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In this article we present findings of a qualitative study of Albanian immigrants in Athens and Mytilene (on the island of Lesvos) in Greece. The study investigates the role that various forms of social capital can play in the social, economic and institutional incorporation of Albanian immigrants in Greek society. The paper focuses specifically on immigrants' interpretations and experiences of social incorporation processes in Greece, placing emphasis on the significance of family, kinship, ethnic and other social networks for immigrants' working and life trajectories in the country. Finally, the investigation of the impact of three main forms of social capital—bonding, bridging and linking—on the social incorporation of Albanian immigrants, leads to the question of Greek migration policy formation and reveals the need for its radical restructuring.

Introduction: Albanian Immigration in Greece

Contemporary Albanian immigration in Greece is a relatively recent phenomenon, which started in the early 1990s, immediately following the demise of the Albanian communist regime. Nevertheless, Albanian immigration has contributed more than any other contemporary movement to the 'sudden' transformation of Greece from a traditional emigration country to a mass immigration destination (Iosifides 1997). Currently, Albanians make up by far the largest community of immigrants in Greece, followed by Bulgarians, Georgians and Romanians (Pavlou and Christopoulos 2004).

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According to the 2001 population census, Albanians represent 56 per cent of all foreign immigrants in Greece, the remaining 44 per cent comprising numerous other nationalities. The second-largest immigrant group in Greece, the Bulgarians, constitutes only 4.7 per cent of all foreign-born immigrants in the country (National Statistical Service of Greece 2001). The number of Albanian immigrants in Greece is 438,000 people, about 4 per cent of the total population of the country, although this number is probably under-estimated due to the fact that a good number of immigrants avoided registering in the census (Labrianidis and Lyberaki 2001; National Statistical Service of Greece 2001).

The data also reveal that almost half of the Albanians immigrants in Greece (207,042) reside in the Athens conurbation, and that six out of ten are men. The majority are between 25 and 44 years of age, reflecting their basic reason for entering the country, and over 60 per cent hold primary and secondary educational qualifications. The most important reasons for migrating to Greece are searching for work (men) and family reunification (women). The main employment sectors for Albanian immigrants are construction, the food and restaurant sector, personal or other services and the primary sector. Just under half had lived in Greece for over 5 years at the time of the census, with 45 per cent resident between 1 and 5 years.

The Albanian inflow to Greece is related to a series of factors which have been extensively researched and documented over the last 10 years—ease of entry, political and socio-economic developments in Albania after 1990, geographical proximity of the two countries, and demand for a cheap and flexible labour force in various sectors of the Greek economy (e.g. construction and agriculture) which has further been reinforced by the persistence of an extensive informal economy (Iosifides 1997; King *et al.* 1997; Kontis 1998; Petracou 2001).

Social Capital and Immigrant Incorporation

Social capital is a concept that is growing in importance in the analysis and explanation of a series of issues and phenomena ranging from local/regional economic development, innovation diffusion and urban community development through to immigrant incorporation and the contemporary formation of transnational social spaces (Pries 2001). It is not our intention here to examine the extensive literature on social capital and its various implications across different social domains. Instead we focus on a brief conceptual clarification of social capital and its implications for the social incorporation of Albanian immigrants in Greece. 'Incorporation' here is used as a relatively neutral concept concerning the terms and conditions of entering and becoming a part of a host society (cf. Hatziprokopiou 2006). Thus 'integration', 'assimilation', 'acculturation' or 'social marginalisation and exclusion' are specific forms and processes of immigrant incorporation in destination societies (Castles *et al.* 2002).

By *social capital* we understand the qualities, characteristics and properties of networks of social relations which are formed, evolved and dissolved within wider

institutional and socio-economic environments, having different implications for individuals, social groups and communities (Policy Research Initiative 2003). Although the concept of social capital is defined in various ways (Bourdieu 1985; Coleman 1988; OECD 2001; Portes 1998; Putnam *et al.* 1993) due to differences in theoretical position or emphasis on different aspects of the phenomenon, it is generally recognised that its key features are social norms, networks and trust.

Thus, '*Social norms* are informal rules that condition behaviour in various circumstances (...) A *social network* is an interconnected group of people who usually have an attribute in common (...) *Trust* is simply the level of confidence that people have that others will act as they say or are expected to act, or that what they say is reliable' (Productivity Commission 2003: x). These properties, dimensions and qualities of social capital produce a series of outcomes, mainly related to the reduction of transaction costs, improvement of access to the resources of others, improvement of information diffusion, enhancement of the potentiality of control and authority, facilitation of knowledge and innovation dissemination, promotion of cooperative and/or socially-minded behaviour and the addition of benefits to individuals and associated social spill-overs (Faist 2000; Productivity Commission 2003).

