, they told me that even if it is an accelerated beat, the music sounds somehow light and thus, gives the impression that the process is easy. The opposition might therefore assume through these videos that, when the buildings will reach their deadline, it will be fast and easy to get rid of them.

To keep on convincing the opposition, an additional point is made on another specificity of the typology. This point concerns the foundations of the centres. Once again the visitor of the website has pictures, videos and informative text online that offer details on the foundations of the centres. What is emphasized each time is how little the impact on the ground is. For instance, for the Bois-de-Bay centre a series of pictures is shared for one to see how the installation of the pipes underground went and how invisible the final result is. On the picture below, one can see the final result:



(picture retrieved from <https://www.histoires-de-constructions.ch/projets/camping-bois-de-bay/>)

The foundation technique, used for the Centre de la Seymaz, follows the same idea, promoting little impact on the site. The technic chosen is presented as it appears here: *“With the Krinner screw-in foundation system, the galvanized metal screws are screwed into the floor. It is an efficient system for this type of floor, easily recyclable and removable.”*

The fact that this technique allows an easy removal process confirms to the opposition that there are no long term thoughts behind these construction projects.

Finally, the foundations of the Centre de Rigot contribute as well to this emphasis on the temporariness of the buildings. The architect of Rigot, Darius Golchan said the following in his interview:

*“And then we were part of this temporary site with this refugee reception project for a period of 10 years which will be dismantled and rebuilt elsewhere, probably. So yes, this question of the site was very important for us in our approach, in the character we wanted to give to the building and also in the way we set up in an open space, in a park. Trying to impact the environment as little as possible and have a soft intervention on the site. (...) We proposed to have a zero concrete construction site, which means that we wanted to use only sustainable, recyclable materials that can be taken away or moved once the project has been rebuilt elsewhere.”*

These narrative couples with the pictures mentioned above show once again to the opposition how not invasive these construction sites are and how little traces they will leave behind once they are gone. Because concrete is usually associated with long term constructions (Abourahme 2014, p.202), knowing that no concrete was used during the construction process of Rigot also sends a clear message: the building is meant to disappear and will leave no traces behind. Indeed, Abourahme argues that once cement is added to a temporary setting such as a refugee camp, the built becomes permanent (Ibid., p.214) and “suddenly allows for vertical expansion” (Ibid., p.202), which would prolong its existence.

More than not having any impact on the ground, the narratives of the website reassure the opposition on another point. If this typology was chosen it is because it allows to not take away land from Genevan people on the long run. Mauro Poggia makes clear in the following statement that he had this concern in mind when preparing this housing solution and that he had no intentions in preventing the inhabitants of the Canton from enjoying these plots once the buildings are away.

*"It is not a question of taking away housing places from the people of Geneva, because that is often what we are accused of doing, and giving them to migrants, but it is a question of temporary structures. This place is not meant to stay."*

He reassures them even more when he acknowledges the fact that some Genevans are also in need of emergency shelters and that these centres could be one of the solution for this issue:

*“We realise that today the housing problem does not only affect migrants but also the resident population in need of emergency housing. (...) So we need to have housing that can adapt to the immediate needs of the people we have to house.”*

As Baumann (2020) writes “such a spatially and temporally flexible approach to refugee shelter (...) [is] a “rational” response from the point of view of a state keeping its spatial options open” (p.25). Thus, to have these “spatial options open” helps Geneva in reassuring its citizens that they will either enjoy the land after the removal of the buildings or enjoy these infrastructures once they are not used by migrants anymore.

Having demonstrated that the typology of the HG centres is made in a way that allows the buildings to be temporary and easily removable and that, once they are gone, no traces of them will be left, it can be assumed that the opposition is more inclined to accept this housing solution. Moreover, because it has been specified that the land will not be taken from the citizens of the Canton and that the authorities do not forget the fact that Genevans themselves are in need of emergency housing, it finishes to reassure the opposition.

“We must now overcome egoism”

As outlined on *Histoires de constructions*, more efforts to convince the opposition had to be undertaken. It appears quite clearly when M. Poggia declared in one of his speeches:

*“With the Hospice général, we had to go to the people to convince them of the rightness of the policy we were implementing.”*

Apart from showing that not everyone was happy with the housing solution, this sentence also demonstrates that efforts were undertaken by the HG and the state counsellor to win the approval of the population.

On the website, an attempt to gain their approval is made through the creation of a discourse of emergency and crisis to emphasize the necessity of such centres. Online, the narratives outline in a repeated manner that Switzerland is facing a “*migratory crisis*” (Rigot, Mauro Poggia) and that there is a need for an “*adequate response in an*

*extremely short time*” (Ibid.). The accent is also put on the numbers of new arrivals, as outlined in LE COURRIER:

*“Geneva currently hosts 184 RMNA<sup>6</sup> (30 girls and 154 boys), out of some 6531 refugees registered at the end of 2015. That is an increase of 235% compared to the previous year.”*

By saying that the *“number of arrivals rose sharply”* (Rigot, La Tribune) and that *“the canton had to accommodate them urgently”* (Ibid.), the opposition understands that this situation is somehow exceptional and has very much the character of a crisis. Rémi Pagani, mayor of the town of Geneva also contributes to these narratives with the following sentence he said during his speech:

*“The migration phenomenon is certainly one of the major challenges that we must face at the beginning of the 21st century.”*

By having various stakeholders involved in the project acknowledging that it is a migration crisis and that the Canton *“must face”* it, the opposition understands the characters of urgency behind this situation and might therefore be more inclined to accept such a housing solution. Because framing this situation as a crisis implies that these centres are seen like refugee camps, as *“temporary space[s] in which refugees may receive humanitarian relief and protection until a durable solution can be found”* (Ramadan 2013, p.65), it might let the opposition think it is only temporary. Indeed, crises are usually sudden and require immediate reaction in order to not let the situation worsen (Garayev 2013, p.187). Therefore the housing solution offered by the HG might be perceived as something answering to an immediate need and not as a long-term infrastructure.

