



Making *Heimat*

A Qualitative Case Study Exploring the Social Integration Processes
of Male Syrian and Afghan Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Their
Initial Integration Phase in Germany

Cora D.A.L. Lüdemann
5615208
Utrecht University
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*The first part of the title, "Making *Heimat*", is inspired by the exhibition of the German Pavilion at the 15th Venice Architecture Biennale 2016, carrying the title "Making Heimat. Germany, Arrival Country." The exhibition displaying the architectural side of reception centres for refugees, also aimed to trigger a debate about districts that are so called "problem areas", which arguably "offer residents and new arrivals the most important prerequisites of an Arrival City: affordable housing, access to work, small-scale commercial spaces, good access to public transit, networks of immigrants from the same culture, as well as a tolerant attitude that extends to the acceptance of informal practices" (Making Heimat, Germany, Arrival Country, 2016).

The term '*Heimat*' has no exact equivalent in English, but is mostly translated to homeland, home or native region. '*Heimat*' in its traditional sense refers to the place of birth or early upbringing. However, it is not that statically defined anymore. '*Heimat*' can also be won over. The concept of '*Heimat*' includes the acquisition of a familiar living environment and social belonging (Mitzscherlich, 1997, as cited in Jugendliche zwischen Ausgrenzung und Integration, 2010). Moreover, '*Heimat*' as a social space opens up in everyday life and commonplace interactions in the context of acquaintances, friendships and neighbourhoods (Cremer und Klein, 1990, as cited in Jugendliche zwischen Ausgrenzung und Integration, 2010).

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate, how single, male Syrian and Afghan refugees and asylum seekers between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five develop social connections in their initial integration phase in Germany. To answer the primal question this study takes a qualitative case study approach, exploring the social integration processes of Syrian and Afghan men, accommodated in two socioeconomically and ethno-culturally contrasting neighbourhoods in Hamburg and Berlin.

The thesis is divided into five chapters, of which the first introduces and gives background to the German refugee situation and related challenges and developments. The second chapter addresses the theoretical debate, in which this study is embedded, providing a review of the most important literature on social integration and explaining the analytical framework guiding this research. In addition, the methodological approach is explained in the second chapter. The third chapter situates the present study in the German refugee-policy context and characterises the research settings in Berlin and Hamburg. Chapter four is dedicated to the analysis of the qualitative data obtained from document analysis, participant observation and above all interviews held with refugees, asylum seekers, social workers, directors of refugee accommodations, volunteers, as well as members and directors of local civic refugee organisations between March and July 2016. The concluding chapter summarises the empirical findings and theoretical implications, as well as discusses the inferences and recommendations that can be derived from the research findings.

On the basis of the results of this research, it can be concluded that the most important social contacts for the studied population of Syrian and Afghan refugees and asylum seekers are their families back home and their housemates, predominantly from the same national or linguistic background, as well as the social service providers operating the refugee accommodations. Social bonds between refugees and asylum seekers and people 'like them' strongly outweigh social bridges with citizens of the German host society. Moreover, the data indicated that the refugees and asylum seekers in this study sought out areas that are frequented by people with their ethnic, cultural or linguistic backgrounds, emphasizing the importance of having a sense of belonging and community in a foreign country.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFD - Alternative for Germany

BAMF - Federal Office for Migration and Refugees

CDU - Christian Democratic Union of Germany

CSU - Christian Social Union in Bavaria

F&W - Fördern & Wohnen

RAHA - Refugee Aid Harvestehude Association

SPD - Social Democratic Party of Germany

SRC - Scottish Refugee Council

UN - United Nations

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CHAPTER I

RESEARCHING SOCIAL INTEGRATION

Introduction

The influx of refugees and asylum seekers to Europe and in particular to Germany reached staggering heights in 2015. For the first time in history, the number of people displaced from their homes worldwide exceeded sixty million (Edwards, 2016). Approximately one third of the asylum applications filed in the European Union in 2015 were filed in Germany, making Germany the most popular destination for refugees and asylum seekers coming to Europe (Ghelli, 2016). Although, in proportion to its population size, Germany is receiving fewer refugees in relative numbers than other European countries, including Sweden, Hungary and Austria, it is experiencing the largest refugee influx since the 1990s, when around 350.000 people fleeing Yugoslavia were granted asylum. Last year, more than 475.000 asylum applications were filed in Germany, the majority of applicants coming from Syria, Albania, Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq (Zahlen zu Asyl in Deutschland, 2016). Between January and May 2016, most applicants originated from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq (Zahlen zu Asyl in Deutschland, 2016). Muslim men between eighteen and thirty and unaccompanied minors make up the majority of asylum seekers and refugees that arrived in Germany in the past year and a half (Zahlen zu Asyl in Deutschland, 2016). Undoubtedly, the high number of asylum applications places a great responsibility on Germany's federal state and local governments, not only in regards to the provision of sufficient housing, but especially in terms of adequate support and the mammoth task of integrating these newcomers into Germany's economic, political, cultural and social life.

