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**From Influx to Integration: How Germany's Grassroots
Organizations are Supporting Refugees**

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University of San Francisco

Master of Arts in International Studies (MAIS)

From Influx to Integration:
How Germany's Grassroots Organizations Are Supporting Refugees
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS
in
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

By KYRA JABLONSKY

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Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this thesis project has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

APPROVED:

Capstone Adviser

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Abstract

With the global trend of massive population displacement only expected to rise in the years to come, it will be more important than ever to understand how to successfully integrate large populations. Using Germany as a case study in the aftermath of the refugee crisis, this paper looks at the unique and important ways in which German grassroots organizations supporting refugees are contributing to successful integration, within that country's larger aid ecosystem. Participants in this project, which was conducted in Berlin, Germany, included ten refugees, six grassroots organizations, one German volunteer, one social enterprise, one international non-governmental organization (NGO), a PhD candidate studying refugee shelters, two professors at Freie University, and a researcher at the Expert Council of German Foundations on Integration and Migration. Results suggest these German grassroots organizations supporting refugees bridge a gap left by the government and other support actors, especially in the realm of social interconnection. Embedded in the community and using an egalitarian approach, grassroots organizations supporting refugees act as social connectors, helping refugees integrate into the community, while activating civil society to participate in "the two-way process" of integration. Although the results suggest that grassroots organizations' support of refugees is not a sufficient substitute for the services and support offered by other aid actors, like the German government and NGOs, they are essential to promoting successful, sustainable integration and are worthy of additional recognition, research, and funding.

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INTRODUCTION

The world is currently experiencing unprecedented numbers of displaced people—the highest numbers ever recorded.¹ In 2018 alone, 70.8 million people were displaced (25.9 million of them refugees), a rate much higher than the deluge that followed World War II.² This trend will continue to rise as long-term conflicts in places like Afghanistan produce large refugee flows, while newer conflicts such as those in Syria and South Sudan occur with more frequency. As a result, the global challenge is how we support successful and sustainable integration at the local level—where the support is most needed. This issue is urgent and one that we will grapple with for generations to come.

During the refugee crisis of 2015, civil society stepped up in an unprecedented fashion to support refugees, especially in many European countries, helping bridge the gap left by governments and other support actors. This was especially pronounced in Germany, where approximately one million refugees entered the country in 2015.³ With the government and public sector overwhelmed, numerous grassroots efforts and organizations quickly formed—an estimated 150 in Berlin alone—and proved vital to refugee support efforts.⁴ These organizations share general characteristics that distinguish them from more traditional aid actors including being deeply embedded within the local community, an informal nature, a general lack of resources, and an egalitarian approach based on collective values. As the crisis has diminished, many such

¹“2018 in Review: Trends at a Glance,” UNHCR, accessed January 25, 2020, <https://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2018/>.

²Euan McKirdy, “UNHCR Report: More Displaced than After WWII,” June 20, 2016, <https://www.cnn.com/2016/06/20/world/unhcr-displaced-peoples-report/index.html>.

³Cynthia Kroet, “Germany: 1.1 Million Refugee Arrivals in 2015,” August 11, 2016, <https://www.politico.eu/article/germany-1-1-million-refugee-arrivals-in-2015/>.

⁴Margit Mayer, “Cities as Sites of Refuge and Resistance,” *European Urban and Regional Studies* 23, no. 3 (2017): 236, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0969776417729963>.

organizations in Germany have continued their work, using a fresh approach. While the refugee crisis has heightened awareness of them, many have remained under-researched and under-funded, with limited resources. Nevertheless, replication and expansion of their programs, as well as international recognition are indicators of their worthiness. With this paper, I hope to further highlight their important and unique contributions, which deserve consideration in the promulgation of best practices around successful and sustainable integration.

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

For my Capstone project, I identified five related topics to frame and contextualize my research question, including: citizen aid and grassroots humanitarianism, grassroots organizations at large, integration, German civil society, and German and EU refugee policy. Since most German grassroots organizations supporting refugees were established around the refugee crisis in 2015, it was critical to analyze newer research assessing the crisis. The literature reviewed here is primarily academic journal articles, accessed through the USF Library. Considering that research on these topics in relation to the refugee crisis is still emergent, I used research identified during my initial literature review in 2019 as a foundation, supplemented by more recent findings.

In the process of conducting this research, I found gaps. In particular, while the refugee crisis has generated more interest in grassroots efforts at large, including citizen aid and grassroots humanitarianism, these phenomena are understudied by virtue of their marginal position within the formal aid ecosystem.⁵ In addition, the literature repeatedly underscored how essential social connection is to successful local integration, but acknowledged a need for more exploration on how reciprocity and trust in social relations is established.⁶ Furthermore, while the research acknowledges the dynamic interconnection between domains in the integration framework and how “resource acquisition spirals” can be established when linkage is enabled, more research is needed on the relationship between integration domains.⁷ The literature also calls for a wider investigation of bureaucracy as a potential means of attaining legitimacy for more “atypical”

⁵Anne-Meike Fechter and Anke Schwittay, “Citizen Aid: Grassroots Interventions in Development and Humanitarianism,” *Third World Quarterly* 40, no. 10 (September 9, 2019): 1770, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2019.1656062>.

⁶Alastair Ager and Alison Strang, “Refugee Integration: Emerging Trends and Remaining Agendas,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 23, no. 4 (2010): 589, <https://doi./10.1093/jrs/feq046>.

⁷Ager and Strang, “Refugee Integration,” 604.

organizations,⁸ like grassroots organizations, as well as additional comparisons between fringe stakeholders, for a more nuanced understanding of legitimacy.⁹ The literature also illustrates the important distinctions between grassroots organizations and NGOs, which are often mistaken for each other.¹⁰ NGOs, as traditional aid actors with more resources than grassroots organizations, are also more dependent on the state for access and funding.¹¹ In turn, grassroots organizations, which originate in civil society, occupy a marginal placement within the larger aid ecosystem and are less bureaucratic and more embedded in the local community than NGOs.¹² Finally, the literature notes that since cities are at the vanguard of supporting refugees who make it into Europe and that relationships within the support ecosystem are complex, more research is needed regarding how cities shape integration politics in the future.¹³

Citizen Aid and Grassroots Humanitarianism

For the purposes of this project, it is important to focus not only the literature on grassroots organizations at large, but in particular, research on “citizen aid.”¹⁴ Although citizen aid has various names throughout the literature, including “citizen organizations” and “private development initiatives,” this type of grassroots humanitarian aid and development intervention is characterized by individuals in the Global North and South instigating support for those in need “across borders,” often with private funds.¹⁵ Literature on this phenomenon, as well as “grassroots

⁸Mona Florian, “Unlikely Allies: Bureaucracy as a Cultural Trope in a Grassroots Volunteer Organization,” *Scandinavian Journal of Management* 34 (2018): 160, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scaman.2018.03.002>.

⁹Rashedur Chowdhury, Arno Kourula, and Marjo Siltaoja, “Power of Paradox: Grassroots Organizations’ Legitimacy Strategies Over Time,” *Business & Society* (December 2018): 26, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0007650318816954>.

¹⁰Fechter and Schwittay, “Citizen Aid,” 1769.

¹¹Gatrell, “Western NGOs and Refugee Policy in the 20th Century,” *Journal of Migration and History* 5, no. 2 (September 2019): 386, <https://doi.org/10.1163/23519924-00502008>

¹²Fechter and Schwittay, “Citizen Aid,” 1770.

¹³Mayer, “Cities as Sites,” 245.

¹⁴Fechter and Schwittay, “Citizen Aid,” 1769.

¹⁵Fechter and Schwittay, “Citizen Aid,” 1770.

humanitarianism”—a type of citizen aid—is still emergent, but the refugee crisis of 2015 has provoked a greater interest and exploration of the topic and an acknowledgement that more empirical and theoretical research is needed.¹⁶ The article “Citizen Aid: Grassroots Interventions in Development and Humanitarianism” by Anne-Meike Fechter and Anne Schwittay, illustrates that while small-scale, private aid activities are not new, they have grown substantially over the past decade, and their successful leverage of social media has only increased their visibility to the general public.¹⁷ In addition, the grassroots, ad-hoc nature of citizen aid efforts allows them to operate and thrive in the margins of the formal aid ecosystem.¹⁸ Citizen aid is generally characterized by greater dependence on personal transnational networks than other aid actors and start-up business features such as an entrepreneurial sense of greater agency and independence.¹⁹ Yet Fechter and Schwittay note that citizen aid’s sometimes willful avoidance of “professionalization” can be seen as a form of resistance against more dominant and mainstream humanitarian practices, contributing to complex and “uneasy” interactions with mainstream aid actors.²⁰ Nevertheless, they acknowledge that both long-distance citizen aid and more localized grassroots humanitarianism “occupy places on the continuum of support activities” and should be acknowledged as such.²¹

Grassroots humanitarianism, a type of citizen aid, is distinguished by its location near or at “sites of humanitarian emergency or natural disaster.”²² The largest and most recent example of citizen aid in practice took place during the refugee crisis.²³ During that time, millions of refugees

¹⁶Fechter and Schwittay, “Citizen Aid,” 1776.

¹⁷Fechter and Schwittay, “Citizen Aid,” 1773.

¹⁸Fechter and Schwittay, “Citizen Aid,” 1770.

¹⁹Fechter and Schwittay, “Citizen Aid,” 1773.

²⁰Fechter and Schwittay, “Citizen Aid,” 1774-5.

²¹Fechter and Schwittay, “Citizen Aid,” 1772.

²²Fechter and Schwittay, “Citizen Aid,” 1772.

²³Fechter and Schwittay, “Citizen Aid,” 1772.

entered Europe—fleeing from conflict and war in the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa—and for many Europeans, this sudden proximity provided opportunities to support refugees that they otherwise might not have had.²⁴ The grassroots humanitarianism that coalesced at sites in Europe during the refugee crisis displayed key hallmarks of citizen aid including an informal, makeshift nature; an “often-spontaneous” inception; and a mission driven by ‘grassroots volunteers’ (many of whom volunteer intermittently or while simultaneously engaged in a paid job).²⁵

Fechter and Schwittay contend that both grassroots humanitarianism and citizen aid-at-large can be considered “ethico-political” projects.²⁶ While they posit that both forms of humanitarian support are not “straightforward political movements,” they see grassroots humanitarianism within the refugee context as more prone to activism and advocacy, because refugees are subjected to governmentality in the state where the support acts transpire.²⁷ However, they also note that citizen aid, which often occurs over long distances, should not be viewed as totally apolitical since it has the potential “to disrupt established development practices” outside the boundaries of policy by supporting diverse populations in the Global North and South.²⁸ Finally, while the authors acknowledge the imbalances of power and hierarchy inherent in all forms of aid, they believe that the supportive, informal interactions fostered by citizen aid constitute a more horizontal philanthropy—which they view as an important contribution to aid approaches.²⁹

Regarding other aid actors, Fechter and Schwittay contest the tendency for researchers to employ NGO frameworks when analyzing citizen aid, noting that citizen aid is distinct and

²⁴Fechter and Schwittay, “Citizen Aid,” 1772.

²⁵Fechter and Schwittay, “Citizen Aid,” 1772.

²⁶Fechter and Schwittay, “Citizen Aid,” 1776.

²⁷Fechter and Schwittay, “Citizen Aid,” 1776.

²⁸Fechter and Schwittay, “Citizen Aid,” 1776.

²⁹Fechter and Schwittay, “Citizen Aid,” 1776.

separate.³⁰ June Fylkesnes agrees and in her article “Motivations Behind Citizen Aid: Norwegian Initiatives in The Gambia,” she finds that citizen aid is distinguished from NGOs by “their focus on direct support and direct giving ... volunteering work [as their foundation], and ... not receiving funds from the government aid budget.”³¹ In Robin Vandevordt’s article “Subversive Humanitarianism: Rethinking Refugee Solidarity through Grass-Roots Initiatives,” she agrees with these authors, contending that grassroots humanitarian initiatives are unencumbered by the prescribed humanitarian principles that many NGOs adhere to, such as the concept of neutrality, which limits their ability to “speak out” and engage in risky behavior such as acts of civil disobedience.³² In his article “Western NGOs and Refugee Policy in the 20th Century,” Peter Gatrell concurs, asserting that NGOs working with refugee populations are constrained by their dependence specifically on the government, finding themselves in a “persistent dilemma” that involves either critiquing the government freely or remaining silent and cooperating, in order to maintain funding and access.³³ Gatrell also notes that because the state acts as a “gatekeeper,” determining who is “recognized and protected as a refugee,” NGOs typically follow their hierarchical approach.³⁴ In contrast, Vandevordt sees many grassroots humanitarian initiatives that operate in this realm, eschewing classifications and instead, emphasizing that their services are for anyone in need.³⁵

Importantly, Vandevordt believes that grassroots organizations supporting refugees offer a different and more subversive approach from professional humanitarian actors by shifting the

²⁷Fechter and Schwittay, “Citizen Aid,” 1773.

³¹June Fylkesnes, “Motivations Behind Citizen Aid: Norwegian Initiatives in The Gambia,” *Third World Quarterly* 40, no. 10 (September 26, 2019): 1800, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2019.1656061>.

³²Robin Vandevordt, “Subversive Humanitarianism: Rethinking Refugee Solidarity through Grass-Roots Initiatives,” *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (September 1, 2019): 245, <https://doi.org/10.1093/rsq/hdz008>.

³²Vandevordt, “Subversive Humanitarianism,” 250.

³³Gatrell, “Western NGOs,” 411.

³⁴Gatrell, “Western NGOs,” 384.

³⁵Vandevordt, “Subversive Humanitarianism,” 253.

view of refugees from that of aid recipient to a more holistic socio-political subject, transcending the “antinomies of insiders and outsiders.”³⁶ In addition, she sees civil organizations as key to providing a space where, despite differences in “formal citizenship status,” refugees and asylum-seekers can be reconstituted into social subjects.³⁷ Yet, while she sees this approach as an act of solidarity by the grassroots organizations subverting the presiding political and social order, she points to the ambiguous relationships these organizations can have to politics.³⁸ Importantly, like Fechter and Schwittay, Vandevordt believes reconstructing the perception of refugees offers a more horizontal approach by changing “the ethics that guide humanitarian action.”³⁹ Furthermore, while acknowledging that there are power asymmetries in all social relationships, she believes a horizontal approach is developed through a genuine belief that guides volunteer action, thereby changing the ethics of care from “caring *for* rather than *about*.”⁴⁰ In turn, this creates relationships of trust and mutuality rather than dependency, with those being assisted not strangers in relation to volunteers, but “part of the wider relationships in which both lead their lives.”⁴¹ The authors of “Antecedents and Consequences of Autonomy- and Dependency-oriented Help Toward Refugees” make a further distinction between these approaches, asserting that “dependency-oriented help” is driven by paternalistic beliefs, which stymies social change by keeping those that are disadvantaged in a state of need.⁴² In contrast, they maintain that “autonomy-oriented help” creates status improvement by allowing low-status members to learn how to help themselves and thus

³⁶Vandevordt, “Subversive Humanitarianism,” 264.

³⁷Vandevordt, “Subversive Humanitarianism,” 257.