We have identified three main forms of social capital that have implications and outcomes for the incorporation of Albanian immigrants in Greek society. The first form is that of *bonding social capital*, referring mainly to the formation of relatively homogeneous social group. The second is *bridging social capital*, which refers to relations between different and heterogeneous social groups. Finally, there is *linking social capital*, which concerns social relations between individuals and groups who hold different positions in a system of social hierarchy (Judge 2003; Productivity Commission 2003).

The implications of these forms of social capital for the incorporation of immigrants into the host society may be manifold and multi-dimensional. They concern almost all aspects of the migratory trajectory: the formation of relatively stable connections between origin and destination through transactions and flows of individuals, material and symbolic goods; mobility and immobility; incorporation into the labour markets of the host societies; geographical distribution and spatial characteristics of immigrant communities; and social relations with Greeks and authorities in countries of destination (Faist 2000; Jordan and Düvell 2002). Almost all these impacts of social capital on the incorporation of Albanians in Greek society—whether positive or negative—are analysed in later sections of this paper.

Research Design and Methods

This research is part of a broader study using a multi-dimensional approach to the contemporary phenomenon of immigration in Greece[1] and was conducted from January to October 2005 in the Athens conurbation and in Mytilene, the main city of the island of Lesvos. The research is based on 28 in-depth interviews with immigrants

from Albania. The criteria for the selection of interviewees were related to the correspondence of their basic social and employment features to those of the Albanian population in the country and to the duration of their presence in Greece. Thus, the majority of interviewees came to Greece between 1991 and 1997 and had extensive experience with processes of social incorporation in the host society. The sample was equally divided between men and women. Twenty-four of the interviewees resided in the Athens conurbation (in Nikaia/Piraeus, Agia Varvara, Korydalos, Kolonos, Keratsini, Rentis, Halandri, Alimos, Castella, Vironas and Vrilisia) and four in Mytilene.[2] The employment sector of the majority of male interviewees was construction and for a minority of them the artisan and small-business sector; female interviewees were occupied mainly in the personal services sector.

Almost all interviews were tape-recorded (with the consent of the interviewees), and total anonymity was assured. The scope of the research was fully explained to the interviewees, and access to the final research report was guaranteed. The mean duration of interviews was three hours; that of individual interviews ranged from one and a half to six hours. Access to interviewees was via the 'snowballing technique' and initial contacts were made mainly through employers, neighbours and associations.

The basic research question concerned the investigation of the positive and negative impact of various forms of social capital on processes of social incorporation of Albanians in Greece, through the experiences and views of immigrants. Furthermore, we asked interviewees not to confine their narratives to their personal experiences alone, but to refer, when possible, to the experiences of others in order to capture to some extent the general picture of incorporation processes in Greece. A semi-structured interview was used, consisting of several themes: the interviewees' immigration trajectory from Albania to Greece; their geographical mobility within Greece; economic and employment arrangements; leisure and recreation habits, social relations with family members in Greece and Albania, with relatives, other immigrants and Greeks; relations with public agencies and authorities; along with issues concerning their broader social and civic participation. Special attention was paid to the role that family/kinship, ethnic and other social networks play in immigrants' incorporation processes in the country. The interview guide was used in a highly flexible way, giving interviewees the opportunity to express their experiences, feelings and views without having them confined in preconceived categories (or 'variables'), so its content changed considerably during the research process (Flick *et al.* 2004). Thus, themes and issues raised by some interviewees were subsequently incorporated into other interviews, in order to deepen our understanding of social incorporation processes. The research ended when a degree of 'saturation' was reached, that is, when the contribution of new interviews to investigating research themes and to answering the research questions became limited (Robson 2002).

Social Capital and Incorporation Processes

Bonding Social Capital: Family and Kinship Networks

Our findings show that bonding social capital, in the form of family and kinship networks, is the most important factor for the incorporation of Albanian immigrants into Greek society compared with other forms of social capital.