Last year the world turned towards Germany, when chancellor Angela Merkel uttered the famous words "Ja, wir schaffen das" ("yes, we can"), connoting that Germany

could handle the reception and integration of drastic numbers of incoming refugees and asylum seekers. In the same spirit, pictures circulated around the world showing German crowds standing at the train stations receiving incoming refugees with applause and welcome-posters, providing sweets, water and food. However, the exemplary welcoming culture Germany has shown the world in the past year is only one side of the coin. On the other side, a relatively young populist party, the *Alternative for Germany* (AFD) propagating against Merkel's refugee politics, has rapidly gained voters, whilst the ruling Christian Democratic Union (CDU) has lost many voters to the refugee-opponents. Additionally, in 2015 alone, over one thousand attacks on refugee accommodations were registered and many politicians supporting refugees continue to receive regular death threats (Morddrohungen an Politiker nehmen zu, 2015). The notably growing aversion against refugees is fuelled by terrorist attacks abroad, as well as smaller Islamist-motivated attacks in Germany and the frequently cited 'Cologne attacks' on New Years Eve, after which more than 1000 women filed complaints of alleged sexual harassment against offenders of North African descent. Many voices warn of the risks of failed integration and predict a ghettoization and the fostering of parallel societies, in the style of Paris or Brussels, if Germany does not appropriately address this vast challenge at hand.¹

Inspired by current developments and challenges, the underlying study aims to contribute to one of the timeliest and most important questions dictating the public and political debate in Germany at this point: how can Germany successfully address its current "refugee-crisis" and especially, how can the integration of refugees and asylum seekers from such contrasting social, cultural and religious backgrounds into German society succeed? Considering that young men constitute the largest group of incoming refugees and

¹ Politicians of various German parties are warning of the risks of failing integration and the fostering of parallel societies, including Sarah Wagenknecht (Die Linke), Sigmar Gabriel (SPD), Peter Altmaier (CDU/CSU), (Bielicki, 2016; Im Dialog: Michael Hirz mit Sahra Wagenknecht, 2016).

asylum seekers and this group is also seen to be particularly difficult to integrate, this study looks at the social integration of Syrian and Afghan men.

More specifically, this study considers, how single, male Afghan and Syrian refugees and asylum seekers between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five develop social connections in their initial integration phase in Germany. The term initial integration phase connotes a yearlong "settling-in phase" starting with the refugee's arrival in Germany. During this time period refugees and asylum seekers usually have unrealistic expectations regarding their educational or vocational prospect, a lack of a material base and most find themselves in a support-receiving position, experiencing socio-cultural and psychosocial insecurity (Kossolapow, 1987). This research question is particularly timely and relevant, as no other study has focused on the question, how refugees and asylum seekers develop social connections in their initial integration phase in a new host country. Moreover, this is the first study to focus on the social integration processes of refugees and asylum seekers, which have applied for asylum in Germany during the latest migratory wave.

The analytical framework guiding this research is borrowed from Ager and Strang's integration model, which proposes that "social connections" defined by social bonds, social bridges and social links, terms coined by social capital theorists Putnam and Woolcock, make up one of four key dimensions of integration. To answer the research puzzle, this study takes a qualitative case study approach, exploring the social integration processes of Syrian and Afghan men, accommodated in two socioeconomically and ethno-culturally contrasting neighbourhoods in the German metropolitan cities Hamburg and Berlin. The primary means are qualitative interviews conducted with refugees, asylum seekers, social workers, directors of refugee accommodations, volunteers, as well as members and directors of local civic refugee support initiatives between March and July 2016.