³⁸Vandevordt, “Subversive Humanitarianism,” 261.

³⁹Vandevordt, “Subversive Humanitarianism,” 259.

⁴⁰Vandevordt, “Subversive Humanitarianism,” 259 (emphasis original).

⁴¹Vandevordt, “Subversive Humanitarianism,” 260.

⁴²Julia C. Becker, Inna Ksenofontov, Birte Siem, and Angelika Love, “Antecedents and Consequences of Autonomy- and Dependency-oriented Help Toward Refugees,” *European Journal of Social Psychology* 49, no. 4: 831, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2554>.

come closer to self-determination.”⁴³ In addition, they find that both Germans and refugees in Germany see autonomy-oriented help as having more potential for social change than dependency-oriented help.⁴⁴

Yet much of the literature, including these aforementioned articles, is quick to note that citizen aid and grassroots humanitarianism have their own limitations. For example, Vandevordt concedes that even the type of solidarity that views refugees as social and political subjects will reproduce its own set of power dynamics.⁴⁵ Fechter and Schwittay also note that citizen aid is not exempt from reproducing conventional development power inequalities, especially at the sites of emergency or disaster.⁴⁶ In addition, they attribute the lack of research and data on citizen aid to typically “low reporting levels, lack of accountability standards ... and absence of transparency ...”⁴⁷ This is exemplified in a case study on two grassroots organizations that engaged within the informal refugee camp, called “The Jungle” in Calais, France.⁴⁸ In “Politics at Play: Locating Human Rights, Refugees and Grassroots Humanitarianism in the Calais Jungle,” two grassroots organizations displayed many of the aforementioned attributes of grassroots humanitarianism such as informality and lack of bureaucracy, which allowed them to quickly set-up sports and arts activities for the refugees within the camp, in an act of solidarity and affirmation that they had the right “to a dignified threshold of life.”⁴⁹ However, once the camp was demolished, the lack of documentation by both organizations—including best practices and key learnings—meant that

⁴³Becker et al., “Antecedents,” 831.

⁴⁴Becker et al., “Antecedents,” 835.

⁴⁵Vandevordt, “Subversive Humanitarianism,” 251.

⁴⁶Fechter and Schwittay, “Citizen Aid,” 1772.

⁴⁷Fechter and Schwittay, “Citizen Aid,” 1773.

⁴⁸Darragh McGee and Juliette Pelham, “Politics at Play: Locating Human Rights, Refugees and Grassroots Humanitarianism in the Calais Jungle,” *Leisure Studies* 37, no. 1: 25, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2017.1406979>.

⁴⁹McGee and Pelham, “Politics at Play,” 28.

there were no formal records, moving forward, to preserve the important work of both organizations.⁵⁰

Grassroots Organizations

In general, the literature is in agreement on the definition of grassroots organizations as “community-led solutions” that offer a “bottoms up”⁵¹ solution to “problems that encompass social, economic, and environmental issues.”⁵² In “Power of Paradox Grassroots Organizations’ Legitimacy Strategies Over Time,” the authors agree with the previous authors that grassroots organizations are different from other types of organizations and they outline their four key characteristics: locality, authenticity, moderate formality, and lack of resources.⁵³ In addition, they see these and other features as distinguishing grassroots organizations from social movement organizations (SMO) and NGOs, situating them between the two, in the middle of the formality spectrum, although they consider grassroots organizations much more locally embedded.⁵⁴ While Fechter and Schwittay, Vandevordt and others address more specific types of grassroots support, the literature agrees that, in general, grassroots organizations are often seen as “fringe stakeholders,” typically providing “protected spaces, or niches, that shelter alternative forms of social and economic life.”⁵⁵

As acknowledged in “The Creation of Legitimacy in Grassroots Organizations: A Study of Dutch Community-Supported Agriculture,” there are numerous challenges facing grassroots

⁵⁰McGee and Pelham, “Politics at Play,” 29.

⁵¹Lauren M. Van Oers, W.P.C. Boon, and Ellen H.M. Moors, “The Creation of Legitimacy in Grassroots Organizations: A Study of Dutch Community-Supported Agriculture,” *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions* 29 (2018): 55, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eist.2018.04.002>.

⁵²Léo-Paul Dana et al., “Success Factors and Challenges of Grassroots Innovations: Learning from Failure,” *Technological Forecasting & Social Change* (January 2017): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2019.03.009>.

⁵³Chowdhury et al., “Power of Paradox,” 4.

⁵⁴Chowdhury et al., “Power of Paradox,” 4.

⁵⁵Van Oers et al., “The Creation,” 55.

organizations including dependence on volunteers, the need to raise monetary support, lack of resources, and the common perception that their activities are “inappropriate” or “out of place.”⁵⁶ Furthermore, in relation to more mainstream, powerful stakeholders, they are often seen as “reactionary, ad-hoc actors seeking to challenge the status quo” and as a result, are often ignored in business and society literature.⁵⁷ Across the literature, gaining legitimacy is seen as the key to organizational survival and that without it, grassroots organizations are ignored or “further marginalized” (although Chowdhury et al. caution that legitimacy does not guarantee success).⁵⁸ The literature generally agrees that legitimacy can be shaped and influenced and define it as “a condition reflecting cultural alignment, normative support, and consonance with relevant rules or laws.”⁵⁹ The literature also agrees that there are three core types of legitimacy: pragmatic, moral, and cognitive,⁶⁰ and that the larger benefits of establishing legitimacy include the ability to mobilize resources, acquire the necessary support to survive, and leads to the belief that grassroots organizations are a “desirable and appropriate alternative to incumbent substitutes.”⁶¹

However, the literature diverges on how legitimacy is best achieved and some authors see paradox as inherent in its establishment. For example, Chowdhury et al. believe the best strategy is use of a flexible, paradoxical approach to acquiring legitimacy over the life cycle of an issue, which, in turn, contributes to establishing an organization’s overall legitimacy.⁶² They believe this approach, which differs from those used by more prominent actors, must be employed to address the paradoxes that emerge when a grassroots organization seeks legitimacy, such as the need to achieve impact through coalitions while developing organizational practices (organizing vs.

⁵⁶Van Oers et al., “The Creation,” 55.

⁵⁷Chowdhury et al., “Power of Paradox,” 1-2.

⁵⁸Chowdhury et al., “Power of Paradox,” 7.

⁵⁹Van Oers et al., “The Creation,” 56.

⁶⁰Van Oers et al., “The Creation,” 57.

⁶¹Van Oers et al., “The Creation,” 56.

⁶²Chowdhury et al., “Power of Paradox,” 25.

performing).⁶³ In particular, they believe an assortment of paradoxical tactics, from mixed messages to contradiction, can weaken the standpoints of more powerful actors and address more complex circumstances as the issues develop to encompass a broader set of actors and power.⁶⁴ Moreover, they posit that while consistent moral and cognitive legitimacy practices can be used in the early life cycle stages of an issue, pragmatic legitimacy strategies must be employed in the later stages in order to effectively influence issues and bring them to the resolution stage.⁶⁵ They also believe these contradictory and complex legitimacy strategies can help mitigate the tradeoffs that come with greater legitimacy, such as loss of some organizational control to other powerful actors.⁶⁶ In contrast, Van Oers et al. see social capital building for grassroots entrepreneurs specifically as vital to legitimacy and consequently, survival, by building strong social networks of lasting relationships that are characterized by “reciprocity, trust, and cooperation.”⁶⁷ In addition, the authors argue that once internal legitimacy is established, it is vital for grassroots entrepreneurs to focus on building external legitimacy so they can draw on external sources of support to help with challenges such as raising money in order to succeed.⁶⁸

In “Unlikely Allies: Bureaucracy as a Cultural Trope in a Grassroots Volunteer Organization,” Mona Florian offers a different strategy, contending that bureaucratization is a promising means of achieving legitimacy in grassroots organizations, justifying further investigation.⁶⁹ In addition, her research on We Help, a grassroots refugee shelter in Germany, finds a paradox between much of the literature’s definition of grassroots organizations as

⁶³Chowdhury et al., “Power of Paradox,” 9-10.

⁶⁴Chowdhury et al., “Power of Paradox,” 25.

⁶⁵Chowdhury et al., “Power of Paradox,” 10.

⁶⁶Chowdhury et al., “Power of Paradox,” 9.

⁶⁷Van Oers et al., “The Creation,” 65.

⁶⁸Van Oers et al., “The Creation,” 65-66.

⁶⁹Florian, “Unlikely Allies,” 151.

fundamentally “counter-bureaucratic”⁷⁰ and the manifold benefits bureaucracy brought to the shelter, including increased efficiency, standardization, and organizational growth.⁷¹ At We Help, for example, bureaucracy manifested in a more formal system of rules, which “standardized work processes, roles, and relationships.”⁷² While adoption of bureaucratic practices formalized the hierarchy between volunteers and supervisors, Florian found that this additional formality made the shelter a more desirable volunteer option compared to other shelters.⁷³ Furthermore, Florian found that bureaucracy as a trope also offers diverse bodies of volunteers a shared meaning and language to frame their experience at the shelter, structuring work and relations within the organization.⁷⁴ While over time, volunteers complained of “over-standardization and a lack of communication,” the fluidity of the organization allowed volunteers to use elements of bureaucracy, such as rules and work processes, in a changeable fashion that provided them with both flexibility and structure.⁷⁵ Interestingly, bureaucratic rules, depicted as ensuring fairness, created a certain distance between volunteers and refugees.⁷⁶ While this made some volunteers uneasy, most preferred this distance from the refugees, allowing volunteers the satisfaction of helping without having to get too close.⁷⁷ Florian notes that while additional pressures like dependence on external funding and a need for more reliability can push grassroots organizations toward bureaucracy, organizations naturally become more bureaucratic as they mature.⁷⁸

⁷⁰Florian, “Unlikely Allies,” 159

⁷¹Florian, “Unlikely Allies,” 160.

⁷²Florian, “Unlikely Allies,” 159.

⁷³Florian, “Unlikely Allies,” 155.

⁷⁴Florian, “Unlikely Allies,” 159.

⁷⁵Florian, “Unlikely Allies,” 159.

⁷⁶Florian, “Unlikely Allies,” 159.

⁷⁷Florian, “Unlikely Allies,” 158.

⁷⁸Florian, “Unlikely Allies,” 153.

Integration

As larger refugee populations are on the move, especially following the refugee crisis, integration has become a policy objective, as well as a public topic of broad debate. While integration has become a central tenant of refugee settlement, Ager and Strang acknowledge that its “form and character vary widely across settings.”⁷⁹ In their article “Understanding Integration: A Conceptual Framework,” which has been widely referenced in the literature on this subject, the authors offer a framework of ten core integration domains in response to the lack of a unifying definition for the term.⁸⁰ Within that framework, they identify key public areas or “Markers and “Means” that are generally indicative of successful integration including employment, housing, education, and health,⁸¹ as well as different types of social connection like social bridges, links and bonding, that serve as “connective tissue” between these sectors. Within the framework, they also include foundational principles of rights and citizenship,⁸² as well as facilitators such as language, cultural knowledge, safety, and stability.⁸³ In particular, they see social connection as vital to “driving the process of integration at a local level” and more generally, as the paramount feature of an integrated community.⁸⁴ As with much of the integration literature that has followed, the authors emphasize that integration must be a “two-way process” of “mutual accommodation” between refugees and the host community.⁸⁵ Importantly, they contend that the concept of integration will invariably depend on a particular nation’s sense of identity and in turn, its values.⁸⁶ As a result, they assert that to develop an effective integration policy, requires governments

⁷⁹Ager and Strang, “Refugee Integration,” 604.

⁸⁰Alastair Ager and Alison Strang, “Understanding Integration: A Conceptual Framework,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 21, no. 2 (2008): 159, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fen016>.

⁸¹Ager and Strang, “Understanding Integration,” 170.

⁸²Ager and Strang, “Understanding Integration,” 177.

⁸³Ager and Strang, “Understanding Integration,” 170.

⁸⁴Ager and Strang, “Understanding Integration,” 177.

⁸⁵Ager and Strang, “Understanding Integration,” 177.

⁸⁶Ager and Strang, “Understanding Integration,” 174.

clarifying their policies on nationhood and citizenship, which then informs the rights provided to refugees.⁸⁷

In their follow-up to this article, entitled “Refugee Integration: Emerging Trends and Remaining Agendas,” Ager and Strang build on their original conceptual framework. They acknowledge that while the definition of integration as a two-way process has been widely adopted, analysis has largely focused on policy, instead of viewing refugees as “primary social actors,” making a home for themselves in a new environment.⁸⁸ They also note the effectiveness of refugee integration “is influenced by [refugees’] experiences from the moment of arrival in a new country”⁸⁹ and that while most integration policy emphasizes integration as a process, in reality it functions more like awarding citizenship only after successful integration has been proven.⁹⁰ Instead, the authors contend that integration is enabled simply by refugees having secure status, underscoring the importance of integration policy outcomes and the refugees’ sense of “belonging.”⁹¹ Furthermore, they assert that—because many official Refugee Committee Organizations (RCO) are pulled between representing the refugees’ best interests and government policy on refugee control—informal networks are more effectual at creating bonds.⁹² Furthermore, Ager and Strang find refugees’ exclusion to be embedded in legal frameworks and, like Vandevordt, posit that a “proactive strategy to create spaces for meeting and exchange” is essential for allowing two main factors of social connection to flourish: reciprocity and trust.⁹³ In general, the authors note that while there is a wide adoption of social capital concepts around the integration discussion, the importance of social bonding for refugees justifies more attention to the

⁸⁷Ager and Strang, “Understanding Integration,” 175.

⁸⁸Ager and Strang, “Refugee Integration,” 600.

⁸⁹Ager and Strang, “Refugee Integration,” 595.

⁹⁰Ager and Strang, “Refugee Integration,” 596.

⁹¹Ager and Strang, “Refugee Integration,” 596.

⁹²Ager and Strang, “Refugee Integration,” 598.

⁹³Ager and Strang, “Refugee Integration,” 599.

way in which it “establish[es] reciprocity and trust in social relations.”⁹⁴ In this context, they also believe that, while social cohesion does not require sameness, there must be greater understanding of sameness and difference in the refugee context.⁹⁵ Importantly, the authors affirm that when fluidity and linkage is enabled among the factors of the framework, “resource acquisition spirals” are created which lead to “social, economic and political progression for the community.”⁹⁶ Conversely, constraints or loss of resources can cause spirals of resource loss.⁹⁷ Consequently, because the interdependencies of the framework’s factors are powerful, complex, and bi-directional, the authors believe this area deserves further research.⁹⁸

In Lucy Hovil’s chapter in the *Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies*, she claims that while local integration is the most viable of the three “durable solutions,” including repatriation and resettlement, it suffers from “official neglect.”⁹⁹ Like Ager and Strang, she notes that while local integration is broadly understood, it has varying definitions and is hard to quantify and evaluate.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, she finds that in official policy terms, local integration as a durable solution is solely focused on acquiring citizenship from the country of exile, in keeping with Article 34 of the 1951 Refugee Convention.¹⁰¹ Yet she maintains that governments often “go to great lengths” not to offer citizenship and that even when it is awarded, it does not automatically translate into inclusion because the “legitimacy to belong” is much more complex.¹⁰² Hovil delineates between the two categories of local integration, “de facto”—where refugees negotiate

⁹⁴Ager and Strang, “Refugee Integration,” 589.