The majority of the interviewees have family members and other relatives in Greece, usually brothers and sisters, cousins, daughters- and sons-in-law and other relatives by affinity. Furthermore, most of them brought their immediate family members—usually wives and children—to Greece, and a small proportion of them married and created a family in the host society. All respondents who brought family members to the country were men, since the first mass migratory wave (during 1990–95) of Albanians to Greece was predominantly a male movement. The presence of family members and relatives in Greece was one of the most important reasons for latecomers to enter the country; the factors of moving to Greece for the first wave of Albanians were related mainly to geographical proximity, ease of entrance and socio-economic hardship in the country of origin. Thus, the immigrants of the first wave were the 'pioneers' of contemporary Albanian migration to Greece. Under extremely hard conditions of moving, settling and working in the country, they established social networks and accumulated adequate material and informational resources to enable others—family members, relatives and/or friends—to come to Greece later on. In other words, they established a base for the development of a system of 'chain migration' from Albania to Greece which has continued to the present day.[3]

Family and kinship networks are the most prominent factor determining the spatial distribution of Albanian immigrants within Greece. Almost all interviewees stressed that the previous presence of family members and relatives in an area determined their decision to settle there. As two interviewees reported:

> At first my husband came to Castella and afterwards I came here with other relatives. Since then we haven't moved. We have been living here for eight years now.

> We did not choose the area. We came because a friend of my father was living here. We knew nothing about the area. He found a house for us and afterwards we got used to living here.

Again, we can roughly divide Albanian immigrants into 'pioneers' and latecomers. The former were characterised by great instability as regards the area of residence and in many cases by extremely harsh housing conditions (see Iosifides and King 1998). Their criteria for choosing the area of residence were related mainly to employment opportunities and to the low cost of housing. After they had become established in an area and their housing conditions improved, the 'pioneer' Albanian immigrants contributed to the spatial concentration of Albanian immigrants by attracting others (family members, relatives and friends) to settle in the same area. Indeed, the vast

majority of our research participants stressed that they live just a very small distance (in most cases walking distance) from other relatives, mainly in the same or in nearby buildings. Spatial proximity with relatives allows the constant exchange of various forms of help and solidarity, some of which require physical presence. These forms of solidarity are presented later on in the paper.

As far as the spatial migratory trajectory within Greece is concerned, we can identify three different paths, each of which is strongly related to the functions of family and kinship networks:

- The first concerns immigrants (mainly latecomers) who moved from Albania directly to the Athens conurbation. The basic reason for their move to this specific area is the presence of family members and/or relatives there.
- The second refers to immigrants who moved to a peripheral area of Greece, having lived in the major urban centres (Athens or Thessaloniki) for some time. This movement is connected directly by the interviewees to the presence of family members and relatives in the final area of residence and with the absence of any supportive social networks in Athens or Thessaloniki. Some interviewees also claimed that their decision to leave the major urban centres was related to the insecurity they feel at times, above all due to the absence of a regularised status.
- Finally, the third category concerns mainly 'pioneers' who moved, primarily to the Athens conurbation, after having lived and worked in various rural areas of Greece for some years. In this case, there is an almost total absence of initial family and/or kinship networks in the country, and Greek rural areas are described in an extremely negative manner. This is the period of extraordinary hardship as regards housing and working conditions, during which they are 'dreaming' of moving to Athens, which was thought to be the 'ideal' destination to continue their migratory trajectory. Almost all those 'pioneer' immigrants—after having moved to Athens and accumulated much experience about the country's life and employment characteristics and particularities—motivated family members and relatives to join them in Greece.

As regards the various forms of migratory trajectory within Greece, our interviewees characteristically reported the following experiences:

> I came straight from Albania here [to Nikaia, Piraeus]. When I got married I got visa and I came in a normal way. I did not come on foot. My husband came in the same way, with visa in 1991. He came on foot once because he went to Albania and returned again to Greece. He got caught because he didn't have any papers. But from the beginning my husband came here to Nikaia.

> A cousin of mine came here [to Mytilene] earlier. He called me and told me that things here are nicer. I was living in Athens and Thessaloniki for two and a half years. In Athens I was feeling differently. Every day I was feeling more and more as a foreigner. There was large population, chaos, even if you were legal: 'Come here to

check you again!'. Constant fear. I was living in a factory, there we were working, I was living there.

I moved from Argyrokastro [Gjirokastër in Albania] to Agrinioin 1992 on foot for eight days. I was working in tobacco farms for 10 hours under the sun, for 2,500 drachmas [about €8] . . . . My final destination was Athens.

When I entered Greece in order to go to Kozani, it took me seven days on foot because I got lost. . . . In Trikala, over Elassona we were living out in the fields under the trees. With plastic over the top, it was very cold. I have built my life here in Athens.