The thesis is structured as follows: chapter two discusses social integration from a

theoretical perspective, outlines the analytical framework and lays out the methodological choices guiding the herein presented research. The subsequent chapter three embeds the research puzzle in the German refugee-policy context and describes the research settings in more depth. After the overall context is provided, chapter four, the centrepiece of this thesis, is dedicated to presenting the empirical findings of this study, resulting from qualitative interviews, participant observations and document analysis. The concluding chapter summarises the empirical findings, discusses the consequent theoretical implications and presents the inferences and recommendations that can be derived from the research findings.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL DEBATE AND METHODOLOGY

Theoretical Debate

Literature Review

In light of the high influx of refugees and asylum seekers that Europe and in particular Germany has seen over the past year and a half, the topic of integration has won new centrality and importance in the public debate. 'Integration' is a debated sociological concept comprising a multitude of interpretations and definitions. In its most basic sense, the term implies the relationship of parts in a "systemic" whole, while the counter-term 'segmentation' describes the autonomous, non-related existence of different entities (Esser, 2001, as cited in van Wupper, 2015, p.6). A broad consensus exists that integration is a multi-dimensional concept comprising of various different levels and interdependent

factors (Esser, 2001, as cited in van Wupper, 2015, p. 7; Kuhlman, 1991, p. 4, as cited in SRC, 2010, p. 2; SRC, 2010, p. 3). Several authors distinguish between structural, cultural and social integration (Bosswick and Heckmann, 2006, pp. 3-10, as cited in SRC, 2010, p. 3; Esser, 2001, as cited in van Wupper, 2015, p. 7).

As this study is particularly concerned with the social integration processes of refugees and asylum seekers, the wider debate around the concept of integration shall not be problematised in depth in this study. Instead, a working definition of my own, which is informed by a wealth of current literature, is provided hereafter. This chapter will then give a review of the literature on the social dimension of integration, followed by a discussion of the conceptual framework of integration by Ager and Strang, which informs the analytical framework of this research.

The term 'integration', as it is used in this study broadly refers to,

the equal participation of refugees in the economic, social and cultural life of the host country. The goal of integration is not the full adaptation to the new host society, but the ability of refugees to participate fully in all aspects of society, under the recognition of the rights and rules governing the host country, without having to give up their own identity. Integration is a two-way interactional process that involves and bears responsibilities on the incoming refugees and the receiving host society and for which no duration can be specified.

(Working definition, my own)

Even though the concept is widely used by politicians, policymakers, academics and journalists, there are many critics of the term, aiming to, instead, replace it with 'participation'. The underlying idea follows from the conviction that the term 'integration' presupposes refugees or migrants to be a particularly vulnerable and passive group, in need for protection and in a position of institutional dependency. In contrast, the term

'participation' portrays refugees as active and competent agents with the skills and capacities to participate in their new host society (Gesellschaftliche Beteiligung von jungen Flüchtlingen, 2016).² A further criticism of the concept of 'integration' is directed at its normative dimension and the fact that sometimes 'integration' is equated to assimilation, meaning mere adaptation. However, there is large consensus in the current debate around integration that assimilation of migrants, defined as a "one-way adaptation or acculturation to the dominant culture and way of life" is a goal not worth striving for, as it implies losing one's identity, whereas integration, understood as an interactional two-way process between refugees and host society, leaves room for a person's individual cultural values, practices, and identity (Threadgold and Court, 2005; Kuhlman, 1991, p. 4, as cited in SRC, 2010, p. 2; Brux, 2013). Despite these criticisms, this study focuses on the term 'integration', as it continues to be the most frequented term to describe the underlying phenomenon and the aforementioned working definition of integration centres around the idea of participation.

According to Esser (2001), who has largely shaped the sociological debate on integration in Germany, an essential step to (social) integration is that newcomers acquire certain knowledge and competencies, including the language of the host country, which allows them to act and interact in a meaningful way (as cited in van Wupper, 2015, p. 7). Bosswick and Heckmann (2006), who see integration as an interactional process between refugees and the receiving society equally highlight that some key aspects of cultural integration, which they define as "acquisition of the core competencies of the dominant culture and society" are essential to "interactive integration being possible" (as cited in SRC, 2010, p. 3). Moreover, according to Esser (2001) the conferment of certain rights, including gaining citizenship and the acquisition of an occupational position are indispensable for establishing interpersonal social relations with host society members (as

² The interviewed directors of the *German - Arabic Centre* and the *Association for Iranian and Afghan Refugees* also used the term 'participation' instead on integration.

cited in van Wupper, 2015, p. 7). Only when these conditions are met, can a newcomer start to identify with the host society, which in turn is fundamental to an integrated society (van Wupper, 2015, p. 7). This idea is being reinforced by Rudiger (2006), who stresses that it may be more difficult for refugees and asylum seekers with a "temporary or precarious status" to enter into "positive relations with established residents" than for "those heading for permanent residence" (as cited in SRC, 2010, p. 28). In addition to that, Esser (1980) assumes that the changing of national contexts puts refugees in a disoriented position, which pushes them into a marginal social group (as cited in van Wupper, 2015, pp. 9-10). Moreover, many familiar "cultural scripts" and behavioural patterns native to their country of origin become invalidated in their new surroundings, presenting further difficulties (Esser, 1980, as cited in van Wupper, 2015, pp. 9-10).