⁹⁵Ager and Strang, “Refugee Integration,” 602.

⁹⁶Ager and Strang, “Refugee Integration,” 604.

⁹⁷Ager and Strang, “Refugee Integration,” 604.

⁹⁸Ager and Strang, “Refugee Integration,” 603.

⁹⁹Lucy Hovil, “Local Integration” in *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies*, eds. Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, Gil Loescher, Katy Long, and Nando Sigona (Oxford University Press, 2014): 1, 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199652433.013.0042.

¹⁰⁰Hovil, “Local Integration,” 2.

¹⁰¹Hovil, “Local Integration,” 1-2.

¹⁰²Hovil, “Local Integration,” 2.

“belonging” in the area where they are living—and “de jure,” which is about belonging on a national level, characterized by the formal and overtly political process of obtaining new citizenship.¹⁰³ While she finds that local belonging is unstable without national recognition, national citizenship is ineffective in turn, if an individual or groups of refugees are not accepted within a locality.¹⁰⁴ Ultimately, while local integration can allow refugees to assert their rights, including freedom of choice and movement, it’s often a difficult alternative, out of reach of those living in settlements.¹⁰⁵ However, Hovil believes the political agenda may be slowly changing, with more emphasis on belonging and “regional mechanisms,” among other factors.¹⁰⁶ While she sees local integration as a durable solution only possible when de facto and de jure integration are promoted side by side, she acknowledges that de facto integration is a delicate and complicated grassroots process that can be disrupted if external actors interfere.¹⁰⁷

German Civil Society and German and EU Refugee Policy

In response to the start of the refugee crisis in 2015, German civil society was activated and played a huge role in Germany’s *Willkommenskultur* or “welcome culture.” In “Practicing Willkommenskultur: Migration and Solidarity in Germany,” the authors examine volunteers’ attitudes related to refugee policy, as well as how volunteering changed their attitudes. The authors observe that while Germany saw an unprecedented willingness by citizens to help at the start of the refugee crisis, it has an unlikely history of establishing volunteer relief organizations, starting during World War I and extending to support of Balkan refugees and others during the 1990s.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³Hovil, “Local Integration,” 2-3.

¹⁰⁴Hovil, “Local Integration,” 3.

¹⁰⁵Hovil, “Local Integration,” 9.

¹⁰⁶Hovil, “Local Integration,” 9.

¹⁰⁷Hovil, “Local Integration,” 10.

¹⁰⁸Ulrike Hamann and Serhat Karakayali, “Practicing Willkommenkultur: Migration and Solidarity in Germany,” *Intersections: East European Journal of Society and Politics*, 2, no. 4 (January 2016): 74.

Interestingly, they note that, once the “welcome culture” gained momentum and the government embraced it, the composition of volunteers skewed older and from non-urban areas.¹⁰⁹ The authors also found that volunteer motivation differed in relation to age, with older people wanting to do something against right-wing populism and younger people seeing their volunteering as a form of support for asylum rights.¹¹⁰ However, overall, the authors do not believe that this volunteering can be seen as a political activity per se, since many volunteers seemed to distance themselves from the more controversial political movement of refugee solidarity.¹¹¹ Yet the authors contend that for certain middle-class sectors, seeing institutional racism for the first time through the refugees’ eyes raised awareness and the possibility of new forms of solidarity.¹¹² Finally, they posit that praise for volunteers by the state is a way of having volunteers do work that would typically be the government’s responsibility.¹¹³

In “The Myth of Apolitical Volunteering for Refugees: German Welcome Culture and a New Dispositif of Helping” the authors agree that German volunteers during the refugee crisis largely saw themselves as “neutral” and outside “the realm of politics” and “political activism.”¹¹⁴ Yet counter to previously cited literature, the authors argue that all volunteering for humanitarian reasons is political, with humanitarianism and politics inexorably linked.¹¹⁵ Further, they posit that volunteers who are willfully “apolitical” and rarely contest government interventions—even when conditions for refugees and asylum seekers are restrictive¹¹⁶—reinforce the “paternalistic” and

¹⁰⁹Hamann and Karakayali, “Practicing Willkommenkultur”, 76.

¹¹⁰Hamann and Karakayali, “Practicing Willkommenkultur,” 83.

¹¹¹Hamann and Karakayali, “Practicing Willkommenkultur,” 78.

¹¹²Hamann and Karakayali, “Practicing Willkommenkultur,” 80.

¹¹³Hamann and Karakayali, “Practicing Willkommenkultur,” 80.

¹¹⁴ Larissa Fleischmann and Elias Steinhilper, “The Myth of Apolitical Volunteering for Refugees: German Welcome Culture and a New Dispositif of Helping,” *Social Inclusion*, 5 no. 3, (2017), 19.

<https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/The-Myth-of-Apolitical-Volunteering-for-Refugees-%3A-Fleischmann-Steinhilper/2bb46fd70776b8827993d3728a002f011d0ff661>.

¹¹⁵Fleischmann and Steinhilper, “The Myth,” 20.

¹¹⁶Fleischmann and Steinhilper, “The Myth,” 21.

discriminatory refugee stereotypes and practices by the state and contribute to the survival of a migration regime in crisis.¹¹⁷ Instead, the authors argue that if this support was political it would be potentially powerful, offering an opportunity to “pull refugee solidarity out of a niche” and instigate change.¹¹⁸ In order for this political transformation to occur, they believe that volunteers need to become aware of the myth of “apolitical help” and root their volunteer activities in a wider context, instead of ignoring it.¹¹⁹ When this occurs, they believe “spaces of encounter”¹²⁰ between refugees and the host community have potential to bring about personal and interpersonal transformations.¹²¹ The authors find that these changes—which include intervention in public discourse—can promote integration and a more egalitarian social order.¹²²

Margit Mayer’s “Cities as Sites of Refuge and Resistance” focuses on the interplay between the role of municipalities in designing refugee and integration policies and the role of civil society, using Germany as an example.¹²³ Mayer underscores the importance of urban settings for refugees, which play an important role in determining the direction immigration movements take, but also provide “strategic sites for activating complex activist networks.”¹²⁴ Like the first two articles, she maintains that governments leverage volunteers to do their work¹²⁵ and further accuses them of perpetuating “apolitical” volunteering to minimize being challenged.¹²⁶ In Germany, for example, she highlights the complicated and uneasy dynamic that arose as municipal administrations sought to control and steer the “non-traditional” civic engagement that cropped up

¹¹⁷Hamann and Karakavali, “Practicing Willkommenkultur,” 20, 22.

¹¹⁸Fleischmann and Steinhilper, “The Myth,” 18.

¹¹⁹Fleischmann and Steinhilper, “The Myth,” 24.

¹²⁰Fleischmann and Steinhilper, “The Myth,” 22.

¹²¹Fleischmann and Steinhilper, “The Myth,” 22.

¹²²Fleischmann and Steinhilper, “The Myth,” 22-23.

¹²³Mayer, “Cities as Sites,” 232.

¹²⁴Mayer, “Cities as Sites,” 236.

¹²⁵Mayer, “Cities as Sites,” 245.

¹²⁶Mayer, “Cities as Sites,” 245.

as part of the “welcome culture.”¹²⁷ While this integration support was appreciated, municipalities often saw it “as linked to unwelcome political protest.”¹²⁸ Mayer positions civil society as the “third sector,” a complicated category encompassing all activity outside the state and private market, including social movements, grassroots civic engagement, non-profits, and NGOs.¹²⁹ In Germany, Mayer points out that the government was already implementing more restrictive refugee policies as the “welcome culture” reached its peak and that this trend has only continued.¹³⁰ This article is part of a nascent trend in refugee literature related to Germany that focuses on how relevant public, private, and civil society actors work together in urban settings to support refugees and she believes these dynamics warrant further scrutiny.¹³¹

In Nanette Funk’s article “A Spectre in Germany: Refugees, a ‘Welcome Culture’ and an ‘Integration Politics,’” she lays the groundwork for Germany’s current refugee policy, noting that as part of Germany’s *Willkommenpolitik* “welcome politics” in 2015-6, the country opened its border for about a month—circumventing the EU Dublin III Agreement—and allowing refugees to apply for refugee status.¹³² In addition, Funk outlines the state provisions of its refugee policy providing refugees with either asylum, protected refugee status for three years, or ‘subsidiary protection’ for one year.¹³³ She also describes deportation rules and notes that extensions are possible and often granted in all categories, with appeals also possible.¹³⁴ Generally, she finds German refugee policy an important, if imperfect model, that provides minimum conditions such as housing, medical care, and living expenses, in addition to language courses to enable social and

¹²⁷Mayer, “Cities as Sites,” 239.

¹²⁸Mayer, “Cities as Sites,” 239.

¹²⁹Mayer, “Cities as Sites,” 237.

¹³⁰Mayer, “Cities as Sites,” 244.

¹³¹Mayer, “Cities as Sites,” 245.

¹³²Nanette Funk, “A Spectre in Germany: Refugees, a ‘Welcome Culture’ and an ‘Integration Politics,’” *Journal of Global Ethics* 12, no. 3 (December 2016): 290, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449626.2016.1252785>.

¹³³Funk, “A Spectre,” 290.

¹³⁴Funk, “A Spectre,” 290.

economic integration.¹³⁵ She states that the goal of German refugee policy is to integrate remaining refugees—creating a much needed labor force and “avoid[ing] parallel societies”—while also reducing the number of refugees who enter and remain in the country.”¹³⁶

Although Funk finds German refugee policy laudable, she notes that its laws and policies change often.¹³⁷ She also sees state language classes accompanied by “a threat:” the courses are mandatory and benefits are reduced for those who fail or drop out.¹³⁸ In general, Funk believes that because Germany was unprepared for the influx of refugees beginning with the crisis, the process is “confusing, overtly bureaucratic, and fraught with issues.”¹³⁹ Like much of the literature, Funk finds that civil society efforts were crucial to the success of Germany’s refugee policy, but points out that civil society actors had no input in defining the policies.¹⁴⁰ Funk addresses the backlash against German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s initial refugee policy around the crisis and she counters a number of specific policy critiques including the costs of refugee programs, fears that Germany will be “overrun” by refugees, and concerns over threats to safety.¹⁴¹ Instead, Funk advocates for a more “moral and political” discussion at the EU level about how EU-wide refugee policies can be implemented effectively and she believes incentives and threats should be explored in order to reinforce these policies among Member States.¹⁴² She also posits that there needs to be further public debate about having the EU provide more development aid to ease the conditions that produce refugees and further discourse on how the EU can stop producing policies that produce untenable conditions in the countries that refugees are fleeing from.¹⁴³ Ultimately, Funk

¹³⁵Funk, “A Spectre,” 290.

¹³⁶Funk, “A Spectre,” 292.

¹³⁷Funk, “A Spectre,” 291.

¹³⁸Funk, “A Spectre,” 291.

¹³⁹Funk, “A Spectre,” 291.

¹⁴⁰Funk, “A Spectre,” 292.

¹⁴¹Funk, “A Spectre,” 294.

¹⁴²Funk, “A Spectre,” 295.

¹⁴³Funk, “A Spectre,” 295.

believes a holistic view of refugee issues is needed that considers refugee concerns, incorporates the conditions in their home countries, and evaluates the EU's role in creating these conditions.¹⁴⁴ She believes that debate should extend beyond criticism of refugee policy, with a goal of reducing the volume of refugees and creating an equitable policy.¹⁴⁵

In "Migration and Integration in German Cities," Norbert Kersting states that, as a counter to the Nazi regime in World War II, Germany's constitution enshrines the human right to asylum.¹⁴⁶ Yet, he notes that Germany has not historically regarded itself as an immigrant country due to its lack of a strong colonial history.¹⁴⁷ While German integration laws were previously built on "old nationalistic reasoning," a demographic change and need for labor in the early 2000s created a shift in migration policy.¹⁴⁸ Like Mayer, Kersting highlights how German federalism is decentralized, with cities and municipalities largely responsible for implementing the refugee registration process.¹⁴⁹ He generally finds refugees' experiences uneven, with incongruities among various regions in terms of expense and employment, and disparities between living in rural versus urban settings.¹⁵⁰ For example, he contrasts cities like Berlin and Hamburg, where one-third of the population has a migration background, with Eastern Germany where the figure is less than 6%.¹⁵¹ Furthermore, representation for refugees across local cities is uneven, with advisory boards for refugee representation obligatory for cities of a certain size, while only voluntary for others.¹⁵² Like much of the literature, Kersting agrees that "civic groups and organizations" assumed many

¹⁴⁴Funk, "A Spectre," 295.

¹⁴⁵Funk, "A Spectre," 297.

¹⁴⁶Norbert Kersting, "Migration and Integration in German Cities," *Croatian and Comparative Public Administration* 18, no. 2 (2018): 203.

¹⁴⁷Norbert Kersting, "Migration and Integration," 203.

¹⁴⁸Kersting, "Migration and Integration," 204.

¹⁴⁹Kersting, "Migration and Integration," 208.

¹⁵⁰Kersting, "Migration and Integration," 211.

¹⁵¹Kersting, "Migration and Integration," 213.

¹⁵²Kersting, "Migration and Integration," 214.

of the state responsibilities for supporting and integrating refugees.”¹⁵³ Overall, Kersting sees three main issues for refugees in Germany: xenophobia; refugees’ special requirements, which make these rural areas undesirable; and the need for lengthy training and socialization for refugees due to a dearth of required skills and requirements.¹⁵⁴ Unlike Funk, Kersting makes policy recommendations that include involving refugees in the political process, investment in education to ease integration, and a reinstatement of the family reunification policy¹⁵⁵ (in 2018, the government amended the rules on family reunification for some refugees.)¹⁵⁶ Evoking Ager and Strang’s work, Kersting calls for social bridging between groups to create one “vibrant, intercultural” society, incorporating new cultures into the current one.¹⁵⁷

This literature review has produced a number of key findings that will inform my Capstone Project. In particular, the research validates that grassroots organizations, especially related to humanitarianism, offer a unique and important approach to aid work by leveraging a horizontal philanthropy strategy that reconstitutes refugees in a holistic and egalitarian way. The research also confirms that grassroots organizations are distinct and separate from other types of support and that they occupy a rightful place within the larger aid ecosystem, making them worthy of further research. In investigating how grassroots organizations are contributing to successful integration, it is important to understand what allows them to survive and ultimately, be sustainable. As a result, a key finding was that legitimacy is vital to grassroots sustainability, although the literature differs on how this is achieved. Much of the literature also points to the need for “spaces of encounter or exchange” as an important means of fostering social connection

¹⁵³Kersting, “Migration and Integration,” 217.

¹⁵⁴Kersting, “Migration and Integration,” 217.

¹⁵⁵Kersting, “Migration and Integration,” 217.

¹⁵⁶Alexander Pearson, “Germany Grants 9,000 Family Reunification Permits,” Deutsche Welle, July 30, 2019, <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-grants-9000-family-reunification-permits/a-49799918>.