Apart from the geographical distribution of immigrants in Greece, family and kinship networks have played a central role in the social incorporation of Albanian immigrants in Greek society and the labour market. The majority of research participants found their current (and previous) jobs through other family members and/or relatives. A smaller proportion found their jobs through—mostly Albanian— friends and only a small proportion through personal search or job advertisements. Relying on strong social ties with immediate family members and relatives in Greece, immigrants utilise valuable sources of information and social relations with prospective employers to find jobs which are characterised by relative stability and improved working conditions, when compared to those found by the 'pioneers'. Thus, the vast majority of immigrants who found their jobs through family and kinship networks have held their current position for over five years, and express their general satisfaction as regards income and working conditions. Nevertheless, it must be noted that this satisfaction is relative and expressed only in comparison with earlier working experiences in the country, which were characterised by extreme instability, insecurity, long working days, a total absence of social and health security provisions and extensive underpayment (Iosifides 1997, 2001).

There are a few, but nevertheless important, cases in which Albanian immigrants work in small enterprises—for example cafés—set up by other Albanian immigrants in Greece. As one respondent said:

The shop [café] I am working in now is owned by my brother-in-law. At first, I was working in an artisan business and, simultaneously, in a house. It was the house of the owner of the artisan business. Now, I am working here.

These cases show that there is a trend towards the establishment of ethnic business by Albanians in Greece, although this trend is still very weak.[4] In such cases, and especially for Albanian immigrants who entered the country without 'pre-migration intentions of business ownership' (Marger 2001: 439), social capital has proved to be central for the viability and development of an 'ethnic business' sector—especially during the initial phases—as it serves for the provision of two valuable sources of business success: immigrant labour and immigrant demand for goods and services (Kolios 2003; Lemontzelis 2005).

Despite the presiding positive aspects of Albanian migration in Greece, channelling Albanian immigrants to specific dependent working positions through family and ethnic networks has its negative aspects. The most prominent of these is the gradual formation of an 'ethnic enclave' economy and of certain sectors of 'ethnic specialisation' for immigrants—for example, construction for Albanians, personal services for Filipinos etc. Thus, 'ethnic mobility entrapment'—the placement of immigrants in specific employment sectors and positions through their social networks—limits their opportunities for wider labour market integration and employment progression according to their education, training or other skills (Lemontzelis 2005; Li 2003). Most of our research participants occupy employment positions which lack any correspondence with their education, training and skills and with their position in the home country (almost 50 per cent of our interviewees hold higher education qualifications). In Greece, Albanian immigrants work mainly as non-specialised labourers in the construction, service and primary sectors, irrespective of their personal skills and type of work in Albania (often they were skilled workers in the industrial sector, craftsmen, scientific or technical personnel). This function of social capital, along with the limited opportunities for formal re-education and training for immigrants in Greece, leads to gradual deskilling and a decrease of opportunities for upward social mobility, reinforcing 'ethnic specialisation'.

When considering aspects of *social reproduction*, family and kinship networks can be placed at the centre of the whole process. Almost all respondents stressed the constant and stable contacts and social relations with family members and relatives in the country. Furthermore, they emphasise that these contacts and relations are often more trustworthy and substantial in Greece than in Albania. Almost all interviewees talked extensively about solidarity and reciprocity on an almost daily basis between family members and relatives. Some typical examples are set out below:

- solidarity in health issues—taking care of children when they are ill, donating blood, occasions of special need such as employment accidents;
- baby-sitting and child-minding during working hours;
- economic assistance during periods of unemployment etc.—almost all interviewees pointed out that they borrow and/or lend money, mainly from and/or to other relatives, on a more or less regular basis;
- utilisation of family and kinship networks to send money and other goods (such as medicine and food) to the home country.

The last of these points bears further comment. Although the use of formal ways of sending money to Albania (mainly through the banking system and Western Union) is relatively extensive, many of the respondents stressed that they send money and goods to Albania with relatives for security reasons and because they wish to keep a

more personal and close relationship with their homeland. The majority send money to Albania on a regular basis (every month or 2–3 months), although the amounts of money sent vary (from €20–30 per month to €200–350 every two months). This money goes to their relatives and/or family members (mainly parents) who stayed in Albania, and usually constitutes financial resources for investments there, the most usual of which is the construction of new houses or the repair and/or extension of old ones. This trend may be considered of great significance as many interviewees expressed their preference for dividing their time and employment activities between Greece and Albania in the near future and giving this opportunity to their children as well. This tendency shows that the development of a 'transnational social and living space' between Greece and Albania in the future is a possibility (cf. Goldring 2001). The development of such a space of systematic flows of people, financial capital, material and symbolic goods between the two countries opens new questions about issues such as immigrants' permanent settlement, citizenship and social integration. Some typical accounts of these issues are the following:

> When I had my husband in the hospital, my sister came and took care of my eldest child.