More than presenting migrants' arrival as a crisis, videos used during the interview of Mauro Poggia are potentially dedicated to make the opposition feel some compassion towards the people arriving in the Canton. Indeed, while he speaks, rather choking videos of migrants jumping from overcrowded boats into the sea and of flows of migrants walking in the dust, are displayed. Playing with these images might have as a purpose to provoke some compassion in the eyes of the opposition and to make them somehow more understanding of the necessity in which these migrants find themselves.

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<sup>6</sup> Requérrants d'asile mineurs non-accompagnés, in english: unaccompanied minors asylum seekers

One other statement that makes it obvious that the authorities are trying to generate some feeling of sympathy in the opposition side is the following statement formulated by Poggia:

*“Precisely to make sure that these migrants are perceived as people who really suffer from a situation they did not seek is also our daily task.”*

By telling this, the state counselor clearly articulates that it is one of the state's daily tasks to make the population understand that these migrants did not come to the Canton by choice, but by necessity. This statement thus differentiates in the opposition minds these newcomers from the seasonal workers migrants that come with the specific purpose of finding a job in Switzerland. Some examples are given in order to reinforce that the migrants had no other choice than leaving their country of origin. Ariane Daniel Merkelbach exemplifies some of the situations of unaccompanied minors as follows:

*“Their paths are very diverse. In the case of young Eritreans, it is a matter of fleeing from enrolment in the army. The families contribute, bleeding themselves dry to find a channel for them to escape this fate. For some time now, we have also had a lot of young people coming from Afghanistan, where the situation is again very conflictual, (...) And, obviously, these young people are also fleeing the war in Syria. Afterwards, in some cases, these minors have lost their families during their exodus (...).”*

With this explanation of the background of the unaccompanied minors, the opposition has further proof that they had no other options than fleeing their country, which might create some empathy towards them.

Finally, another factor that might influence the opposition opinion is knowing the political positions of Mauro Poggia. The state councillor is a member of the Mouvement Citoyen Genevois (MCG) party, a populist party that has as a slogan: “Geneva and the Genevans first” (Burgy 2005). Having Poggia saying that *“we must now overcome egoism and quickly build new accommodation centers for migrants”* might therefore be better received by the opposition than if it were, for instance, a member of the socialist party who said it. Additionally, the fact that he also said that if the migrants do not integrate, they will be a future burden for the Genevan society (Rigot, Mauro Poggia) might as well convince the opposition that efforts should be undertaken to offer an integration process that works. When Poggia mentions their

integration in his interview, pictures of migrants at Genevan cultural events are displayed to emphasize the possibility of the migrants to adopt the Canton's traditions. In the first picture below one can see the migrants stand in front of the Swiss National Circus and in the second one, they are participating at the traditional running race of Geneva happening each December:



(screenshots retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T-91kzQMPO0&t=1s> )

A member of the MCG party encouraging such an integration process to happen might therefore help convince the opposition.

“The value of Geneva's wood and local skills”

In order to keep convincing the opposition, and in addition to what has just been mentioned above, the website *Histoires de constructions* offers further arguments on the advantages that these accommodation centres have.

On one side, the financial argument is presented to show that these centres are more advantageous in budgetary terms than the reception of migrants in the controversial underground shelters. State counsellor Poggia puts it as follows:

*“We must remember that at the height of this migratory crisis, when we were forced to place these people in shelters, it was not satisfactory for anyone: neither on a human level, because one does not obviously integrate in a civil protection shelter, nor on a financial level given the cost of this accommodation.”*

Arguing that it is economically preferable to offer this housing solution to the migrants could possibly convince the opposition. Indeed, if newcomers have to be accommodated, the Canton should at least do so at the lowest price.

Another argument in favor of these centres is the emphasis placed on the “Swiss made” aspect of them. The idea behind it is to demonstrate to the opposition that the building project allows the Swiss industry to work and enhances the local economy. On one hand, all the stakeholders included in the project are Swiss: four out of five centres were designed by Genevan architect firms, and the rest of the companies involved in the project are from the country. Swiss industry and Swiss knowledge are therefore the main elements contributing to this housing solution. To outline this, the interview of Jean-Marc Ducret, director of JPF-Ducret SA, a Swiss wood construction firm, specifies how much work it represents for his company:

*“The two projects, Rigot and Thônex [= Seymaz], are a very big challenge for our company, since they account for about a third of our annual turnover. We have just started the real production of the Rigot elements, which will already represent 3-4 months of work, (...). Here at the Yverdon site it's between 4 and 6 months of assembly and on site at the Rigot park it will be 2 to 3 months with the finishing touches.”*

Thanks to this contract for the construction of the Seymaz and Rigot centres, this local firm insures a third of its annual turnover, which gives concrete proof to the opposition that this project is beneficial to the local industry.