¹⁵⁷Kersting, “Migration and Integration,” 218.

and integration between refugees and the local community. In terms of Germany's refugee policy, the literature finds it commendable, if imperfect, but acknowledges that in Germany, the state depends on civil society for refugee support. This is important to my project because it affirms that the state is unable to support refugees on its own and that there is a need for German grassroots organizations to continue supporting refugees. Investigating how these organizations contribute to successful integration may help capture best practices that can be used in other regions or countries.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

Using qualitative methods, I sought to answer the research question: *Are German grassroots organizations which support refugees contributing to successful integration?* In the wake of the refugee crisis that began in 2015, a wave of grassroots organizations in Germany have cropped up, instigated by civil society. In general, research focused on grassroots support of refugees since the crisis is still emergent, especially in Germany. As a result, I designed my project to conduct observations and collect primary research, in addition to reviewing secondary research. This topic is of particular interest to me as my German mother considers herself a displaced person, having fled from East to West Germany with her mother when she was a child in 1950, leaving everything behind. In addition, having grown up with family living in Berlin, I have always been fascinated by the city's ability to endure great upheaval and change, including, most recently, the refugee crisis in 2015.

To gain a better understanding of German grassroots support, I wanted to hear directly from the diverse range of actors constituting the country's aid ecosystem, including grassroots organization founders and volunteers, refugees using their services, NGOs, government-supported refugee programs, and thought leaders. In addition, the grassroots organizations I selected offered support services in the four widely recognized key domains of integration: employment, housing, education, and health.¹⁵⁸ Since Berlin is the epicenter of German grassroots refugee support, I chose it as the location of my field work.¹⁵⁹ Over the course of fifteen days there, I engaged in, and observed, a number of grassroots volunteer activities supporting refugees and conducted a total of twenty-two interviews, with one conducted by phone the following month.

¹⁵⁸Ager and Strang, "Understanding Integration," 170.

¹⁵⁹Mayer, "Cities as Sites," 236.

Fieldwork Design

Participant Observation

From July 15-31, 2019, I traveled to Berlin, where I engaged in volunteer activities with two grassroots organizations, Give Something Back to Berlin (GSBTB) and BikeyGees. Over the course of my trip, I attended three two-hour sessions of a *Sprachcafé* (language classes) hosted by Give Something Back to Berlin, a project platform and network fostering community integration, participation, and intercultural dialogue.¹⁶⁰ There, I taught English and engaged with a wide variety of refugees from countries including Afghanistan, Sudan, Iraq, and Syria. For BikeyGees—a grassroots organization promoting autonomy for refugee women by teaching them bike riding and German traffic signs—I spent five hours with a small team, conducting bike training for ten refugee women.¹⁶¹ In addition, I volunteered with an international NGO, IsraAID Berlin, which offers international support in emergency and long-term development settings.¹⁶² Along with IsraAID staff, their friends, and several refugees, I helped clean up a park in the Neukölln neighborhood. I also patronized two grassroots organizations that employ refugees and provide them with opportunities to connect and interact with the local population. This included taking a two-hour walking tour with Refugee Voice Tours, a largely refugee-run organization exploring the challenges refugees face and the root cause of conflicts.¹⁶³ On the tour, my Syrian guide narrated a history of Berlin and some of its most historic locations, while drawing parallels to Syria's current regime and telling us his personal story of fleeing to Germany. In addition, I attended a cooking session at Über den Tellerrand, a space that fosters exchange between refugees and the

¹⁶⁰“This is GSBTB. Our Past, Present, and Future,” Give Something Back to Berlin, accessed February 28, 2020, <https://gsbtb.org/about/history/>.

¹⁶¹“Cycling Training for Refugee Women,” BikeyGees, accessed February 28, 2020, <https://bikeygees.org/en/>.

¹⁶²“About IsraAid,” IsraAid, accessed February 28, 2020, <https://www.israaid.org/about>.

¹⁶³“Who We Are,” Refugee Voice Tours, accessed February 28, 2020, <https://refugeevoicestours.org/>.

local community through a range of activities, including cooking classes.¹⁶⁴ In my class, led by two Syrian refugees, we cooked a multi-course Syrian meal and learned about Syrian culture (this included a slide show on the country, discussion of Syrian politics, and a lesson in Syrian dancing.) I also attended a community dinner at Bantabaa (“Bantabaa” means “meeting place” in Mandinka), a grassroots organization that offers West African refugees support in navigating the bureaucracy of seeking asylum; as well as literacy and math tutoring; legal, medical and employment support; and communal cooking opportunities.¹⁶⁵ On the evening I attended, I paid an optional donation fee and spent an evening with a mix of refugees and German locals, cooking a West African dinner and playing games. Throughout my trip, I recorded my observations by taking notes as soon as I left a given activity.

Interviews

For this project, it was important not only to hear first-hand from grassroots organizations about their mission, goals, and services, but also to gauge whether refugees who worked with them felt they were effective, and if so, how. By conducting interviews in person, I was able to gain a more in depth understanding of participants’ opinions, motivations, and emotions. I chose grassroots organizations based on the location of my field site: Berlin, and those that were the most prominent in international media coverage, such as Give Something Back to Berlin and Über den Tellerrand. The rest were selected based on research and snowball sampling. In addition, I was able to meet the refugees I subsequently interviewed through my observation, volunteer work, and snowball sampling.

¹⁶⁴“What We Do,” Über den Tellerrand, accessed February 28, 2020, <https://ueberdentellerrand.org/>.

¹⁶⁵“Who We Are,” Bantabaa, accessed February 28, 2020, <https://www.bantabaa.de/about-us/>.

Of the ten refugees I spoke with, all were from countries that had experienced conflict or war in the recent past, including Syria, Sudan, Afghanistan, and Iraq. In addition, all of them had arrived in Germany within the past two years and all but one were young men, reflecting a larger trend.¹⁶⁶ To recruit interviewees, I would typically ask a refugee who I was already interacting with if they would be willing to speak with me for my Capstone project. Everyone I asked agreed to participate and all of my interviews were voluntary. While I asked all refugees the same set of questions, the interviews were semi-structured so the refugees could also talk about other or related topics, if they wanted. As a result, the interviews ranged from approximately nine minutes to over an hour in length and took place in a number of public areas, mostly restaurants and cafés. Interviews were recorded on my iPhone and I also took handwritten notes. Following each interview, I would transcribe the audio recording into a Word document on my laptop, which I kept in a safe at my hotel. Before each interview, I also obtained a verbal consent from each refugee to use their interview for my Capstone project, although some of them did not feel comfortable signing the official USF consent form. In deference to people's wishes for anonymity, I have used initials, when asked, instead of full names. The interviews I did with RK at Refugee Voice Tours and SH at the Pergamon Museum served dual purposes, since both spoke on behalf of their organization, in addition to being refugees themselves. In addition, I interviewed staff members at five other grassroots organizations (GSBTB), Über den Tellerrand, Refugee Law Clinic (Berlin), SINGA Labs (Berlin), BikeyGees); one volunteer at Über den Tellerrand; one social enterprise, specializing in humanitarian refugee shelters (More Than Shelters); one international NGO (IsraAID); an Oxford University PhD student whose thesis is focused on refugee housing; two professors from Freie University's "Academics in Solidarity Program;" and a researcher at the

¹⁶⁶Stefan Trines, "The State of Refugee Integration in Germany in 2019," World Education News and Reviews, last modified August 8, 2019, <https://wenr.wes.org/2019/08/the-state-of-refugee-integration-in-germany-in-2019>.

Expert Council of German Foundations on Integration and Migration, a non-partisan advisory council that provides research-based actionable policy advice.¹⁶⁷

For refugees, I included questions about the grassroots organizations they had worked with, how they heard about them, if they would recommend them, and how their services did or did not differ from those provided by the government or NGOs. Importantly, I stated the EU and German definitions of successful integration and then asked what each refugees' personal definition of successful integration was and whether or not they felt these grassroots organizations contributed to those standard definitions or their own definition. I also asked what grassroots organizations did well in terms of services and support and what could be improved. For the grassroots organizations, I asked how their missions were tied to the refugee crisis, their long-term goals and KPIs (key performance indicators), biggest challenges/successes, and the surge in grassroots organizations in Germany and who they considered peers, locally and within the country. I also asked about their long-term goals and planning, including where they saw their organization in five years. As with the refugees, it was important to not only understand how the grassroots organizations defined successful integration, but how they believed they contributed to the integration process and how they saw their services and support differing from other local aid actors like the German government and NGOs, for example. It was also important to ask if there were other regions in the world they thought served as a role model for successful integration.

Methods of Analysis

For my analysis, it was important to operationalize definitions for “grassroots organizations,” “refugees,” and “successful integration.” Broadly, “grassroots organizations” are “community-led

¹⁶⁷The Expert Council of German Foundations on Integration and Migration, “Germany is a Country of Immigration,” accessed January 27, 2020, <https://www.svr-migration.de/en/>.

solutions” that provide a “bottoms-up” solution to “social, economic, and environmental issues”¹⁶⁸ and typically display “an informal, makeshift nature; an often-spontaneous inception; and a mission driven by ‘grassroots volunteers.’”¹⁶⁹ All grassroots organizations are considered “fringe stakeholders,”¹⁷⁰ although for those associated with humanitarianism, they are considered a viable support provider within the formal aid ecosystem.¹⁷¹ The United Nations offers a similar definition, noting that “grassroots organizations are primarily made up of civilians advocating a cause to spur change at local, national, or international levels.”¹⁷² Through media coverage and research, I was able to identify German grassroots organizations that support refugees and embody these characteristics, many of which self-identify as grassroots organizations.

The term ‘refugee’ is defined by the 1951 Geneva Convention as someone who has a “fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.”¹⁷³ While Article 16a of the German Basic Law grants asylum for those who are politically persecuted in their home country, people in Germany can also be recognized as refugees under the Geneva Convention, with asylum granted to those who also flee war.¹⁷⁴ While the term ‘refugee’ is used ubiquitously in Germany, for all “humanitarian migrants” who enter the country seeking refuge, recognized refugees—per

¹⁶⁸Dana et al., “Success Factors,” 1.

¹⁶⁹Fechter and Schwittay, “Citizen Aid,” 1772.

¹⁷⁰Van Oers, “The Creation,” 55.

¹⁷¹Fechter and Schwittay, “Citizen Aid,” 1770.

¹⁷²Alexandra Bettencourt, “Grassroots Organizations are Just as Important as Seed Money for Innovation,” UNHCR, accessed January 39, 2020, <https://www.unhcr.org/innovation/grassroots-organizations-are-just-as-important-as-seed-money-for-innovation/>.

¹⁷³“The 1951 Refugee Convention,” UNHCR, accessed February 4, 2020, <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/1951-refugee-convention.html>.

¹⁷⁴Ahmad Wali Achakzai, “What’s the Right to Asylum as Stated in the German Constitution,” InfoMigrants, November 23, 2018, <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/13525/what-s-the-right-to-asylum-as-stated-in-the-german-constitution>.

the law on asylum—are only those whose asylum proceedings have been completed.¹⁷⁵ Aside from entitlement to asylum or refugee protection, Germany offers subsidiary protection which applies when neither refugee protection nor entitlement to asylum can be granted and serious harm is threatened in the country of origin.¹⁷⁶ If none of the three forms of protection are applicable, a ban on deportation can be issued, if specific circumstances apply.¹⁷⁷ Of the refugees I interviewed, from countries including Syria, Iraq, Sudan, and Afghanistan, all had either been granted refugee status, asylum, or were waiting to be granted asylum. For consistency and to avoid confusion, I have taken the Germans' lead, and referred to them all as refugees, regardless of status.

Integration is commonly acknowledged as a complex concept without a universal definition and the EU notes that Member States are largely responsible for integration, while the EU supports policy coordination and exchange of knowledge and financial resources.¹⁷⁸ As a stated priority of the EU, integration was originally defined as “a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of EU Member States.”¹⁷⁹ Germany has adapted this definition: “Integration can work only as a two-way process. It requires acceptance by the majority population and the willingness of immigrants to learn and respect the rules of the host country and to take responsibility for their own integration.”¹⁸⁰

Using these, and other key terms, I transcribed my interviews and color coded all key words, saving the transcripts into one large document where I was able to search for broad themes

¹⁷⁵Trines, “The State.”

¹⁷⁶Trines, “The State.”

¹⁷⁷Trines, “The State.”

¹⁷⁸“Migration and Home Affairs,” European Commission, accessed February 5, 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/legal-migration/integration_en.

¹⁷⁹“Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions,” Commission of the European Communities (January 9, 2005): 5, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52005DC0389&from=DE>.

¹⁸⁰“Integration,” Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community, accessed February 6, 2020, <https://www.bmi.bund.de/EN/topics/community-and-integration/integration/integration-node.html>.

in an efficient manner. Based on these findings, I formulated my own analysis on how grassroots organizations fit into the overall aid ecosystem in Germany and how they contribute to successful integration.

Limitations

As with the majority of studies, this research is subject to several limitations. First, while I was able to interview many different actors within the aid ecosystem in Germany, I was not able to speak with any government refugee support agencies. However, the German government is transparent about its refugee policies and procedures, with an abundance of material and research online, and as a result, I did not feel that it was imperative to interview government spokespeople. Nevertheless, future studies may wish to incorporate in-person interviews with government officials. Another limitation, by virtue of my short time in Berlin, was my small sample size. While these interviews proved to be rich in content and insight, further studies may wish to broaden the number of interviewees.

CHAPTER 3: ANALYSIS

Germany has experienced a proliferation of grassroots organizations supporting refugees since the refugee crisis of 2015, with most having been founded by younger members of civil society. These organizations display many key attributes of grassroots humanitarianism and grassroots organizations at large, including an informal nature, an independent spirit that eschews a certain “professionalization” and rules that more traditional aid actors abide by, a mission driven by volunteers, and a lack of resources. For the organizations I interacted with, proximity to refugees was paramount and most were located in refugee-dense neighborhoods in Berlin, such as Kreuzberg and Neukölln. Most importantly, while many of these organizations offer free practical services that support local integration, like *Sprachcafes*, their emphasis is on providing a neutral and informal setting to facilitate the inter-connection of refugees and German locals.

Due to lack of resources, many of these organizations’ community spaces were accessible and welcoming but modest, with the focus on the encounters taking place within. This social connection provides refugees access to local networks and a sense of community, while helping them navigate German culture and society. In addition to services, many grassroots organizations also offer social activities, ranging from music classes and picnics, to group cooking sessions and sports. What separates these organizations from other actors in the German aid ecosystem is their focus on human connection, coupled with an egalitarian approach, rooted in a strong sense of collective values. In addition, they serve as connectors in facilitating integration, activating not only the refugee community but the local community as well, and in the process, helping dissipate bias. While these organizations face significant challenges, their fresh approach has captured

international attention and can serve as an example for other countries dealing with similar population streams.