> They [my relatives] help me and I help them all the time. Once I needed blood for an operation, my brothers came and donated.

> This thing [solidarity] for us is the rule every day. When I had no house I stayed for two months with my brother. If we want money, if there is illness, we are close.

> I think I will have houses here and in Albania as well. [. . .] Because I have two homelands now. I want at least my children to choose what to do and where to stay. Now I have done the first steps in Albania. I build new houses there. I have started from zero. I had only a bicycle and later on a motorbike, a car, a house, a piece of land. I have reached this point now. I believe I will finish in a year's time and I will see what I can do. I may take a loan and buy a house here as well. And the children can choose what to do, to go up there [Albania] or stay here.

Finally, most immigrants who participated in the research process stated the almost total unavailability of free time and recreation in Greece. This is linked not only with the relatively long hours of work but also with the character of their employment which is usually tiring and laborious. As one respondent reported, 'My life is: going home, having a sleep, waking up and working'. Another said emphatically, 'The only thing we want when we go home is to sleep. Nothing else'. Indeed the majority of interviewees equate recreation and free time with rest at home. Thus, there is a great degree of entrenchment in private spaces and an avoidance of participating in public and social recreational activities, which would be considered as normal by the native population. The most usual recreational activity reported by the interviewees is the exchange of visits between relatives in their homes and to a lesser extent visits to cafés or a stroll around the market.

Bonding Social Capital: Ethnic Networks

Bonding social capital, in the form of ethnic networks, also plays a role in the incorporation of Albanian immigrants in Greek society, although it is relatively limited compared with family and kinship ties. A significant research finding is that almost one third of our research participants have not developed social relations of any kind with immigrants of the same or different nationality since they have come to Greece. Their substantive and stable social relations are confined within family and kinship networks in Greece and Albania. The interviewees gave several reasons for this phenomenon: lack of time to develop and sustain wider social relations, intense working life, family duties and responsibilities, and a relatively widespread lack of trust for people of the same nationality. The roots of this lack of trust and general caution may be found in the period of the first mass inflow of Albanians to Greece (1990−95), when intra-community violence and criminality were apparently widespread (Karydis 1996). This is illustrated by the following account:

> I went for work to Agrinio, in the fields; we were sleeping outside at that time, but it was summer. When we arrived in Agrinio, we were a large company of people and we were sleeping together. A lot of crimes happened at that time between Albanians. We were afraid very much then.

Nevertheless, the majority of interviewees have developed some kind of social relationship with other immigrants, mostly of the same nationality, although the importance of those relationships is generally rated less when compared to those with family members and relatives. The basic reasons for the development of ethnic networks are reported to be the shared immigration and social incorporation experiences in Greece and the commonality of language, descent and culture. Thus:

> We have the same nature, I think. I do not want to say that Greeks do not help us. Where I work they helped us. But they see us with a different eye. This is it, I think.

> We understand each other in a better way, the language, all the same experiences, all these help. It is easier to have social relationships with people from the same country because they speak the same language and it is easier to speak your mother tongue.

The role of ethnic networks in social processes of incorporation of Albanian immigrants in Greece is almost of the same nature and character as that of family and kinship, but social ties are more unstable and weak. Their role is mainly the exchange of valuable information for practical matters (housing and work availability and contacts with the authorities and public agencies), the common utilisation of recreation time mainly through the exchange of home visits, financial assistance in various circumstances, and mobilisation as regards a series of crucial issues such as baby-sitting and health emergencies.

Regarding contact with the authorities and public agencies, interviewees mentioned that many Albanian immigrants act as mediators, providing services such as

the explanation of bureaucratic procedures, the completion of various applications, the translation of documents, interpreting and the arrangement of contacts with key persons in central or local government agencies. These services are in some cases paid for, and they are considered by the interviewees to be highly important for crucial issues in Greece—meeting deadlines for a regularisation application, collecting the right documents for various procedures etc.—as they substitute, to some extent, the lack of formal policy provisions for these matters (Kavounidi 2004).