Moreover, it's not only about giving work to Swiss labour, but it is as well about using Swiss materials and resources. More specifically, it is the wood from the Canton and the neighboring areas that has been selected for the buildings. The architect Carella told the following statement during his interview:

*"We have to work with wood. For various reasons: because we are convinced that it is also good to use Swiss industry, which has excellent wood. And to use Swiss knowledge."*

Apart from integrating the "*valorization of the Geneva wood in this project*", using this type of wood for the centres gives several advantages. First of all, as Philippe Poget, director of the POGET & MEYNET firm of forestry engineers said, it allows the Canton to demonstrate what can be done locally:

*"In this way, we enhance the value of wood from the Geneva forest and set an example of what we can do with the trees we have at home, in the forest."*

The slogan "*think global - act local*" is thus respected and the value of the wood promoted. Second, working with wood asks for more working hours than when using other materials like steel or concrete. Consequently, it is better for the local industry since more labour will be necessary to realize the projects. The informative text about Rigot on the website explains it like this:

*"Using wood means participating in local economic development because all the players in the sector, from the cutting of the trees to the installation of the framework, are part of the dense fabric of regional businesses. This is perfectly in line with the philosophy of sustainable development: think global / act local. It has a high added value since 1m<sup>3</sup> of indigenous wood creates 40 hours of work, i.e. 35 to 40% more than competing concrete and steel materials."*

It is hence more advantageous for the local firm to be asked to work with wood rather than other materials. Finally, Darius Golchan, architect of Rigot highlights that it is easier to coordinate and check the quality of the product when working with regional stakeholders. In his interview he said:

*"(...) it [zero concrete construction site] allowed us to integrate short distribution circuits and to promote the value of Geneva's wood and local skills. We went to the sawmills of the Cru [local region], we always had direct contacts which allowed us to control the quality of the materials and the project."*

As he just said, by working through short distribution circuits, the quality offered to the project is assured. So, because they had to have a construction site entirely without concrete, it enabled them to keep an eye on the quality and be sure of the final result offered. And, to come back to the first paradox of hyper-positive-visibility, it is potentially because the stakeholders were confident of such quality that the centres were rendered visible.

The opposition is therefore faced by a series of reasons to agree with this housing solution. After the temporary character of the typology of the centres was highlighted, the crisis discourse the HG and the other stakeholders involved have created, emphasizes the necessity and the emergency in which the Canton is. In addition to this, other advantages of the buildings such as their “Swiss made” nature, their economical aspect and the way they promote the local industry finishes the list of arguments to convince the opposition.

## Discussion

The findings obtained thanks to the qualitative methods employed for this research, such as observations and narrative analysis, are discussed in this section. They demonstrate what the values embodied in the design and typology of the refugee accommodation centres in Geneva are and how we should understand them in relation to Switzerland migration management.

As established in the literature review, these findings contribute in some ways to the field of migration studies. On one side, it offers a focus on the migrants’ shelter itself and its design by considering it as an architectural piece, an aspect that has most often been overlooked by researchers (Scott-Smith and Breeze 2020, p.1). On the other side, it gives the reader insights into how infrastructures can embody cultural values and “certain political ideas” (Murphy 2013, p.120) and objectives. More specifically, to offer a change from studies examining how infrastructures are used as a deterrence tool, my thesis’ focal point is on infrastructures presented very positively, almost as an exemplary housing solution.

The first section of my analysis presents one of the two paradoxes of the accommodation centres: their hyper-positive-visibility contrasting with the restrictive Swiss asylum policies. In order to fully apprehend the grounds for such a paradox, the design and typology of the buildings were analyzed. Their analysis reveals that asylum seekers are received in newly designed and innovative centres, in which local architect firms have put particular attention on the materials used and the colors chosen. So, even if each centre is modular and made of a series of containers, their aesthetic remains quite engaging. To understand why the Canton provides such accommodation centres and renders them visible, a closer look at the narratives depicting them revealed potential explanations. The analysis of the narratives shows that if the centres have been made visible in a very positive manner it is because this visibility was used to communicate other messages. Indeed, we have seen that the state of Geneva outlines in the different materials available online the Canton's hospitality tradition, solidarity values and reaffirms Geneva's position as the example to follow in terms of humanitarian action. The analysis demonstrates as well that there is a real attempt from HG's side to occult some parts of the reality by presenting carefully selected materials to only tell its side of the story. Consequently, to allow this story to be communicated to the audience, the centres had to be "showable" and therefore, this explains why such a design and innovative typology was chosen: to ensure this positive visibility to happen, then allowing the Canton to promote its tradition of asylum.

The infrastructure of this housing solution has thus a different role than its basic function of housing. This infrastructure serves Switzerland, at the international level, to restore its humanitarian reputation and keep its exemplary role and hospitality credibility. This finding confirms therefore what the theory says regarding the importance of fully understanding the paradoxes of infrastructures in order to reveal their true function and use. Thanks to investigating the aforementioned paradox, one can see how the centres embody Swiss humanitarian and hospitality values and intend to promote them.