Inception of Grassroots Organizations

Most of the grassroots organizations I interacted with in Berlin had experienced a spontaneous and organic inception, borne out of a desire by civil society to address a perceived need. Andreas Eibelshäuser, a law student at Refugee Law Clinic (Berlin), noted, “These civil society organizations started because there was no counseling for refugees at all and in 2015, law clinics just shot up, basically in every large university town in Germany. There was migration going on ... and [law students] wanted to help and also be educated in this type of law, so they took it upon themselves and many of the clinics are grassroots, student-organized, with a decentralized kind of feel. And it’s grown: [migration law] is a huge field of practice now.”¹⁸¹ (Jablonsky, Interview 01). Über den Tellerrand began as a student project in 2013, in response to refugee protests occurring at Oranienplatz in Berlin.¹⁸² Motivated by the desire to engage refugees and the local community on a personal level, the two founding students organized a cooking event with refugees, which led to the publication of a cookbook featuring refugees’ personal stories and recipes.¹⁸³ Together, a group of students and refugees built the organization’s mobile community kitchen, which eventually became their Kitchen on the Run program.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹Andreas Eibelshäuser (law student and volunteer at Refugee Law Clinic (Berlin), interviewed by Kyra Jablonsky, Berlin, July 25, 2019.

¹⁸²“Über den Tellerrand,” SE-Hub Initiative, accessed March 4, 2020, <https://empowering-changemakers.eu/uber-den-tellerrand-2/>.

¹⁸³SE-Hub Initiative, “Über den Tellerrand.”

¹⁸⁴Danny Lewis, “Refugees Are Teaching Germans How to Cook Their Traditional Foods,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, June 10, 2016, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/refugees-are-teaching-germans-how-cook-their-traditional-foods-180959355/>.

For some of these organizations, their ideas began on social media. Give Something Back to Berlin (GSBTB) was founded by Swedish journalist Annamaria Olsson, who moved to Berlin in 2008. As a newcomer herself, she started the organization with a simple Facebook post asking that expats who enjoy Berlin pay back the community with volunteer hours. The project snowballed as a “a bottom-up kind of grassroots civic [project]” with a goal of making “newcomers active contributors ... creating strong networks for participation and inclusion.”¹⁸⁵ (Jablonsky, Interview 02). For Lorna Cannon, a tour guide involved in fighting for refugee rights, the 2015 refugee crisis “was getting a lot of media attention [and] I noticed more ... people on tours asking about refugees in Berlin. My first thought was that it’s not my story to tell, but because walking tours are such a good way to get people engaged with spaces and stories, it could give refugees a voice.”¹⁸⁶ That same year, she began Refugee Voice Tours as a Facebook event, working closely with a small team of Syrian refugees to create a tour drawing parallels between Syria and Berlin.¹⁸⁷ Bantabaa, founded by a mother and daughter, began as an online crowdfunding project on the website Start Next, where the organization raised over 15,000 euro to provide holistic integration support for West African refugees.¹⁸⁸ While social connection is paramount for many of these organizations, most also offer free practical services for refugees.

In Germany, grassroots organizations supporting refugees offer a wide variety of free services. Of the six organizations I encountered in Berlin, services included bike riding and traffic sign training for women, language classes, legal advice, business mentoring, medical care, and

¹⁸⁵Anna Maria Olsson (founder of Give Something Back to Berlin), interviewed by Kyra Jablonsky, Berlin, July 30, 2019.

¹⁸⁶Annie Brookstone, “Meet the Changemakers: Lorna Cannon from Refugee Voice Tours,” National Geographic, August 17, 2019, <https://www.nationalgeographic.co.uk/travel/2019/08/meet-the-changemakers-lorna-cannon-refugee-voices-tours>.

¹⁸⁷Brookstone, “Meet the Changemakers.”

¹⁸⁸“Bantabaa Food Dealer-Support Your Local Dealer,” Start Next, accessed March 8, 2020, <https://www.startnext.com/en/bantabaafooddealer>.

employment support. In addition, many of the grassroots organizations offer multiple services. Some organizations like Refugee Voice Tours and Über den Tellerrand employ refugees, often part-time, providing modest financial support, in addition to the opportunity to connect with the local community and share their personal experience and home culture. At Über den Tellerrand, which also offers a number of activities and services, refugees host cooking classes and lead participants in preparing a meal from the refugees' home country. While a few of these organizations make a small revenue by charging participants other than refugees (e.g., corporate volunteer groups) for certain activities, the emphasis is on supporting refugee integration, through practical free services and social connection, using a horizontal philanthropy approach.¹⁸⁹

An Egalitarian Approach

Indeed, for many of these grassroots organizations, this egalitarian approach (Germans use the term *augenhöhe* or “eye level”) is based on a strong, shared value system of solidarity, support, and equity. As Fabian Thun, office director at SINGA Labs Berlin, noted, “We don’t see newcomers as separate—our approach is very much on equal terms. We don’t create a lot of programs on the side of the local population and then kind of put it upon the newcomers, but it was more like ... in collaboration and cooperation always, with [them].¹⁹⁰ (Jablonsky, Interview 03). Olsson stated, “As someone new to the city, the challenges are often the same—people come with baggage in terms of trauma and being displaced—migrants, refugees. Whatever the status, to us, they are all the same.”¹⁹¹ MT, a volunteer for Über den Tellerrand shared a similar sentiment, “People from different backgrounds and countries—whether they’re refugees or not refugees—

¹⁸⁹Fechter and Schwittay, “Citizen Aid,” 1776.

¹⁹⁰Fabian Thun (German office director SINGA Labs Berlin), interviewed by Kyra Jablonsky by phone, August 26, 2019.

¹⁹¹Olsson, interview.

just anybody is welcome. It's simple."¹⁹² (Jablonsky, Interview 04). Grassroots organizations' deep commitment to social justice and equality is evident in their unequivocal mission statements which are typically foregrounded on their social media platforms and websites. Über den Tellerrand's homepage reads in part, "We want to live in a society that is determined by social cohesion, mutual respect and openness to diversity. That is why we are committed to everyday cooperation at eye level with people of different origins. We ... spread our vision of an open and tolerant society to shape intercultural coexistence in Germany and Europe ... because we believe in a society in which all people are equal members."¹⁹³ BikeyGees, a grassroots organization that teaches refugee women bike riding and German traffic rules, features their mission prominently on their home page: "We help to break down borders: origin, religion, [and] status are unimportant. Every woman in the world should be able to cycle."¹⁹⁴ These collective values are borne out of a desire for societal change and in part, out of an underlying sense of unfairness around German's current integration process. As Eibelshäuser noted, "[You have] someone who's probably traumatized ... and then [the government] says 'within two years you need to learn the language' and then having this whole administrative procedure hanging over your head, not really knowing whether you can stay. There are so many challenges and of whom do we ask this other than refugees?"¹⁹⁵ Echoing this, Dr. Vera Axyonova, coordinator for Freie University's Academics in Solidarity program, stated: "When you [come] to a country as a refugee, there are so many issues you have to deal with, from insecurities like, 'How long can I stay here?' to legal issues. Even once that is dealt with, language is a huge hurdle..."¹⁹⁶ (Jablonsky, Interview 05).

¹⁹²MT (volunteer for Über den Tellerrand), interviewed by Kyra Jablonsky, Berlin, July 21, 2019.

¹⁹³"What We Do," Über den Tellerrand.

¹⁹⁴"Cycling Training for Refugee Women," BikeyGees, accessed February 26, 2020, <https://bikeygees.org/en/>.

¹⁹⁵ Eibelshäuser, interview.

¹⁹⁶Dr. Vera Axyonova (program coordinator for Freie University's Academics in Solidarity Program), interviewed by Kyra Jablonsky, Berlin, July 17, 2019.

Of the grassroots organizations I interacted with, almost all of the staff and volunteers were in their twenties and thirties. While there are grassroots organizations with older employees and volunteers, Olsson believes that many grassroots initiatives are largely borne out of younger people's frustration with "outdated structures and very ... traditional German-type organizations."¹⁹⁷ Linn Kaldinski, of Über den Tellerrand, also sees a generational gap in terms of perspective, noting that at a monthly district meeting of associations "dealing with migration and integration" she is the youngest participant, with most in their fifties and sixties.¹⁹⁸ She said, "Of course, we all have the same mindset because we work in the same area, but they have a very, very different approach. Young people are trying to find new ways to create a sustainable integration process so in twenty years, when I'm fifty, we aren't again saying, 'Oh my God, integration, what can I do?' Because this happened before in the sixties—it's not a new phenomenon."¹⁹⁹ (Jablonsky, Interview 06). Thun agreed that age contributes to many of these organizations' fresh approaches and believes it also coincides with an economic shift in Germany.²⁰⁰ He said, "... This goes along with ... this entrepreneurial spirit, especially in Berlin, that is strong right now ... people are much more encouraged to start smaller, working on innovative solutions ... and you don't need to be a fifty-year-old white man ... [to] achieve results."²⁰¹

¹⁹⁷Olsson, interview.

¹⁹⁸Linn Kaldinski (Head of volunteers and community management at Über den Tellerrand), interviewed by Kyra Jablonsky, Berlin, July 25, 2019.

¹⁹⁹Kaldinski, interview.

²⁰⁰Thun, interview.

²⁰¹Thun, interview.

Government Support of Refugees

The German aid ecosystem for refugee support is diverse and complex, comprised of support from the state and local municipalities, traditional and religious charities and NGOs, as well as civil society projects. Regarding the work of the different support actors helping refugees, Nils Friedrich, research project manager at The Expert Council of German Foundations on Migration and Integration, sees their duties as not well delineated: “[Their services] are overlapping—it’s not so black and white, but I would say the direction and focus is a bit different.”²⁰² (Jablonsky, Interview 07). He believes that since the refugee crisis, “Government efforts and maybe those of NGOs, are about how to manage the situation.”²⁰³ In particular, he notes that for the German government, “It’s very important to integrate refugees into the labor market. [Their] focus is ... ‘how can we [help] these people ... live here on their own and finance themselves independently?’ If they integrate into the labor market, it’s like no one cares about them.”²⁰⁴ As the literature indicates, he also believes the government relies on the support provided to refugees by grassroots efforts: “There is some kind of expectation that these grassroots organizations [will] work in the integration process and sometimes offer services that are originally the duty of the state. It’s not official, but if these grassroots organizations do this on their own, then ... the government saves money, but [the grassroots organizations] say ‘We have to do things with our own funding that normally the government should do’—so that’s the discussion.”²⁰⁵ The biggest difference he sees between the government and these grassroots organizations is their approach: “Making refugees independent is one goal of grassroots organizations but it’s also about

²⁰²Nils Friedrichs (research project manager at the Expert Council of German Foundations on Integration and Migration), interviewed by Kyra Jablonsky, Berlin, July 16, 2019.

²⁰³Friedrichs, interview.

²⁰⁴Friedrichs, interview.

²⁰⁵Friedrichs, interview.

looking at the mind of the people: ‘What do you want? What are your personal goals?’ And it’s more ... looking at the personal situation of the people.”²⁰⁶

Of the grassroots organization members I interviewed, most saw their services and support as unique and separate from more mainstream actors in the aid ecosystem, including the government and NGOs. Olsson commented:

We are really not in contact with each other. The NGOs work on bigger projects like in refugee shelters and are doing more advocacy work; it’s a very clear division. The government is doing what we call “bed and breakfast” integration. It’s almost like ‘Oh, you have a roof over your head and language classes, so your fine.’ ... [The government] is also extremely obsessed with people getting a job, which is very important, but it’s ... missing the trick because people get jobs from contacts and understanding how society works.²⁰⁷

SJ also saw grassroots organizations providing a different type of support, especially from the government: “It’s one thing to provide money and classes, but another to be working with refugees on a daily [basis], cycling and hanging out together. [Refugees] come to us—not because we say so—but because they want to.”²⁰⁸ (Jablonsky, Interview 08). DM agreed, “The [German] government gives [refugees] things like water, shelter, [and] money for a living but the [grassroots organizations] give you more this integration feeling because they provide community. With the government, they are not in the town or with the people—[refugees] are just in the system.”²⁰⁹ (Jablonsky, Interview 09). For Thun, grassroots organizations are “filling a lot of gaps left by the government” because, in contrast to the government being “bureaucratic” and “very slow,” he sees grassroots organizations as nimble and “much quicker at adapting to the changes and demands of society.”²¹⁰ Still, he noted, “Whenever I work with people from the government, [many of them]

²⁰⁶Friedrichs, interview.

²⁰⁷Olsson, interview.

²⁰⁸SJ (volunteer coordinator at BikeyGees), interviewed by Kyra Jablonsky, Berlin, July 23, 2019.

²⁰⁹DM (staff member at Bantabaa), interviewed by the author, Berlin, July 18, 2019.

²¹⁰Thun, interview.

... have ... good ideas, but even they struggle sometimes to make change a little bit quicker.”²¹¹ He added, “Older support organizations—like those that have been working thirty years ... since the Kosovo crisis, for example—are offering services in the name of the government, but you can feel an ‘us vs. them’ mentality in many of them.”²¹² Some refugees see government support as offering little incentive for self-reliance. Said FE, “If you have a refugee family of five, they each get about 50 euro a month, so a total of maybe 2,000 euro. If the parents get a job, they will likely make less [than what the government provides] and they will also need to find their own housing. Then the government doesn’t pay them. So, if they have free house (sic), Internet, water, why bother working?”²¹³ (Jablonsky, Interview 10). Other refugees agree and crave more autonomy than the government and certain support organizations allow. Said AA, “Big organizations ... and the government definitely help with food and housing but ... they take away our dignity if they give us too much. I don’t want Germany to make me lazy: show me how to get my own food. Let people fail; they will figure it out.”²¹⁴ (Jablonsky, Interview 11). AI concurred, “Some organizations do everything on our behalf and so we have no chance to speak to Germans. For some people this is okay, but I want to take action. The [grassroots organizations] give me an address for example, but I make the contact and speak to the German people on my own.”²¹⁵ (Jablonsky, Interview 12).

Nevertheless, as the literature notes, Germany is generally seen as having a good, if imperfect model, for integration.²¹⁶ HS, a PhD candidate at Oxford University who has lived in Berlin for a year and is writing his thesis on refugee shelters, commented, “It’s important to be

²¹¹Thun, phone interview.

²¹²Thun, phone interview.

²¹³FE (Sudanese refugee), interviewed by Kyra Jablonsky, Berlin, July 26, 2019.

²¹⁴AA (Syrian refugee), interviewed by Kyra Jablonsky, Berlin, July 19, 2019.

²¹⁵AI (Sudanese refugee), interviewed by Kyra Jablonsky, Berlin, July 19, 2019.

²¹⁶Funk, “A Spectre,” 290.

critical, but I think we should be very impressed with what the government is doing. When you compare it to other situations in the world it gives perspective.”²¹⁷ (Jablonsky, Interview 13). While some refugees I spoke with had complaints about the government, most also recognized the benefits they were afforded. FE, a Sudanese refugee who was diagnosed with a rare bone cancer shortly after he arrived in Berlin, said: “The German government gives you enough money to live on, free language and training classes, and they gave me free medical treatment. I would not have gotten this treatment in Sudan. You don’t need to love the system, but you should respect it at least.”²¹⁸ WA, a former Syrian journalist who was tortured by Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s regime, noted: “Social justice is very important to me and I have it here. I have everything that the German people have except ... I can’t choose the president. But I am like the German people.”²¹⁹ (Jablonsky, Interview 14).