A special feature of the function of ethnic networks in the incorporation of Albanian immigrants in Greece concerns the use of public spaces such as parks and squares on a regular basis. These public spaces (a kind of spatially-defined field for the development of bonding and linking social capital) are used primarily for thickening social contacts, resulting in a quite intense exchange of information for housing, work and legal issues, in many cases between immigrants of the same or other nationalities who had never met before. Furthermore, apart from enhancing ethnic bonding, such public spaces are used as 'vehicles' for the development of linking social capital with prospective employers—certain squares and parks ('*piatsies*') serve as regular meeting points between immigrant workers and prospective employers, setting up the appropriate arrangements for hiring immigrants.

As regards involvement and participation in immigrant associations and other non-governmental organisations, together with participation in social and political life in Greece, our research findings reinforce the general picture of informality of processes of incorporation in Greek society (Berger *et al.* 2004). Thus, almost all our respondents do not participate in any organisation or association relevant to migration issues in Greece. The main factors explaining the extremely low member-ship rate of immigrants in immigrant associations are the great fragmentation of those associations and the widespread sense of their ineffectiveness in representing immigrants' interests. Indeed, for Albanians in Greece there are more than 10 different national associations, the majority Athens-based. Furthermore, the largest of these associations has only a few hundred members and even fewer active members out of an Albanian population of around half a million in Greece (Gropas and Triandafyllidou 2005; Soubert 2003). The weakness in developing a form of semi-formal and active ethnic social capital through the actions of immigrant associations reinforces the importance of informal social networks of Albanians in Greece for their social incorporation into the host society.

Bridging and Linking Social Capital: Relationships with Greeks and Public Authorities

While bonding social capital (i.e. family/kinship and ethnic networks) plays a prominent role in the social incorporation of Albanian immigrants in Greece, bridging social capital—social relations with Greeks—is still very weak, and sets the scene for a highly problematic wider social integration picture. The social relations of the majority of respondents with Greeks are reduced to banalities such as saying

simply 'Good morning' or 'Good evening'. The main reasons interviewees give to explain these uneasy relations are linked to the widespread perceived negative image of Albanians in Greece, and discrimination in social fields such as housing, the labour market, public transportation and public recreational places, as evidenced in the following quotes:

> Very few contacts [with Greeks]. In the cafeteria I am afraid that someone will hurt me.

> We don't have fun together [with Greeks]. Because neither we [Albanians] nor Greeks want to have relationships, because we don't have many things to discuss.

> We don't have good relations [with Greeks]. There are people and people; they are not all the same. Some people when they get to know you well, treat you in a right way; the others treat you like garbage.

> When they find out that you are from Albania they isolate you. They see you in a different way.

> They see us as an inferior. To us, because I am an Albanian they don't pay any attention to what I say.

Only a small fraction of our research respondents have developed and sustained trustful and stable social relations with Greeks, mainly at the neighborhood level or within working environments. These few cases concern immigrants who reside in a particular neighbourhood or work in a specific enterprise for a prolonged period of time (5–10 years). Immigrants acknowledge from their personal experience that close social contact with Greeks for a relatively long period of time reduces prejudice, xenophobic behaviour and discrimination quite substantially. Indeed, empirical evidence from other research projects tends to confirm the 'contact hypothesis', that is, the development of close, stable, cooperative and long-term social relations reduces prejudice and discriminatory behaviour and practices (Allport 1954; Chryssochoou 2004). Immigrants who developed close social relationships with Greeks talked extensively about the benefits of this form of bridging social capital. They referred to incidents and practices of solidarity and reciprocity between them and Greeks, emphasising the mediation with public authorities and the police. They stressed that those relations led to an overall positive change in self-image, self-appreciation[5] and self-perception as individuals with particular skills, qualifications, qualities and abilities rather than as members of a devalued ethnic group. The end-result was a significant decrease of discrimination practices at work and elsewhere, as the quotes below testify:

> This incident happened last summer. My son fell down and hurt his knee. I took the car and drove him to the hospital. And after that ten people [Greeks] from my neighbourhood asked about his health. A neighbour of mine works at the hospital,

and she was waiting for me outside the hospital. The next day many neighbours came to our house. It was very touching for me. People love me here.

I myself have no problems at work. I feel they do not see me differently, because they got to know me as a person.

The bad thing about my job is that it is very tiring. The good thing is that people there have known me for many years; they trust me; they know me as a person; they know the work I can do. They make things easy for you when they have known you for years. Many times they helped me a lot.