Overall, the importance of social connections for refugee integration, especially between refugees and members of the host community is well established in both academic and policy literature (Ager and Strang 2008, 2010; Beirens et. al, 2007; European Commission, 2007; Korac, 2003; Threadgold and Court, 2005). The European Commission (2007) for instance emphasises that regular interactions between immigrants and members of the receiving host society is a "fundamental mechanism for integration" (p. 41). In this context, the crucial role played by the voluntary sector is frequently highlighted (Aumüller et al., 2015; Han-Broich, 2015; SRC, 2010). This is mostly due to the flexible nature of civil society organisations that allows them to "respond to the cross-cutting nature of migrants' needs" from assistance to finding housing or a job, to "emotional support" and "the fostering of community relations" (Cooke and Spencer, 2006, p. 13, as cited in SCR, 2011, pp. 5-6). Likewise, a German commission of experts recently published a report, underlining the central role voluntary engagement plays for the acceptance and social integration of refugees, especially at the local level (Aumüller et al., 2015, p. 73).

Particularly the development of personal relations between refugees and volunteers is believed to strongly contribute to easing psychological stress and dealing with the insecurities and hurdles many refugees are facing in Germany (Han-Broich, 2015, p. 45, as cited in Aumüller et al., 2015, p. 73). However, an important condition for success is that the contact between volunteers and refugees or asylum seekers takes place at eye level (Aumüller et al., 2015, p. 86).

Analytical Framework

Ager and Strang's "*Conceptual Framework Defining Core Domains of Integration*" is a model that simplifies complex and much discussed integration theory. According to the Scottish Refugee Council (SRC), the framework "provides the most rounded basis from which an empirical study of integration can flow" (SRC, 2011, p. 1). The model is particularly helpful for researchers and practitioners, as it accommodates both theory and practice in a straightforward model. Since its inception, the framework has conceptually and methodologically informed numerous studies of local integration and beyond that widely influenced policymaking and the development of services aimed at refugee integration (Ager & Strang, 2008, p. 185; Marks, 2014; SRC, 2011).

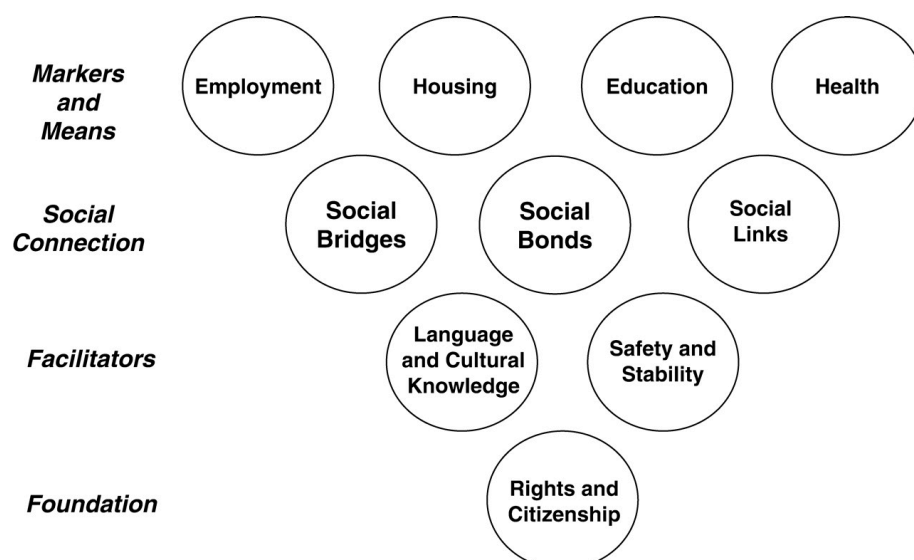


Figure 1. A Conceptual Framework Defining Core Domains of Integration (Ager & Strang, 2008)

The above model does not aim to be exhaustive and address all factors that stand in connection to the integration of migrants. Instead, it suggests ten core realms that reflect normative understandings of key components that in interdependence allegedly constitute "successful" integration. The framework arose from primary fieldwork on integration processes conducted by Ager and Strang (2010) in two British neighbourhoods with different patterns of refugee settlement (p. 591). After a short description of the assumptions about integration underlying the conceptual framework, the individual levels will be discussed. Thereby special attention will be paid to the 'social connection' dimension, as this serves as the analytical framework of the present study.