During my field work, I also spoke with a number of laudable, state-funded projects supporting refugees in the sectors of culture, education, and shelter. These worthy programs provide examples of the important investment that the German government is making in integration. This included the Multaka program, a collaboration among a number of Berlin’s museums, that trains Syrian and Iraqi refugees as museum tour guides for Arabic-speaking tour participants, including refugees.²²⁰ SH remarked, “We are lucky that we don’t have to worry as much about funding. Instead, we are focused on the program which is growing—we are now in Oxford, Bern, and other sites”²²¹ (the Louvre in Paris is planning its own version of the Multaka

²¹⁷HS (Oxford PhD candidate), interviewed by Kyra Jablonsky, Berlin, July 29, 2019.

²¹⁸FE, interview.

²¹⁹WA (Syrian refugee), interviewed by Kyra Jablonsky, Berlin, July 26, 2019.

²²⁰Multaka, “Multaka: Museum as Meeting Point – Refugees as Guides in Berlin Museums,” accessed March 2, 2020, <https://multaka.de/en/startsite-en/>.

²²¹SH (Iraqi refugee), interviewed by Kyra Jablonsky, Berlin, July 26, 2019.

program soon.)²²² (Jablonsky, Interview 15). In addition, I spoke with two professors of Freie University's Academics in Solidarity program, funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), a peer-mentoring program that is open to "young postdocs forced to leave their home countries due to war or persecution ... who wish to resume their academic work in Germany or another host country."²²³ According to Freie University Professor Dr. Stefan Rummel, "visiting scholars, with the help of an academic host, are able to plan for their future in a safe environment."²²⁴ (Jablonsky, Interview 16). For More Than Shelters, a social enterprise that provides "integrated humanitarian design"²²⁵ of refugee shelters, government funding has supported the work of their non-profit branch. JP noted, "This funding, along with donations, has allowed us to go to places where no one wants to invest, like refugee camps."²²⁶ (Jablonsky, Interview 17).

NGO Support of Refugees

During the course of my field work, most of the refugees I spoke with did not proactively mention NGOs and were mostly unfamiliar with them, although a number of the larger ones such as the IRC (International Rescue Committee), ORAM (Organization for Refuge, Asylum and Migration), and Save the Children, have offices in Berlin. On my trip, I participated in a volunteer event with the Berlin office of IsraAID, an Israeli-based NGO that, at the request of the German government, established a team of Arabic and English-speaking psychosocial specialists in

²²²Hannah McGivern, "Louvre to Train Refugees as Tour Guides with Funds from Saudi Foundation," *The Art Newspaper*, September 13, 2019, https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/louvre-planning-a-multaka-programme-for-refugee-communities?fbclid=IwAR27gN4bcWOrlf1nXdJsfq_sNOCidKiCUDIGJxHU4uK7VJhBc58OpsDgHJI.

²²³Academics in Solidarity," Freie Universität, June 13, 2019, <https://www.fu-berlin.de/en/international/news-events/newsletter/2019/201902/201902-academics.html>.

²²⁴Dr. Stefan Rummel (Professor at Freie University), interviewed by Kyra Jablonsky, Berlin, July 17, 2019.

²²⁵"Humanitarian Solutions," More Than Shelters, accessed March 1, 2020, <http://www.morethanshelters.org/eng/>.

²²⁶JP, More Than Shelters, interviewed by Kyra Jablonsky, Berlin, July 17, 2019.

Germany in 2016, to help support refugees in settlements.²²⁷ In 2018, the German IsraAID office won the country's national integration prize for its work with refugees.²²⁸ Especially in German cities, many traditional NGOs play a pivotal role in running refugee reception centers and supporting shelters and like IsraAID, provide support that the government is unable to.²²⁹ LH, an IsraAID staff member, explained, "You have a huge group of people in the refugee shelters who are majorly traumatized—probably 50 percent. The government pays the people in the shelter, but they can't provide psychological support, so we do this in shelters on a weekly and often, daily basis."²³⁰ (Jablonsky, Interview 18). Yet for one refugee, the bureaucratic approach of some NGOs is off-putting. BP remarked, "When I go to [a large Catholic NGO] and I have a question, they do help, but sometimes the people there aren't so friendly. They get paid, but maybe they don't want to be there. With [grassroots organizations] it's a really big difference—they are here because they want to help."²³¹ (Jablonsky, Interview 19).

While many grassroots organizations may not have as much contact with more mainstream aid actors, they typically feel a sense of collaboration and camaraderie within the grassroots and community networks. As Olsson noted, "We do a lot of exchange with other organizations and mostly mentor younger ones, just trying to spread our knowledge ... and build alliances and networks. We have never seen this as some kind of competition with other groups."²³² GSBTB also acts as a community connector, helping provide volunteers for a wide range of external projects from soup kitchens and neighborhood events sponsored by the city council, to social

²²⁷"Germany," IsraAID, accessed February 21, 2020, <https://www.israaid.org/projects/germany>.

²²⁸"Germany," IsraAID.

²²⁹Bruce Katz, Luise Noring, and Nantke Garrelts, "Cities and Refugees: The German Experience," The Brookings Institute, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/cities-and-refugees-the-german-experience/>.

²³⁰LH (staff member, IsraAID), interviewed by Kyra Jablonsky, Berlin, July 27, 2019.

²³¹BP (Afghani refugee), interviewed by Kyra Jablonsky, Berlin, July 23, 2019.

²³²Thun, phone interview.

events for refugees at shelters, and projects for those with disabilities.²³³ In July 2019, the four biggest grassroots organizations supporting refugees in Berlin—including SINGA Labs, Über den Tellerrand, GSBTB, and Start With a Friend—convened to for the first time and Thun said, “We do offer very similar services and it’s the first time we all meet together for a specific purpose. Of course, we have met before through our work with foundations, but there is just so much potential in terms of collaboration; we can do even more together. At least in Berlin, it’s not a feeling of competition where you want to keep your secrets.”²³⁴ For IsraAID, collaboration with other organizations as less of a priority. Said LH, “We collaborate with other organizations, but not too much. First of all, we need to focus on our work, it’s the fundamental—then we can have space for it.”²³⁵

German Aid Actors Supporting Refugees

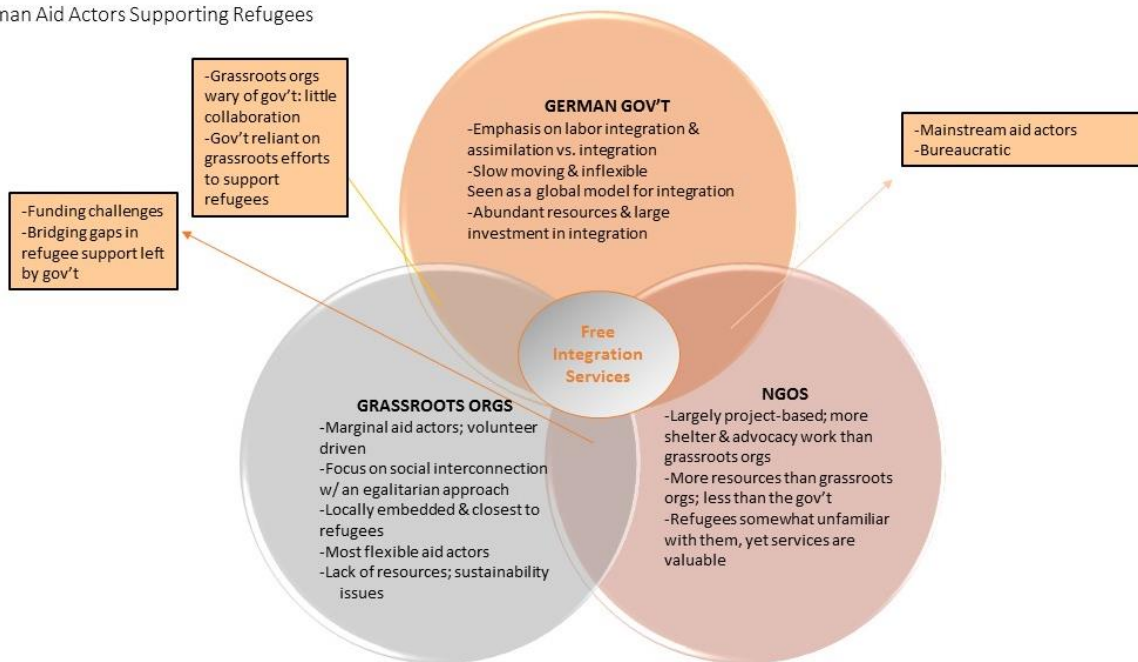


Fig. 1: A comparison of refugee support, provided by the German government, NGOs, and grassroots organizations.

²³³“External Projects by GSBTB,” Give Something Back to Berlin, accessed March 7, 2020, <https://gsbtb.org/projects/external-partners-and-projects/>.

²³⁴Thun, phone interview.

²³⁵LH interview.

As the literature notes, the definition of integration and how its interpreted is central to determining how refugees integrate successfully. Among the refugees I spoke with, everyone agreed with the German government’s definition of integration as a “two-way process ... that requires acceptance by the majority of the population and the willingness of immigrants to learn and respect the rules of the host country and to take responsibility for their own integration.”²³⁶ Friedrichs noted, “A common definition of integration ... in research means a combination of—on one hand, belonging to the host country and host society—but also to continue being able to [cultivate] the culture of your home country or the country you came from.”²³⁷ In contrast, Friedrichs believes that German politics emphasizes refugee assimilation instead of integration, which keeps “German culture dominant,” instead of allowing refugees’ home cultures to flourish in the host country.²³⁸ In addition, he believes the current debate about integration is not so much about the expense of such massive population influxes, but about culture.²³⁹ He explained, “It’s a question of values. Do [refugees] have different values? There are discussions about religion because many refugees have an Islamic background ... is it possible to live here together if there is such a separation between the East (where the right-wing, nationalist AfD party or *Alternative für Deutschland* is popular) and the West...?”²⁴⁰ Olsson agreed, “This is the big debate in this sphere ... assimilation or diversity. Like how can we live in diverse communities where people have different political opinions ... and different religions?”²⁴¹

²³⁶“Integration,” Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community.

²³⁷Friedrichs, interview.

²³⁸Friedrichs, interview.

²³⁹Friedrichs, interview.

²⁴⁰Friedrichs, interview.

²⁴¹Olsson, interview.

Importance of Home Culture

For the refugees I spoke with, the preservation and incorporation of their home culture into their new culture was vital to their personal definition of successful integration. RK shared the sentiment of refugees: “If I speak enough German to be aware of the law, respect [it], work and contribute to the country, it doesn’t matter what food I eat, what religion I am, or what Syrian friends I see. I can still be an active citizen and give back.”²⁴² (Jablonsky, Interview 20). AI believes part of the integration process is having Germans show interest in his culture. He said, “Integration is a process between two sides—one side [us] and the other, the local people. It’s ... about learning the language and culture, but they also have to learn about my culture. I’m thirty-three years old, I have memories and I can’t give them up.”²⁴³ In an effort to keep their culture alive in Germany, many refugees are engaged in projects in Berlin that preserve their home culture. For example, AA, with a few other Syrian refugees, helped amass 3,000 Arabic books on behalf of the Syrian community in Germany, for a project that is now supported by the Central Library in Berlin;²⁴⁴ WA, a Syrian journalist, started a podcast to teach Germans about Syria and Arabic culture and in the future, he hopes to establish an Arabic radio station for this purpose;²⁴⁵ and AI, along with a few friends, founded a Sudanese club that holds regular gatherings and Sudanese film screenings.²⁴⁶ Yet many refugees believe that to integrate, refugees must not become too insular and they point to the example of the Turkish, who arrived in waves during the sixties and seventies, as a group that is still seen as not fully integrated into German society.²⁴⁷ QR said, “Some Syrians,

²⁴²RK (Syrian refugee), interviewed by Kyra Jablonsky, Berlin, July 20, 2019.

²⁴³AI, interview.

²⁴⁴AA, interview.

²⁴⁵WA, interview.

²⁴⁶AI, interview.

²⁴⁷Matthias Bartsch, Andrea Brandt, and Daniel Steinvoth, “A Sorry History of Self-Deception and Wasted Opportunity,” Spiegel International, July 9, 2010, <https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/turkish-immigration-to-germany-a-sorry-history-of-self-deception-and-wasted-opportunities-a-716067.html>.

they only speak to Syrian friends. I think it's wrong because they don't practice the language, they don't get to know the culture here."²⁴⁸ (Jablonsky, Interview 21). As difficult as it was, AI decided not to be in contact with his Sudanese friends until he learned German. He said, "I needed to learn the language so it was best to not be in contact with them until I had made progress."²⁴⁹ SH sees a parallel between age and insularity. "Many of the old Iraqis here, they are traditional and they don't understand when young people say, 'We need to go out and meet people, make new associations and friends in Germany.'"²⁵⁰

In turn, many of the grassroots organizations I interacted with have incorporated refugee home cultures into their organizational programs. Kaldinski commented, "If you want integration to be ... a successful process, you need people to understand the other culture and what [the refugees] have been through. This is what's missing a lot ... we're trying to do this."²⁵¹ In addition to the efforts of Refugee Voice Tours and Über den Tellerrand, GSBTB hosts an Open Kitchen project, where refugee chefs lead a team of volunteers to cook a meal from their home culture for a diverse mix of diners, including German locals and other refugees.²⁵² At Bantabaa, the organization hosts weekly community dinners where a mix of locals and refugees play West African games and cook a West African meal together. For BikeyGees, ensuring that all their traffic signs are in multiple languages, including Farsi and Arabic in addition to German, is an acknowledgment of the refugee women's native languages.²⁵³ MT noted, "It's not just about

²⁴⁸QR (Syrian refugee), interviewed by Kyra Jablonsky, Berlin, July 30, 2020.

²⁴⁹AI, interview.

²⁵⁰SH, interview.

²⁵¹Kaldinski, interview.

²⁵²"Open Kitchen by GSBTB," Give Something Back to Berlin, accessed February 25, 2020, <https://gsbtb.org/projects/open-kitchen/>.

²⁵³DM, interview.

Germans teaching newcomers about how things ... work here, but also that we learn something from them about where they came from—I think for both parties it’s ... very gratifying.”²⁵⁴

Social Connection and Network Access

For grassroots organizations, providing social connection and access to local networks is central to their mission and seen as a vital component to successful integration. JP noted that social connection is often overlooked by the government: “[In Germany], it’s more like a three-pronged approach to integration [housing, employment, language]. Alone, these three elements don’t mean that [refugees] are accepted into society and or that they’re making personal connections. One of the most important elements is missing.”²⁵⁵ Thun acknowledged that refugees have “a very hard time accessing local networks”²⁵⁶ and DM concurred, “... [the West African] refugees don’t know how to get in touch with Berliners. It’s like ‘How can I meet people?’ For them, it’s even more complicated because of the stereotype: ‘You want to sell me drugs?’²⁵⁷ Of the value of connection and networks, Olsson noted, “Who are [refugees] going to speak German to, if [they] don’t have any friends? Who are [they] going to learn about open jobs from? Like 70% of all jobs are found through networks that you need to build.”²⁵⁸ SJ noted that while BikeyGees hopes to empower women through mobility their “first goal is to have women meet people and to have fun. Women from different cultures often meet there and do stuff outside the training like ... go to a concert. We are also still in touch, and do [bike] rides with women we trained years ago.”²⁵⁹ Early in the refugee crisis, Olsson saw many developers trying to use technology to connect to refugees: “They

²⁵⁴MT, interview.