My working environment is very pleasant. They don't consider me as a foreigner among them and they do not treat me like one.

From the above quotes, it becomes evident that bridging social capital may be the catalyst for improving the terms of wider social incorporation and integration of immigrants in Greek society. Its great weakness is that it is still so little developed: this poses a series of challenges for the future formation of a comprehensive and inclusive migration policy in the country.

The general picture of uneasy and problematic social relations between Albanian immigrants and Greeks also extends to relations between immigrants and public authorities.[6] Almost all our research participants referred extensively to their more or less 'traumatic' experiences of contacting central and local public agencies. These experiences are mainly derogatory behaviour by staff, the refusal to provide services, information or meaningful advice, long hours of waiting and extreme problems in communication. Some typical accounts of such experiences are shown below:

Their behaviour was not good. I went to ask them to explain some things to me and they started shouting.

I went to take my stay permit [in the Prefecture office]. [. . .] Their behaviour was not good. They told me to leave and that they would call the police. They insulted me very badly.

When I was pregnant and went there [in the Municipality office], some people told the employees to allow me in because it was winter, 27 December, Christmas. They did not allow me to get in.

In the police they look down upon you. It is like we are not humans. It is like they are gods for us. They do what they want. They put us all in the same category.

In order to overcome bureaucratic difficulties and other problems when dealing with the authorities, immigrants mainly use two strategies which include their involvement in social networks. The first strategy is to mobilise family/kinship, ethnic or other network members who act as mediators with the authorities and who usually have the experience and the personal acquaintances appropriate for these procedures. The second concerns the involvement of more formal mediators, usually lawyers, who

charge a certain amount of money for providing their services to immigrants—filling in application forms, providing information and advice, and making direct contact with the authorities. For the regularisation processes of 1998 and 2001, the fee for these services was reported to be between €50 and €150. Most immigrants who had such experiences acknowledge that such networks are highly exploitative but nevertheless substitute, to a certain extent, for the almost total absence of a coherent public policy on these sensitive matters. Examples are the lack of competent immigration staff, and of free advice, information, translation and interpreting services etc.

Concluding Remarks and the Question of Policy Response

Table 1 summarises our research findings and identifies possible ways for a comprehensive and integrative migratory policy response. The most impressive finding is the predominance of *informality* in the social incorporation of Albanian immigrants, some 17 years after their initial inflow into Greece.[7] Basic processes concerning the life trajectory of immigrants, such as entering the labour and housing markets, social reproduction and dealings with the authorities and public agencies, are managed mainly by (and through) their informal social—notably family/kinship and ethnic—networks. This feature reveals the drawbacks and limitations of immigrant integration policy in Greece, and opens the way for its radical restructure and redirection. A detailed analysis of immigration policy in Greece exceeds the scope of the present paper. Yet, it must be noted that, apart from some fragmented or *ad hoc* social integration measures, there is an almost complete absence of a policy framework for the enhancement of the social incorporation of immigrants in Greece in terms of the promotion of equal rights in social fields such as the labour market, housing, education and training, religion, culture and civic participation (Marvakis 2004).

The policy responses as presented in Table 1 are relatively 'ambitious' given the current Greek migration policy framework. This framework is characterised by certain non-integrationist elements and has attracted a lot of criticism by immigrant organisations, NGOs and social scientists (see e.g. Meintanis 2005). The basic lines of criticism are related to the linkage of immigrants to specific employment positions, to the enhancement of their dependence on employers, to the curbing of a series of social and employment rights (right of geographical mobility within the country, right to stay in the country during unemployment periods), to the change of responsibility of deportation decisions from regional authorities to the Ministry of Public Order, and to the almost total absence of any specific and comprehensive social integration and inclusion measures especially designed for foreign immigrants (Hellenic League of Human Rights 2005). Nevertheless, the policy options presented in the table are 'realistic' in order to avoid the extreme social exclusion of first- and second-generation immigrants in Greece, but their implementation seems remote, as it presupposes a considerable change of balance of socio-political power at country and EU levels.