The realization that my canton of origin was offering designed accommodation centres to migrants not to offer - at least not only - proper housing to migrants, but mainly to restore its hospitality reputation after the underground shelters scandal, confirmed to me the relevance of further studying infrastructures' paradoxical qualities. Indeed, by

looking beyond the primary function of infrastructures, researchers can unravel new meanings, uses and roles buildings play in our societies and enrich our understanding of them. As Larkin (2013) encourages, an ethnographic lens applied to the study of infrastructures can help researchers get insights into, for instance, governmental practices (p.328). As seen in my thesis, buildings have a lot to say on state behaviours and intentions, hence their study should be promoted.

Although one should be careful when considering these findings since they represent one potential interpretation of the narratives studied and thus, other readings would have been possible, I confirm here that investigating these centres' infrastructures allowed me better understand Geneva's intentions regarding the reception of migrants. More broadly, these findings help us to make sense of Switzerland's approach to migration in comparison to the European countries. We can see that even if Switzerland tries to be less attractive to migrants, like other EU states, by adopting more restrictive asylum policies and introducing new kinds of status, its international reputation and what it entails prevail. Indeed, assuming that Geneva chose this housing solution to ensure its hospitality tradition, it would therefore mean that, politically speaking, Switzerland sees more advantages in keeping its humanitarian image than in making the country less attractive for newcomers. However, having selected this designed housing solution does not make Switzerland more accessible for migrants, in practical terms, than other EU countries, because the country still enjoys a restrictive asylum policy. Therefore, it only offers what Switzerland needs: a beautiful facade to display on the international scene and maintain its humanitarian status.

The second part of my analysis presents the paradox I called "unrooted roots". As the analysis demonstrates, this paradoxical quality comes from the fact that, on one hand, the centres' typology promotes the integration of migrants because the centres are "open to the city", and invite the citizens and residents to share activities such as gardening, sports and other shared spaces. These structures thus allow them to create links with the local population and "grow new roots" in the city. But, on the other hand, the analysis also shows that the typology is modular, and therefore very much mobile and easy to be removed. Indeed, as explained in the analysis, each building is composed of containers, which are by definition elements made for transport (Scott-Smith and Breeze 2020, p.6), and thus movement. In addition to this, the deadline

assigned to each centre is further proof of their future disappearance. Their “temporariness” comes therefore as a contradiction with the structures put into place for the residents to create links with the city.

To potentially explain why such a paradox takes place, the narratives presenting the centres were further examined. Their analysis shows that two different discourses can be found on the website: one that seems targeting the pro-migrants and the other one aimed at the opposition. The discourse aimed at convincing the pro-migrants side emphasizes the happiness of the migrants to be in these centres and how this housing solution meets their needs. The discourse also accentuates the efforts made by the Canton to build a future for migrants in Geneva and how they are already considered “citizens of tomorrow”. On the other side, the speech targeting the opposition focuses on creating a discourse of crisis to highlight the emergency situation in which the Canton finds itself. It also insists on the temporary nature of the centres and on the fact that each of them will be removed, thus not taking land from Geneva citizens. Finally, it also adds that the construction of these centres has been beneficial for the local economy since local stakeholders and local materials have been used.

The typology chosen for the housing solution is therefore the result of these two discourses, clearly trying to satisfy both sides, by providing something enhancing migrants’ integration but simultaneously not meant to stay. Through this typology, the consensual culture of Switzerland’s politics appears thus rather clearly. So, as concluded above for the first paradox, we can see here once again that the infrastructure of the centres goes beyond its primary function of housing and is being used by the state to reach another goal: ensure not provoking any strong opposition to its decisions. By taking into account the opinions of both parties, the state achieves its goal of remaining in power and avoids any referendums or popular initiatives that might jeopardize its stability.

To have looked further than the first function of these centres by investigating their paradoxical qualities helped again here achieving a broader understanding of these infrastructures and their underlying values, meanings and functions. It is therefore additional proof of the relevance of studying what buildings can tell us about the (in)voluntarily hidden intentions of their creators.

Concerning the limitations coming with such a study, and as mentioned above, focusing on the narratives formulated by the persons in charge of the infrastructural

project could be a source of misinterpretation because interpretation very much varies depending on the person formulating it. However, I reaffirm here that even if the study of infrastructures might only lead to one potential explanation, it is still worth the attention. Indeed, it offers academia new ways of achieving understandings of the infrastructures surrounding us and the values, meanings and hidden roles they play. As Murphy (2013) affirms “understanding the logic of its [the design] reality offers a powerful opportunity to uncover not only some of the critical mechanics that drive (...) politics and society but also the more general, often uneasy, relationships subsisting between people, power, and the things of the world” (p.129). As he continues, the ethnographic inquiry of design “can generate new possibilities for understanding the relation of things, broadly defined, to social life” (Ibid., p.128) and should thus, only be encouraged. This, of course, does not apply only to migration studies but to other academic fields such as gender studies, political sciences and others that would certainly benefit from a focus on infrastructures and their design.