²⁵⁵JP, interview

²⁵⁶Thun, phone interview.

²⁵⁷DM, interview.

²⁵⁸Olsson, interview.

²⁵⁹SJ, interview.

[would] say, ‘I want to do something cool, like create an app for refugees.’ But they were completely disconnected from ... the actual needs of people and there was so much money invested in this. You can just bring people together instead—refugees use Facebook and What’s App like everyone else. [Connecting people] is not rocket science; the simplest ideas are the most effective.”²⁶⁰

For refugees, social connection is vital. WA stated that “a sense of community” is what makes refugees like him feel they belong in Germany.²⁶¹ SH recalled how difficult it was to meet anyone when he first arrived in Berlin from Iraq in 2006.²⁶² He often went out to clubs by himself, desperate to find people to talk to: “Back then, there wasn’t the *Sprachcafe*, integration courses, or all of these volunteer projects and support.”²⁶³ Today, he believes that the general increase of offerings for refugees, including more opportunities for social connection with the local population, has “helped so many people.”²⁶⁴ AI said, “We are from poor countries with ... bad systems and now we are [here] and we don’t know how things work.”²⁶⁵ He credits a local grassroots organization, Babelsberg Hilft, just outside of Berlin where he lives, with helping him meet people who, in turn, have helped him navigate German culture. He said, “At their *Sprachcafe* I have met both locals and refugees and made friends—it gives me a sense of community. They are the ones that showed me how things work in Germany—it would have been so much harder if I hadn’t found these people.” For example, when AI couldn’t get a loan to attend the Berlin School of Economics and Law, his friend put him in touch with a grassroots student organization that

²⁶⁰Olsson, interview.

²⁶¹WA, interview.

²⁶²SH, interview.

²⁶³SH, interview.

²⁶⁴SH, interview.

²⁶⁵AI, interview.

loaned him the tuition.²⁶⁶ He said, “My problem [was] not solved by the government, but from my friends that I’ve met here.”²⁶⁷

MN, a female refugee from Syria, who was paired one-on-one with a German local through the organization Start with a Friend, calls it “a lifesaver.”²⁶⁸ (Jablonsky, Interview 22). She credits her “tandem partner” with helping her adjust to the city and help learn the language and culture. She said, “It’s been hard finding work [as a social worker], but my [tandem partner] comes to my apartment and has dinner with me and my mom—we are good friends.”²⁶⁹ QR, who has attended German language class at GSBTB for three years, noted, “My first friends [in Berlin] were from ... language class and we play football every week. They are German and now I know all of their friends too.”²⁷⁰ Having learned the language and made friends, he wanted to give back to the community and is currently the *Sprachcafe* class leader, responsible for organizing the room, bringing refreshments, and helping German-language beginners.²⁷¹ With busy schedules, refugees also appreciate that grassroots organizations allow them to participate in multiple activities in one place. BP explained, “I’m a student and also apprenticing to be an electrician. My work is from seven to four every day and it takes three hours to commute both ways. I’m tired, of course, but I come [to GSBTB’s *Sprachcafe*] because I can do many things: learn a language, visit old friends ... and make new friends. I get positive energy from it.”²⁷² FE frequents a local grassroots organization that supports refugees outside of Berlin and remarked, “In addition to language help, socially [the organization] helps. My father and I are always talking in Arabic about the revolution in Sudan so if I need a break and feel bored or lonely, I can talk German and get to know [locals].

²⁶⁶AI, interview.

²⁶⁷AI, interview.

²⁶⁸MN (Syrian refugee), interviewed by Kyra Jablonsky, Berlin, July 29, 2019.

²⁶⁹MN, interview.

²⁷⁰QR, interview.

²⁷¹QR, interview.

²⁷²BP, interview.

People are really nice. I have a good friend I met through *Sprachcafe* and we hang out often.”²⁷³ GU, an Afghan refugee waiting for asylum, also appreciates the social support. Of GSBTB’s *Sprachcafe*, he commented, “Waiting to find out if I can stay in Germany is very hard. I need to talk to my doctor about this because I am very anxious all the time. But at least [at *Sprachcafe*], I can meet-up with my friends, be social, and learn German and English ... forget about my troubles for a little...”²⁷⁴ (Jablonsky, Interview 23).

Embedded in the Community

By being embedded in the community, often in neighborhoods with high refugee populations, many grassroots organizations foster deep social connections with refugees through informal daily contact. DM notes that often while she’s working at Bantabaa’s office in the Kreuzberg district, refugees “just pop in ... they see the door open and they ask, ‘What are you doing? Want to go for coffee? Just to have some contact and not be reminded of the situation they came from.’”²⁷⁵ She noted that Bantabaa’s location next to Görlitzer Park is especially important, since the park is a frequent hangout spot for many of the West African refugees they work with.²⁷⁶ Eibelshäuser sees a particular benefit in going to where refugees are, especially in the shelters: “We do have open office hours, but we find that when we go to refugee shelters—which we do regularly—we reach people who wouldn’t come [to us] themselves. Also, we reach women [there] because men are often the ones sent to get the [asylum] counsel. But it’s important that everyone interviewed in the asylum process knows what’s going on.”²⁷⁷ BikeyGees has a small office in Kreuzberg, but SJ recalls that when the organization began: “[We] just went to [refugee shelters]

²⁷³FE, interview.

²⁷⁴GU (Afghan refugee), interviewed by Kyra Jablonsky, Berlin, July 23, 2019.

²⁷⁵DM, interview.

²⁷⁶DM, interview.

²⁷⁷Eibelshäuser, interview.

with a pump and a helmet in hand ... and asked who wanted to learn. In a short time, many women started to come to our trainings and sometimes in Kreuzberg, there are one hundred women and they bring their family: their aunts, sisters, and children ...”²⁷⁸

However, grassroots organizations are not just connecting refugees to the local community, but they also encouraging local society to be more active in the integration process. Kaldinski commented, “We are trying ... to activate civil society to be part of this integration process. That’s why we work with volunteers. I could do all the events [myself], but I’m really pro-‘this is going to work’ and I want to create awareness [that citizens] can be part of the process and make a difference.”²⁷⁹ Thun also emphasized the local community’s role in integration and said, “In Germany, in many cases, integration is a very one-way road where the local population expects newcomers to assimilate. But ... [we believe] that ... the local population needs to open up in a way and be ready for change. And ... actively take part in spaces where newcomers and locals ... meet.”²⁸⁰ Added Olsson, “We want to mobilize as many people as possible and create networks as big as possible because if you get to know these [refugees], how are you going to still have ... prejudice?”²⁸¹ For RK, Refugee Voice Tours has allowed him to engage with locals directly on these topics: “[My job] lets me connect with people—many are Germans—and raise awareness and have a dialogue about this so-called refugee crisis and conflicts and the situation in Syria.”²⁸²

²⁷⁸SJ, interview.

²⁷⁹Kaldinski, interview.

²⁸⁰Thun, interview.

²⁸¹Olsson, interview.

²⁸²RK, interview.

Challenges

Yet as tangential actors, grassroots organizations face a number of challenges. In Germany, there has been a backlash to the initial “welcome culture,” with a shift to more conservative politics and the rise of the AfD.²⁸³ RK said, “There’s a shift in the public perception. In 2015, it [went from] a sympathy-based narrative—people at the train station welcoming refugees—to a securitization narrative that all refugees are fundamentalists that want to convert the continent.”²⁸⁴ HS frequently visits refugee shelters in Eastern Germany for his dissertation on German refugee shelters and he commented: “[In the East] you do see attacks on refugee shelters. One was set on fire, another—pigs heads were thrown in—and refugees are harassed on the street in some places.”²⁸⁵ FE is more sanguine: “You do see some racism here, but I am open minded. Even in Sudan, we have racism everywhere.”²⁸⁶

Whether it’s politics or fatigue, some grassroots organizations are noticing a decline in volunteerism. Kaldinski said, “Three years ago, when I started working here, I got tons of emails each month [about volunteering]. Now I get like two a month. People are losing interest because they think [the refugees] who arrived three years ago must live somewhere now and have found work. And with the rise of the AfD, I think that’s a pretty clear statement [of] what lots of people think.”²⁸⁷ DM said, “Next time [we have a community dinner], I need to invite all the neighbors again because they know about this project. Earlier, they all came, but now since it’s been going on, they feel like ‘Am I really changing something?’”²⁸⁸ However, Eibelshäuser offers a different

²⁸³Titus Molkenbur and Luke Cooper, “The AfD is Gaining Strength in Germany. A Reformed EU can Stop It,” *The Guardian*, September 3, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/sep/03/afd-germany-reformed-eu-immigration-parties-europe>.

²⁸⁴RK, interview.

²⁸⁵HS, interview.

²⁸⁶FE, interview.

²⁸⁷Kaldinski, interview.

²⁸⁸DM, interview.

perspective, “In 2015, there was this hype ... of the ‘welcome culture’ and as everyone could have predicted that didn’t last, but now I think a lot of focus has been on the backlash. And there’s probably many more people who work [helping refugees] for free on a daily basis, quietly, without question.”²⁸⁹

For many refugees, word of mouth and social media are they primary ways in which they find out about grassroots organizations. SH said, “We find these resources on Facebook and social media; people from all of our countries use Facebook more than anything.”²⁹⁰ QR concurred, “I found GSBTB through Facebook and all the information I needed about their programs.”²⁹¹ For organizations like BikeyGees, promotion has largely been viral, although they actively post on their Facebook page. Said SJ, “At first, we had to recruit women at the shelters and let the social workers know about the trainings. But we quickly grew because women were talking to each other about us... it’s like a big spider web or word of mouth.”²⁹² Yet a few refugees I interviewed weren’t aware of grassroots organizations that could be helpful to them and BP noted that word of mouth can sometimes be fragmented. He said, “Some of my friends suggested that I come to GSBTB, but nobody told me what they did. I’m really glad I showed up for an event there [because] I ... didn’t know that they offered so many programs.”²⁹³ Especially outside of Berlin, refugees are not always aware of resources or opportunities available to them. Said AI: “A grassroots [organization] needed an Arabic translator in Potsdam, but when I talked to the manager about it, he said that no one applied because no one knew about it. [The organization] did promote the opening, but not where refugees look.”²⁹⁴

²⁸⁹Eibelshäuser, interview.

²⁹⁰SH, interview.

²⁹¹QR, interview.

²⁹²SJ, interview.

²⁹³BP, interview.

²⁹⁴AI, interview.

Funding Structure and Sources

Central to the challenges faced by these grassroots organizations is the question of funding. Some grassroots organizations receive government funding while others receive none, but all are reliant on funding sources, from foundations to individual donations. MT noted, “A lot of great [grassroots] organizations also means there’s a lot of organizations that need funding.”²⁹⁵ In addition to competition, grant applications are time-consuming and funding only temporary. Kaldinski said, “If you’re lucky, you get funding for maybe three years, but usually it’s for one year and then you have to apply again and it has to be something new: a new project, a new idea, and it’s hard. One year is just enough time to create basic structures.”²⁹⁶ LH acknowledged that NGOs also struggle: “Funding is an issue for us, always. Other NGOs that may be actually working on your side to change things, but they are applying for the same funds, so there is competition. Also, if you’re an NGO, you’re always dependent on politics. So, we are absolutely dependent on funding and it’s a year-to-year process.”²⁹⁷

Many of the organizations I interacted with in Berlin have diverse funding models relying on a patchwork of funding from foundations (Robert Bosch Foundation gives to a number of these organizations), individual donations, some government and city funding, and in some cases, corporations or modest revenue. Kaldinski detailed Über den Tellerrand’s funding structure, “You have foundations, maybe a little government [support], and then a little revenue from cooking classes and you kind of mix it all together.”²⁹⁸ For Thun, a balanced funding model is important: “We try to have a business model that is equilibrated and not just dependent on public and private

²⁹⁵MT, interview.

²⁹⁶Kaldinski, interview.

²⁹⁷LH, interview.

²⁹⁸Kaldinski, interview.

money, but also corporate funding.”²⁹⁹ A few of the larger grassroots organizations have attracted international supporters like GSBTB, whose Open Art Shelter is funded by San Francisco-based Global Whole Being Fund and SINGA Labs, which lists Google Entrepreneurs as a corporate partner. Yet for all of the grassroots organizations I interviewed, funding was cited as the biggest challenge.

Some grassroots organizations are wary of depending too much on government funding. Said Thun, “[We] always think twice. Do [we] really want government money because that ties you to a lot of rules that you don’t actually want to set for yourself.”³⁰⁰ However, he acknowledged the necessity of working with the larger aid ecosystem in order to achieve his organization’s vision of “systematic change.”³⁰¹ Olsson agreed and as a result, GSBTB’s funding model is diverse, “Some [organizations] say ‘We don’t want to be tied to government and foundation money.’ [But] the only way I see ... societal challenges being solved is that we need to work together on a state level, in the private sector, and on an individual level. And I want our funding structure to mirror that.”³⁰² Yet she acknowledges the challenge of acquiring funding for an organization with a broader, less-traditional mission: “Because we work with all types of newcomers, we fall outside the [traditional funding] categories of like ‘Here are the traditional migrants, here are the refugees, here are the vulnerable communities.’ We are just open to all of them”³⁰³ Thun also noted that their non-traditional approach is often at odds with the government’s when it comes to funding: “The closer you work with the government, the more information they want on your programs. They may ask about our ‘refugee entrepreneurs,’ but we refer to them as just an ‘international

²⁹⁹Thun, interview.

³⁰⁰Thun, interview.

³⁰¹Thun, interview.

³⁰²Olsson, interview.

³⁰³Olsson, interview.

crowd’—we never ask people what their status is. It’s a total mindset thing but there’s a big difference.”³⁰⁴ Olsson also acknowledges that while “everyone who works in the field knows the importance of bottom-up kind of grassroots integration efforts,” government funding is often directed elsewhere because there isn’t enough research on grassroots work to justify it.³⁰⁵

For some grassroots organizations, being small and nimble and on the front lines of integration work has allowed for innovative funding collaborations and opportunities. Thun remarked, “We work closely with the Robert Bosch Foundation and it’s a proper collaboration—it’s not only like we are the ones asking for money, but we are also supporting the foundation in ... setting their goals and strategy on the integration approach.”³⁰⁶ For the Refugee Law Clinic in Berlin, being a small grassroots organization means less bureaucracy to pursue projects they are interested in. While the clinic is associated with Humboldt University, it remains independent and Eibelshäuser noted, “We started a counseling project on Samos, the Greek island, and this certainly would be a project that the university [would find] too politically charged but we were able to just say, ‘I think we should do it.’ Most projects that are run in a more hierarchical structure [would take longer], but we wrote a successful foundation grant and implemented the project ... instead of having to wait one or two years to start doing something.”³⁰⁷

While funding often requires metrics and analysis to demonstrate an organization’s impact and performance, many grassroots organizations don’t have the resources or bandwidth to collect more than basic data, even though in-depth data and analysis are critical for influencing policy and acquiring funding. In addition, some grassroots organizations’ assessment of success can be seen as untraditional. Kaldinski said, “Sometimes we have people come [to our activities] for a couple

³⁰⁴Thun, interview.