Table 1. Summary of major research findings

Form of social capital	Characteristics	Major impacts on the social incorporation of immigrants	Possible policy response
Bonding social capital: family and kinship networks	• A very developed form of social capital • Strong, stable and trustful social ties	• Enhances chain migration • Major impact on the geographical distribution of immigrants within Greece and within urban centres • Major impact on labour market incorporation but enhances phenomenon of 'ethnic specialisation' • Positive impact on processes of social reproduction and on satisfying social needs • Observable trends for the gradual formation of transnational social spaces • Potentiality for the development of an 'ethnic business' sector	• Improvement of policy provision for family reunification • Introduction of special training programmes for immigrants • Gradual formal recognition processes of immigrants' educational and training qualifications granted in the country of origin • Special programmes for job placement of immigrants according to skills and qualifications • Regular social support of immigrant families in need
Bonding social capital: ethnic networks	• A relatively developed form of social capital but in many cases unstable and weak social ties • A large proportion of immigrants is not involved in ethnic networks	• Some impact on labour market incorporation but enhances phenomenon of 'ethnic specialisation' • Some impact on processes of social reproduction and on satisfying social needs • Special role of public spaces for the social incorporation of immigrants • Little or no impact of semi-formal forms of ethnic networks (immigrant associations, wider social and political participation) • Potential for the development of an 'ethnic business' sector	• Establishment of permanent structures of consultation between central/local government and immigrant associations • State financial assistance to immigrant associations and common (cooperation between associations and government and/or local public agencies) planning of anti-racist campaigns in targeted social domains (e.g the general public, employers, the educational sector, public authorities, the police etc.)

Table 1 (*Continued*)

Form of social capital	Characteristics	Major impacts on the social incorporation of immigrants	Possible policy response
Bridging social capital: social relations with Greeks	• Extremely weak for the vast majority of immigrants	• Its weakness has a negative impact on processes of social incorporation as it increases discrimination and racist behaviour • For the few cases where this form of social capital is developed, there are observable trends of reduced prejudice and discrimination	• Introduction of a comprehensive and inclusive social integration policy for immigrants in key fields such as: labour market, social security, health, education and training, housing, culture, religion and political rights. Introduction of an anti-racist and anti-discriminatory policy framework associated with permanent monitoring mechanisms
Linking social capital: relations with the authorities and public agencies	• An extremely weak form for the vast majority of immigrants	• Its weakness has an extremely negative impact on processes of social incorporation and leads to economic exploitation by mediators	• Enhancement of the capability of immigration agencies to offer quality and free services to immigrants

To conclude, this paper has offered some insights into the crucial role of informal types of social capital for the incorporation of Albanian immigrants in various fields of Greek society, without covering, in any sense, all of its multiple dimensions, implications and particularities. Nevertheless, apart from the fact that they concern an extremely under-researched topic in Greece—the relation between social capital and immigrant incorporation—our findings may become the basis for further research on central issues of immigrant incorporation in Greece, such as socio-cultural identity formation and differentiation, cultural syncretism and hybridism, religious freedom and rights, civic participation and political rights, and the education and social inclusion of the second generation.

Notes

[1]   Research Project 'PYTHAGORAS', co-funded by the European Social Fund and National Resources (EPEAEK II).
[2]   Because the interviews conducted in Mytilene were relatively few, the analysis does not concern the differentiation of social incorporation processes between Athens and Mytilene, although there are some indications that in peripheral areas, bridging social capital between immigrants and natives is stronger (Koniordos 2005).
[3]   After a period of time, and according to the theory of 'cumulative causation', this system of chain migration operates independently of the initial moving factors (that is, the motives of 'pioneers') and contributes to the increasing importance of social capital and community factors (Massey 1999). See also Peixoto (2005).
[4]   About one quarter of all foreign immigrants who started a new business in Greece and enrolled at the Chamber of Commerce and Industry were Albanians (Galanopoulos and Dionysopoulou 2003).
[5]   The analysis of the complex psychological mechanisms that help immigrants to cope with uncertainties and emotional stress in various stages of the migratory trajectory exceeds the scope of the present article.
[6]   The process of criminal stigmatisation of Albanian immigrants in Greece, due to more frequent reporting of their illegal or alleged illegal activities to the police, and to the special attention they have received by public order authorities, reinforces the uneasy relations of Albanians with the Greek public (Karydis 1996).
[7]   The persistence of a large hidden economic sector in Greece (it is estimated to account for more than 35 per cent of the country's GDP) reinforces the informal social and economic arrangements of immigrants' incorporation and enhances the development of various forms of informal social capital (Droukas 1998; Massey *et al.* 1993; OECD 2005). Nevertheless, informal types of social capital are also reinforced by a series of other reasons as well, namely social discrimination and racism, limited immigrant socio-political organisation and absence of a social inclusion policy framework designed for foreign immigrants in the country.

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