## Conclusion

My research has shown that symbolic messages and cultural values are to be found embodied in the refugees' accommodation centres of the canton of Geneva and therefore, that these centres are fulfilling a role that goes beyond their main function. Thanks to a careful analysis of their design and typology and of the narratives depicting these centres, some explanations for the paradoxical qualities of their infrastructure were provided. The findings reveal that the housing solution offered by the Canton serves the state, on one hand, to communicate to the audience the continuity of its reputation as land of refuge and its qualities in terms of hospitality. The symbolic message of Geneva keeping its leader role in terms of humanitarian action is thus embodied in the accommodation centres. On the other hand, it has been demonstrated that the Swiss value and tradition of consensus is as well materialized in them. Indeed, it has been illustrated how the design and typology satisfy both parties of the population: the ones in favor of and against receiving migrants.

These conclusions lead to the observation that buildings can embody values and symbolic messages, but also that they can be used to achieve purposes different from their original function. With this housing solution, the state of Geneva can not only

preserve and promote its humanitarian credibility, but also it can make sure to remain in power and avoid both the “pro-” and the “contra-” welcoming migrants to go against its decisions.

This research contributes therefore to a better understanding of the State’s intentions when offering such accommodation centres to the migrants arriving to the Canton and how these buildings can help it achieve other political goals. Future research on the topic should be encouraged in order to deepen the academic knowledge on the impact and role infrastructures can play in our societies. For instance, further attention should be put on the residents of these centres to see if the design selected for the buildings is meant to create a specific feeling to the ones inhabiting them or if any other hidden intention is to be encountered. To do so, it would be relevant to interview the migrants and investigate the way they live through these infrastructures and perceive their housing. Furthermore, it would be relevant to also investigate the future of this housing solution. The use and role to come of these buildings meant to be removed, as well as the exit strategy the Canton will deploy, should receive researchers’ interest. This would allow them to outline the impact they might have on the new context they will be implemented in and the new meanings their design will have in their afterlives. Since the HG was telling us a story through its website, the audience might be eager to know “what happens next?”.

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## Appendix A

**List of the materials used for the analysis, found on the website *Histoires de constructions*:** <https://www.histoires-de-constructions.ch>

The materials are presented in a chronological order on the website. Therefore, I follow in the list below the order established online.

### Centre de l'Étoile

To access the page, click here: <https://www.histoires-de-constructions.ch/projets/etoile/>

- **03.08.2015:**
  - Type: Video-presentation
  - Length: 52 seconds
  - Date: August 2015/2017
  - Speaker: none
  - Title: Centre de l'Étoile - Arrival of the modules
  - Music: The time to run (finale)
  - Also accessible on YOUTUBE - link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-yW7lqQBHvg>
  
- **15.01.2016:**
  - Type: Video-timelapse
  - Length: 44 seconds
  - Date: August 2017
  - Speaker: none
  - Title: The Étoile is taking shape....
  - Sub-title: Relive here the construction of the Centre de l'Étoile in pictures...
  - Music: The time to run (finale)
  - Also accessible on YOUTUBE - link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4BIG869tw1Y>
  
- **22.01.2016:**
  - Type: Pictures
  - Quantity: 3
  - Title: Inauguration of the Centre de l'Étoile
  - Sub-title: The new Étoile accommodation center on Route des Jeunes now welcomes all unaccompanied minor asylum seekers arriving in Geneva. Inaugurated in the presence of Mauro Poggia, State Councillor, and the Carouge authorities, the 230-place center meets the needs of young migrants who continue to arrive in large numbers.
  
- **23.01.2016:**
  - Type: Newspaper article from LE COURRIER (pdf)

- Length: 1 page
  - Date: 25.01.2016
  - Author: Philippe Bach (first article), Marc-Olivier Parlatano (second article), Ariane Daniel Merkelbach (her answers for the section “Three questions to...”)
  - Title: Two container buildings for 230 unaccompanied minors
  - Sub-title: ASYLUM - A new center, dedicated to young migrants without family, has been inaugurated in Carouge. Other structures of this type are being studied to cope with the influx of minor refugees.
- **14.03.2016:**
    - Type: Pictures
    - Quantity: 6
    - Title: Elevation/Raising of the Étoile center

## Centre du Bois-de-Bay

To access the page, click here: <https://www.histoires-de-constructions.ch/projets/camping-bois-de-bay/>

- **07.06.2016:**
  - Type: Pictures
  - Quantity: 14
  - Title: The building site begins
- **26.10.2016:**
  - Type: Pictures
  - Quantity: 3
  - Title: Arrival of the modules
- **01.03.2017:**
  - Type: Newspaper article from Satigny en clair (pdf)
  - Length: 2 pages
  - Date: March 2017
  - Author: not specified
  - Title: Reception of migrants at the Bois-de-Bay campsite - Satigny en clair, March 2017
  - Sub-title: On January 12, the Town Hall invited the population of Satigny to inform them of the opening of the new site of the General Hospice for asylum seekers in Bois-de-Bay in Peney-Dessous.
- **06.04.2017:**
  - Type: Pictures
  - Quantity: 8
  - Title: Arrival of the storage module
- **01.06.2017:**

- Type: Newspaper article from Satigny en clair (pdf)
- Length: 3 pages
- Date: June 2017
- Author: Committee of Mandement Accueille association
- Title: The village of Bois-de-Bay comes to life - Satigny en clair, June 2017
- Sub-title: The village of Bois-de-Bay has been welcoming migrant families for several weeks now. About fifteen homes are occupied, for a total of sixty-five people, the majority of whom are children of all ages.
  