³⁰⁵Olsson, interview.

³⁰⁶Thun, interview.

³⁰⁷Eibelshäuser, interview.

of months or half a year—and [they] participate in all kinds of events and then ... they don't come anymore. So, they ... come, get what they need from the community and when they got what they're looking for, they leave. Maybe it's a sign of success.”³⁰⁸ Olsson noted,

Of course, we measure success in how many participants we're having and that's the foundation way of seeing it ... For more traditional projects, they might have ... twenty refugees in a program, so you can follow the impact very closely. We have thirty weekly events which we don't calculate. It's also like you can come in one time to one of our projects and you might never come back, but you have meet someone there who you ... maybe go for coffee with or connect on Facebook or LinkedIn. And that could actually be a measure of success. ... that connection is there and it's where a lot is happening. They may drop off, but they know they can always come back and if they actually used our facilities and networks to an extent that they don't need us any longer ... that's good.³⁰⁹

Another challenge facing grassroots organizations is staffing and dependence on a largely volunteer workforce. For those employed by these organizations, the work is often part-time and many of them hold multiple jobs or are also university students. Split schedules and often-heavy workloads are challenging. Said Eibelshäuser, “I'd say that everyone who works with us is working intensively and that probably, their [law] studies suffer a bit ... because it's just a lot of work.”³¹⁰ SJ, who is studying to be a social worker, remarked, “Having just one or two people manage the volunteers all alone can be hard because we also have a lot of background work to do, like finding places to train, coordinating with the social workers, and getting new supplies. And it's working as a student, without money.”³¹¹ City funding covers DM's work ten hours a week as well as her two part-time colleagues, but the organization is largely dependent on volunteers. “Sometimes we have so many volunteers and they do it for two to three months and then they're ... gone. On Facebook, ten will sign-up but maybe only one will show-up, so for me this work is

³⁰⁸Kaldinski, interview.

³⁰⁹Olsson, interview.

³¹⁰Eibelshäuser, interview.

³¹¹JS, interview.

super exhausting.”³¹² She also noted the emotional toll her job takes. As part of her many responsibilities, DM regularly accompanies refugees to their asylum proceedings and the intensity of the experience is bonding, but difficult: “[We] become so close... really quickly because [the refugees] tell the story of how they came here and it’s emotional because the stories are so tragic. You prepare them and then spend hours at the hearing. Recently, one of the guys was crying and I called our lawyer on the break and said, ‘Do we continue? He’s really crying.’ And the lawyer said, ‘Yes, even if it’s shitty now, it’ll be worse if he has to go back there again.’ So, you say, ‘Ok, how do we do this?’ And you give [the refugee] a hug and stay.”³¹³

As the literature notes, many grassroots organizations also grapple with the challenge of long-term sustainability. With limited resources and staff, many grassroots organizations are too immersed in daily issues to engage in long-term planning or sustainability discussions. For example, when asked about long-term planning, DM said, “Right now, I’m most concerned that we don’t have access to a proper kitchen anymore to really cook and continue our [refugee] catering program.”³¹⁴ Eibelshäuser noted that with support from Humboldt University, they were able to hire a few part-time employees to help manage office coordination. “But still,” he said, “there are tons of things that we’d like to do, but we can’t because there’s no time.”³¹⁵ Thun also acknowledged the pressure on these nascent groups: “We are a young organization, so I don’t see this as a failure, but we still haven’t managed to have ... a real sustainable business model. We’re working on it.”³¹⁶ He added, “Long-term planning is always in the conversations but it’s not a well set-up strategy.”³¹⁷ For GSBTB, it’s a calculated decision not to engage in long-term planning.

³¹²DM, interview.

³¹³DM, interview.

³¹⁴DM, interview.

³¹⁵Eibelshäuser, interview.

³¹⁶Thun, interview.

³¹⁷Thun, interview.

Olsson noted, “The German system is very much like ‘... Where are you going to be in five years?’ And I’m like ‘We are running a project that is organic and the situation changes.’ And this is why we could stay flexible and why we were successful. Other organization have done a five-year plan ... but now there’s this refugee crisis and it doesn’t fit anymore. We can adapt and I think this is the way to run modern organizations ... Because we have an extremely fragile world and you literally don’t know what’s going to happen tomorrow.”³¹⁸ Still, some organizations were starting to think more broadly about their future. Kaldinski said, “Last week, our team in Berlin had a strategy meeting. We aren’t changing our mission, but lots of things have happened in the last three years and we want to see if our target groups still need what we’re offering or if we need to ... adapt our projects in new ways.”³¹⁹

Success and Legitimacy

However, despite significant obstacles, many of these organizations are showing signs of success and legitimization, especially through third-party endorsements—attracting international media attention and accolades—while being replicated or expanded within Germany and beyond. In particular, they have garnered the attention of mainstream media, with a variety of feature stories in international media coverage from prestigious outlets such as *The Guardian* (UK), *The New York Times*, *Deutsche Welle*, *The Atlantic*, *The Financial Times*, *Smithsonian Magazine*, *National Geographic*, and *Public Radio International* (PRI), among others. In addition, many of the organizations have won prestigious awards, validating their unique contributions. For example, GSBTB won the Blue Bear for Civic Engagement from the European Commission and the Berlin Senate in 2015, and a year later, the Intercultural Innovation Award from the UN and BMW.³²⁰ In

³¹⁸Olsson, interview.

³¹⁹Kaldinski, interview.

³²⁰Give Something Back to Berlin, “This is GSBTB.”

addition, GSBTB was recently featured in a national LinkedIn advertising campaign throughout Germany, featuring the hashtag #InItTogether.³²¹ Über den Tellerrand was the flagship project of Google’s Art and Culture Campaign #25 in 2015 and the same year, they won the “Active for Democracy and Tolerance” competition sponsored by the government-funded Alliance for Democracy and Tolerance, which supports civil society activities in the field of democracy and tolerance promotion.³²² BikeyGees won the same award in 2017 and, in addition to other accolades, won the Berlin Advice for Democracy in 2018, which honors projects and people who are committed to democratic and peaceful coexistence in Berlin.³²³ Furthermore, in 2017 SINGA Labs was a finalist for the *Deutscher Integrations Preis* and the Ashoka, Zalando, & Betterplace Innovation Fund for Integration and that same year, won the Schöpflin Foundation award.³²⁴

Another important indication of success has been the replication and expansion of some of these organizations’ programs. For example, Über den Tellerrand now has a presence in thirty-five German cities and internationally, in the United States, Columbia, Austria, and other countries.³²⁵ As Kaldinski explained, “The people in each of these locations are all volunteers—maybe they read or heard about us and said, ‘I want to do that in my town as well’ and we show them how to do it and provide support.”³²⁶ In addition, Über den Tellerrand’s Kitchen on the Run program is a traveling kitchen, or “a mobile integration incubator,” where one or two hosts from different countries invite people to cook together and get to know each other and to date, people from over

³²¹“GSBTB Fronts LinkedIn’s Nationwide Campaign,” GSBTB, accessed March 4, 2020, <https://gsbtb.org/2018/06/20/gsbtb-joins-linkedin-nationwide-campaign/>.

³²²“Active for Democracy and Tolerance’ Competition,” Bündnis für Demokratie und Toleranz, accessed March 4, 2020, <https://www.buendnis-toleranz.de/arbeitsfelder/wuerdigung/aktiv-wettbewerb/>.

³²³“Awards,” BikeyGees, accessed March 4, 2020, <https://bikeygees.org/#about>.

³²⁴“About Us,” SINGA Labs Deutschland, accessed March 4, 2020, <https://singa-deutschland.com/en/home-en/>.

³²⁵Kaldinski, interview.

³²⁶Kaldinski, interview.

60 countries have participated.³²⁷ Refugee Voice Tours, which expanded to Copenhagen in 2016, is now planning to launch tours in London and Paris soon.³²⁸ In addition to the aforementioned project on the Greek island of Samos, where a team of permanent legal counselors provide information on refugee rights and EU asylum procedures, the Refugee Law Clinic is also working with the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki in Greece to design a seminar on migration law.³²⁹ Even as these grassroots organizations expand and change, strong values continue to anchor their work. Eibelshäuser said, “In the end, [with the University of Thessaloniki], we would like the product that we started to go ... into Greek hands so we’re not a German organization from abroad ... patronizingly doing things.”³³⁰

For organizations that emphasize locality, replication of services to other areas can be a challenge. SINGA Labs Germany was founded in 2016 as a branch of SINGA France, which started in Paris.³³¹ While the organizations share the same values, they have tailored their work to the local population. Thun said, “The circumstances in each country in Europe are very, very different and it’s important to keep this in mind. Even within Germany, the circumstances between cities and rural areas are very different. We are now offering coaching, together with the Bosch Foundation, in rural areas and we are learning as we go. There are a few things we can scale and some things just need to be adapted to the local circumstances.”³³² For Olsson, being successful within the local community doesn’t necessarily translate to expansion and bandwidth is also a factor: “We have funding from a US foundation to take [our] concept elsewhere and we’re looking into Lisbon first ... but it’s also been busy here and we’ve had so much growth. I think the best

³²⁷“Kitchen on the Run,” Über den Tellerrand, accessed March 4, 2020, <https://kitchenontherun.org/en/>.

³²⁸“Meet the Changemakers.”

³²⁹“The Situation on Samos,” Refugee Law Clinic Berlin, accessed March 2, 2020, <https://en.rlc-berlin.org/samos>.

³³⁰Eibelshäuser, interview.

³³¹“About Us,” SINGA Labs Deutschland.

³³²Thun, interview.

ideas are very local. Like in that sense you know your community and ... then you adapt [the concept]. But for us, [expansion] has been a little bit of a question mark.”³³³

Results

My research verifies that while grassroots organizations offer services in the main domains of integration, their unique contribution to the aid ecosystem is in the social interconnection they provide, which is key to successful integration. Moreover, these organizations work as bidirectional connectors, supporting the local integration of refugees through contact with a diverse population, while encouraging German locals to participate in the “two-way process” of integration. In addition, grassroots organizations utilize an egalitarian approach rooted in a strong collective value system and a desire not only for a more sustainable integration process but, more broadly, for a more tolerant and equal society. Compared to more mainstream actors, these organizations—with less bureaucracy and hierarchy—are more flexible and better able to adapt to refugees’ needs. Moreover, by being embedded within the local community, they are better positioned to forge deep connections and understand refugees’ needs through informal, frequent contact. For refugees, the benefits are powerful and include connection and access to local networks and the community; support in keeping their home culture alive, which is vital to many refugees’ personal definition of integration; and help navigating a foreign culture. Yet grassroots organizations are not a substitute for other support services, but instead, are a vital part of the overall aid ecosystem in Germany. As a result, they fill a gap left by other aid actors including the government and NGOs, with targeted activities that promote community and integration, while helping disperse bias in the local community.

³³³Olsson, interview.

Recommendations

As the literature suggests, grassroots organizations, in general, including those supporting refugees, are often under-researched and under-funded due to their marginal placement within the larger aid ecosystem. However, their indispensable contributions to successful and sustainable integration in conjunction with other support actors deserve more funding, research, and recognition. In particular, while there are various methods for grassroots organizations to achieve legitimacy, it would be important to better understand how this cohort can professionalize while preserving their core attributes, including independence and deep connection to the local community.

One way for these grassroots organizations to achieve more legitimacy and influence is to see themselves as part of the larger aid ecosystem and strengthen their ties to larger, more mainstream aid actors, including the government—which they are often wary of—in a way that does not feel compromising. In addition, because funding is a critical concern for all the grassroots organizations I interviewed, it would be important for them to prioritize the capturing of data and metrics to better demonstrate their overall impact and attract funding. Furthermore, in-depth data capture and analysis would allow them to influence on policy makers, which is critical for their ultimate, collective goal of effecting systematic change. Moreover, with more tangible results, these German grassroots organizations would be better poised to demonstrate their impact and secure rightful recognition for their contributions to best practices, which, in turn, can be valuable to other countries and regions. Specifically, increased funding would provide grassroots organizations with more resources and address bandwidth issues, allowing them to engage in strategic, long-term planning which in turn, would support legitimacy and sustainability. In addition, while grassroots organizations have been successful at attracting refugees to use their

services, more funding would allow them to increase reach through targeted advertising, especially to refugees outside of urban centers, who have less resources at their disposal.

Conclusion

This paper has confirmed the literature showing that German grassroots organizations supporting refugees are providing a unique contribution to the process of successful and sustainable integration. Many of these organizations were founded by German civil society around the refugee crisis in 2015 and began in a spontaneous and organic fashion. While they continue offering free services mirroring those provided by other support actors, their collective values of solidarity, support, and equity have produced a simple, yet distinctive egalitarian approach that sees refugees as fellow human beings instead of subjects of aid. In addition, these grassroots organizations have forgone formality, bureaucracy, and other hallmarks of more traditional support actors in favor of simple human connection. As a result, they see themselves as separate from these more traditional support actors like the government and NGOs—yet they share a collaborative relationship with community and grassroots networks. However, my research confirmed that the German government, while not a perfect integration model, is commendable in many ways and refugees largely acknowledge these benefits, although they seemed less familiar with NGO services. For the refugees I interviewed, a preservation of home culture was imperative to their personal definitions of integration and many of them were active in projects that fostered their culture in Berlin. In turn, many of the grassroots organizations I interacted with celebrated refugees' home cultures through a variety of activities, including cooking events and guided tours.

For grassroots organizations, social connection is central to their missions and it is equally important for refugees. Grassroots organizations are uniquely positioned to establish deep and rich relationships with refugees by embedding within the local community. In addition, they act as

connectors, providing refugees access to the local community and networks, while encouraging local society to get to know refugees on a personal level. Yet, these grassroots organizations have faced significant challenges that include lack of funding, an increasingly conservative political landscape, declining volunteerism, and general issues of sustainability. Nevertheless, with limited resources, these organizations have managed to achieve some legitimacy through international media coverage, prestigious awards, and the replication and expansion of some of their programs.

This paper raises a number of questions, including how refugees' personal definition of integration—including a preservation of their home culture in a new country—can be acknowledged and incorporated more broadly into the integration process and beyond. In addition, it points to the need for local citizens to assume more responsibility in the “two-way process” of integration and further research is warranted on how to activate and engage local populations in an authentic and sustainable manner. As the literature indicates, more research is also needed on how different approaches to social connection, including the egalitarian approach leveraged by the grassroots organizations during the recent refugee crisis, impact refugees in the long term. Most importantly, this paper underscores the need for more research on grassroots organizations, especially in the humanitarian aid sector. This is critical, not only to ensure their unique contributions are incorporated into successful integration best practices, but to gain a better understanding of them and support their preservation and sustainability.

There is something to be admired in these small groups of ordinary citizens who not only imagine a more tolerant and equitable world, but set about the hard work of trying to bring their vision to fruition. It's too early to tell the long-term effects of these organizations, but—at a time when the world is steeped in political turmoil and chaos—these organizations show us that a return to simple human connection is not only affirming, but deeply powerful.

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