- **15.09.2017:**
  - Type: Informative text
  - Author: Hospice général
  - Title: The Bois-de-Bay centre has been awarded
  - Text: The Hospice General received the 2nd prize in the "social housing" category for the Bois-de-Bay accommodation center. Two projects launched by the real estate department of the Hospice General were rewarded at the 3rd edition of the Real Estate Awards organized by Bilan. The first in the renovation category and the second in the social housing category. These two buildings were awarded by a jury of experts on the basis of multidisciplinary criteria. Aesthetic, architectural, functional, environmental and social qualities were taken into account.
  
- **01.11.2017:**
  - Type: Newspaper article from Schweizer Musikzeitung (pdf)
  - Length: 1 page
  - Date: November 2017
  - Author: Gianluigi Bocelli
  - Title: Helping refugees through music
  - Sub-title: All children should have the right to practice music. This is the thinking of Matteo Agostini, who leads music workshops for migrant children at the Bois-de-Bay center in Satigny.
  
- **31.08.2020:**
  - Type: Video-presentation
  - Length: 1 minute 30 seconds
  - Date: 7th of July 2020
  - Speaker: Jérôme (manager of the centre unit)
  - Title: Discovering the center of Bois-de-Bay
  - Music: not specified
  - Also accessible on YOUTUBE - link:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4tSgy7dn0P0&t=89s>

## Centre de Lancy

To access the page, click here: <https://www.histoires-de-constructions.ch/projets/centre-de-lancy/>

- **17.01.2018:**
  - Type: Pictures
  - Quantity: 4
  - Title: The building site has begun
  - Sub-title: While waiting for the assembly of the modules at the end of February, the construction site is progressing on schedule.
  
- **01.03.2018:**
  - Type: Video-timelapse
  - Length: 59 seconds
  - Date: February 2018
  - Title: Installation of the modules
  - Sub-title: The Lancy center takes shape: Relive here its construction in pictures
  - Music: The time to run (finale)
  - Also accessible on YOUTUBE - link:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K2GA0c0hKDI>
  
- **18.07.2018:**
  - Type: Pictures
  - Quantity: 12
  - Title: An imminent opening...
  - Sub-title: The interiors are being refined for an imminent opening... The floor heating is installed, the tiles are laid, the individual and common kitchens are assembled. A few more finishing touches on the outside and the Lancy center will be ready to open!
  
- **14.08.2018:**
  - Type: Pictures
  - Quantity: 10
  - Title: The first residents were welcomed...
  - Sub-title: The new collective accommodation center for migrants in Lancy has just opened! The first residents (from Syria) were welcomed on Wednesday August 8th.
  
- **04.10.2018:**
  - Type: Video-interview
  - Length: 2 minutes
  - Date: 28th September 2018
  - Speaker: Thierry Apothéloz, Frédéric Renevey
  - Title: Official opening of the Lancy center
  - Sub-title: A new collective accommodation center of the Hospice General, with a capacity of 80 persons, has opened its doors in Lancy. Inaugurated on September 28 in the presence of State Counselor Thierry Apothéloz and the Mayor of the City of Lancy, Frédéric Renevey, the center has been occupied since August by families of refugees from the Syrian contingent.
  - Music: Broke for free - Summer spliffs
  - Also accessible on YOUTUBE - link:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vHWgCZOMxRI&t=1s>

## Centre de Rigot

To access the page, click here: <https://www.histoires-de-constructions.ch/projets/centre-de-rigot/>

### - 09.01.2018:

- Type: Informative text
- Author: Hospice général
- Title: Valorization of the Geneva wood
- Text: For this project, the Swiss forest resources, and more particularly those of Geneva, are highlighted because they produce high-performance construction materials: softwood and hardwood. Using wood means participating in local economic development because all the players in the sector, from the cutting of the trees to the installation of the framework, are part of the dense fabric of regional businesses. This is perfectly in line with the philosophy of sustainable development: think global / act local. It has a high added value since 1m<sup>3</sup> of indigenous wood creates 40 hours of work, i.e. 35 to 40% more than competing concrete and steel materials. The valorization of the Geneva wood is integrated in this project by a choice of local supply for the larch of the driven piles and for the oak of the coverings (cladding, decking, guardrails, ...).

### - 09.02.2018:

- Type: Press file of Hospice général (pdf)
- Length: 4 pages
- Date: not specified
- Author: Hospice général
- Title: Opening of the construction site - Rigot: an innovative project
- Sub-title: Thanks to the support of the Task Force for the accommodation of migrants instituted by the State Council in June 2015, the construction sites for three of the six projects for new collective accommodation centers for migrants have begun. In charge of the construction and renovation of the accommodation facilities, the real estate department of the Hospice General has commissioned an architectural firm and a wood engineer sa to carry out, in the heart of the Nations district, an innovative project in more ways than one.

### - 10.02.2018:

- Type: Video-interview
- Length: 2 minutes 06 seconds
- Date: 9th of February 2018
- Speaker: Reporter, Christophe Girod, Mauro Poggia, Pascale Moreau
- Title: First shot on the RTS
- Sub-title: Center for asylum seekers Geneva: first groundbreaking. Presented as innovative, it is supposed to allow the cohabitation of different populations.
- Music: none
- Also accessible on RTS (Radio Télévision Suisse) - link: <https://www.rts.ch/play/tv/19h30/video/centre-pour-requerants-geneve-premier-coup-de->

[pioche?urn=urn:rts:video:9322416&station=a9e7621504c6959e35c3ecbe7f6bed0446cdf8da](https://www.rts.ch/video/pioche?urn=urn:rts:video:9322416&station=a9e7621504c6959e35c3ecbe7f6bed0446cdf8da)

- **12.02.2018:**
  - Type: Newspaper article from (probably) La Tribune (pdf)
  - Length: 2 pages
  - Date: 10th - 11th of February 2018
  - Author: Céline Garcin, ATS
  - Title: The press is talking about it...
  - Sub-title: Press coverage of the work on the future collective accommodation center for asylum seekers in Rigot
  
- **05.03.2018:**
  - Type: Video-interview
  - Length: 3 minutes 31 seconds
  - Date: February 2018
  - Speaker: Christophe Girod, Rémi Pagani, Mauro Poggia, Michael Møller, Pascale Moreau
  - Title: Opening of the Rigot construction site
  - Sub-title: Located in the heart of the international organizations, this center for migrants will consist of two buildings with housing modules that can be adapted to the number of people to be housed and their needs, particularly in the case of reduced mobility. The buildings will be made of wood, some of which will come from the canton of Geneva.
  - Music: Broke for free - Summer Spliffs
  - Also accessible on YOUTUBE - link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WnODzDostVc>
  
- **12.03.2018:**
  - Type: Pictures
  - Quantity: 9
  - Title: Visit to the sample module
  - Sub-title: Back in pictures on the visit of the Rigot center's sample module at JPF's premises in Yverdon in February 2018.
  
- **15.03.2018:**
  - Type: Video-interview
  - Length: 1 minute 47 seconds
  - Date: February 2018
  - Speaker: Léonard De Muralt
  - Title: The Mandela Monument and the Center
  - Sub-title: Interview with the artist Léonard De Muralt, who created the Mandela monument in 2015 while a student at HEAD Geneva. His work momentarily removed from Rigot Park, during the duration of the construction, will take on a new meaning once it is reinstalled near the center.
  - Music: Broke for free - Summer Spliffs
  - Also accessible on YOUTUBE - link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a-xfvHkx4IA>

- **10.04.2018:**
  - Type: Video-interview
  - Length: 5 minutes 37 seconds
  - Date: March 2018
  - Speaker: Mauro Poggia
  - Title: Interview with Mauro Poggia
  - Sub-title: Mauro Poggia takes stock of the Task Force for the accommodation of migrants set up by the State Council.
  - Music: Broke for free - Summer Spliffs
  - Also accessible on YOUTUBE - link:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=1&v=T-91kzQMPO0&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=T-91kzQMPO0&feature=emb_logo)
  
- **30.04.2018:**
  - Type: Video-interview
  - Length: 2 minutes 09 seconds
  - Date: April 2018
  - Speaker: Philippe Poget
  - Title: Valorization of the Geneva wood for the construction of the Rigot center
  - Sub-title: Interview with Philippe Poget in the woods of Versoix. Geneva wood will be used for the construction of the Rigot center: oak for the cladding and larch for its foundations.
  - Music: not specified (probably Broke for free - Summer Spliffs)
  - Also accessible on YOUTUBE - link:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wz1QPr7In3E&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wz1QPr7In3E&feature=emb_logo)
  
- **12.07.2018:**
  - Type: Video-interview
  - Length: 2 minutes
  - Date: 25th of May 2018
  - Speaker: Jean-Marc Ducret
  - Title: Construction of wooden modules
  - Sub-title: Interview with Jean-Marc Ducret, Director of JPF-Ducret SA, at the assembly site in Yverdon
  - Music: not specified (probably Broke for free - Summer Spliffs )
  - Also accessible on YOUTUBE - link:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y9G4cpudLfQ&t=2s>
  
- **07.09.2018:**
  - Type: Pictures
  - Quantity: 8
  - Title: The modules are being assembled
  - Sub-title: The assembly of the modules is in full swing in Yverdon (JPF). The first modules will be delivered to the Rigot site in the coming weeks.
  
- **01.11.2018:**
  - Type: Pictures

- Quantity: 11
- Title: The installation of the modules is in progress...
- Sub-title: The installation of the modules started at the beginning of October and is progressing rapidly...
  
- **13.12.2018:**
  - Type: Video-interview
  - Length: 3 minutes 57 seconds
  - Date: October 2018
  - Speaker: Darius Golchan
  - Title: Interview with the architect, Darius Golchan
  - Sub-title: Check out the interview with Darius Golchan, architect at Acau, on the Rigot site during the assembly of the modules.
  - Music: not specified (probably Broke for free - Summer Spliffs)
  - Also accessible on YOUTUBE - link:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oggg5Qc4Xdo>
  
- **16.01.2019:**
  - Type: Video-interview
  - Length: 2 minutes 18 seconds
  - Date: November 2018
  - Speaker: Mehrshad Ghaffary
  - Title: Interview with Mehrshad Ghaffary, director of Sismondi College
  - Sub-title: The collaboration between Sismondi College and the future Rigot Center is already beginning to take shape through ideas and projects that come from both teachers and students at the college.
  - Music: Broke for free - Summer Spliffs
  - Also accessible on YOUTUBE - link:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYK0ERCfxBw>
  
- **28.03.2019:**
  - Type: Video-interview
  - Length: 1 minute 14 seconds
  - Date: February 2019
  - Speaker: Filippo Grandi
  - Title: Message from Filippo Grandi on the future collective accommodation center in Rigot
  - Sub-title: Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, is pleased to be among the neighbors of Hospice General's future Rigot collective accommodation center.
  - Music: Broke for free - Summer Spliffs
  - Also accessible on YOUTUBE - link:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cAJ16Y37JQc&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cAJ16Y37JQc&feature=emb_logo)
  
- **04.07.2019:**
  - Type: Video-timelapse
  - Length: 1 minute 30 seconds
  - Date: July 2019

- Title: Rigot Residential Center in 90 seconds
- Sub-title: Relive here the construction of the Rigot shelter in pictures: 18 months in 90 seconds!
- Music: Time to Run (finale)
- Also accessible on YOUTUBE - link:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=6&v=DTXKznD4u24&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=6&v=DTXKznD4u24&feature=emb_logo)
  
- **11.09.2019:**
  - Type: Video-interview
  - Length: 1 minute 52 seconds
  - Date: 2019
  - Speaker: Serge Dal Busco
  - Title: Interview de Serge Dal Busco
  - Sub-title: On the occasion of the inauguration of the Rigot accommodation center, Serge Dal Busco, Vice President of the State Council, gives us his impressions.
  - Music: not specified
  - Also accessible on YOUTUBE - link:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8N1QJE2rMWI&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8N1QJE2rMWI&feature=emb_logo)
  
- **27.08.2020:**
  - Type: Video-presentation
  - Length: 1 minute 26 seconds
  - Date: July 2020
  - Speaker: Emir (social worker)
  - Title: Discovering the center of Rigot
  - Music: not specified
  - Also accessible on YOUTUBE - link:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YDZbskrzrPs&t=1s>

## Centre de la Seymaz

To access the page, click here: <https://www.histoires-de-constructions.ch/projets/centre-de-la-seymaz/>

- **17.11.2017:**
  - Type: Video-presentation
  - Length: 48 seconds
  - Date: August 2017
  - Title: Centre de la Seymaz - picketing of the construction site
  - Sub-title: Relive the beginnings of the construction site of the Seymaz center with the staking of the perimeter of the construction site.
  - Music: The time to run (finale)
  - Also accessible on YOUTUBE - link:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TI1ugtvWCyc>

- **06.03.2018:**
  - Type: Pictures
  - Quantity: 7
  - Title: Visit to the sample module
  - Sub-title: A look back at the visit of the Seymaz center's sample module at JPF's premises in Le Pâquier in December 2017.
  
- **21.03.2018:**
  - Type: Pictures
  - Quantity: 11
  - Title: Overview of the center in a few shots...
  - Sub-title: In a few plans made by the architectural firm Bassicarella, here is an overview of the 4 buildings that will be built in the coming months.
  
- **18.05.2018:**
  - Type: Video-interview
  - Length: 3 minutes 28 seconds
  - Date: April 2018
  - Speaker: Roberto Carella
  - Title: Interview with Roberto Carella
  - Sub-title: In this interview, Roberto Carella, architect at BassiCarellaMarello presents the project of the Seymaz center.
  - Music: not specified
  - Also accessible on YOUTUBE - link: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s\\_Wgln\\_g7hY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s_Wgln_g7hY)
  
- **15.08.2018:**
  - Type: Pictures
  - Quantity: 10
  - Title: Find out how the foundations are laid
  - Sub-title: With the Krinner screw-in foundation system, the galvanized metal screws are screwed into the floor. It is an efficient system for this type of floor, easily recyclable and removable.
  
- **23.08.2018:**
  - Type: Video-presentation
  - Length: 35 seconds
  - Date: July 2018
  - Title: Screwing of a metal pile
  - Sub-title: Discover the screwing of a pile according to the Krinner method. Note that 166 screws are needed per building and that each piece can support a load of 10 tons.
  - Music: Grandioso
  - Also accessible on YOUTUBE - link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EE-MfVsaFA0>

- **18.07.2019:**
  - Type: Video-timelapse
  - Length: 39 seconds
  - Date: July 2019
  - Title: 30 seconds on the clock...Building B is up!
  - sub-title: Live the assembly of the building B in 30 seconds...
  - Music: Time to run (finale)
  - Also accessible on YOUTUBE - link:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nVeduli8eTM&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nVeduli8eTM&feature=emb_logo)
  
- **04.09.2020:**
  - Type: Video-presentation
  - Length: 1 minute 30 seconds
  - Date: 29th of June 2020
  - Speaker: Morgane (social worker)
  - Title: Discovering the center of the Seymaz
  - Music: not specified
  - Also accessible on YOUTUBE - link:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ktBSo8Xv1IQ>