Underlying Ager and Strang's conceptual framework is the conviction that integration is a dynamic "two-way process" of "mutual accommodation," which places "demands on both receiving societies and the individuals and/or the communities concerned" (ECRE, 1999, p. 29, as cited in Ager and Strang, 2010, p. 600). The process of refugee integration is believed to start with the refugees' arrival in the new host country, irrespective of the asylum status. Its effectiveness is argued to strongly depend on the "intentions and aspirations of refugees themselves," as well as the experiences they make

from the moment of arrival (Ager and Strang, 2010, pp. 595-600). Additionally, the authors stress that the responsibility to facilitate enabling conditions for integration lies especially with the host society, mainly through integration facilitating work at the local level (Ager and Strang, 2010, p. 601).

Ager and Strang argue that rights and citizenship play a fundamental role in enabling integration, as refugees should enjoy the same rights as citizens in an 'integrated' society. However, they believe that legal statuses "become irrelevant at the local level, where concerns are to build relationships and community" (Losi and Strang, 2008, as cited in Ager and Strang, 2010, p. 601). The areas of education, housing, employment and good health are seen as both 'markers and means' to integration, implying that they can be indicative of integration into a new society, while at the same time functioning as potential means to integration. So-called facilitators and social connections constitute the connective tissue between the foundational rights and markers and means of integration. Since a lack of language and cultural knowledge and safety and security can act as an impediment to effective integration and inhibit the 'economic and social participation' of refugees 'in mainstream society,' the removal of these barriers is seen to pave the way for the facilitation of integration (Hale, 2000, p. 276, as cited in Ager and Strang, 2008, p. 181).

Based on their extensive study, Ager and Strang (2008) argue that social connections play an essential role in "driving the process of integration at a local level" (p. 176). Ager and Strang borrow the domains they associate with social connections from Putnam (1993) and Woolcock (1998), who distinguished between three types of social capital, namely social bonds (with family and co-ethnic, co-national or co-religious groups), social bridges (with other non-alike communities) and social links (with structures of the state).

As regards social bonds, Ager and Strang found that trusting and cooperative

relations with people that have a shared sense of identity ("people like us"), such as family, friends and people from the same religious, cultural, linguistic or national background, are a critical priority for most refugees. Moreover, they found that refugees highly value proximity to family and friends, as this enables them "to share cultural practices and maintain familiar patterns of relationships," which plays an important role "in them feeling 'settled'" (Ager and Strang, 2008, p. 178; Ager and Strang, 2010, p. 596). In their view, "integration risks being 'assimilation,' if refugees do not have social bonds and the connected "sense of identification" to a community of members with backgrounds similar to their own (Ager and Strang, 2004, p. 20).

Ager and Strang (2008) argue that social bonds can positively contribute towards effective integration, for instance because such relations considerably appear to reduce the risk for depression or ill health (Beiser, 1993, p. 221, as cited in p. 178). Moreover, social bonds often provide three forms of resources to refugees: "information and material resources," "emotional resources," and lastly "capacity building resources" (Ager and Strang, 2010, p. 597). Furthermore, strong social bonds are also seen to be beneficial for the development of 'bridging capital', as bonds can be a "source of self esteem and confidence," assumed to be relevant for the formation of bridges (Losi and Strang, 2008; Spicer, 2008; Vrečer, 2010, as cited in Ager and Strang, 2010, p. 598). With regards to the potential drawbacks of social bonds, the authors do not highlight the risk that tightly knit immigrant communities in which members have strong social bonds, but lack social bridges can also strongly hamper integration and lead to exclusion and the exacerbation of inequalities (Bourdieu, 1986, as cited in Amlani 2010, pp. 7-10; Cheong et al., 2007).

According to Ager and Strang "mixing", that is developing connections with people who are sociodemographically different to oneself or have other national, cultural, ethnic or religious backgrounds, is crucial for the "'two way' interaction at the heart (...) of

integration" and the "social cohesion" of the society. Especially bridges between refugees and members of the majority host society are assumed to be highly beneficial for effective integration of the refugee community; these, for example, often facilitate "employment opportunities" for refugees (Woolcock, 1998, as cited in Ager and Strang, 2008, p.180). Relations between refugees and non-refugees do not need to be strongly developed to be called 'bridges', also "relatively minor interactions with the local community" and "small acts of friendship" make up bridges according to Ager and Strang (2008) and are believed to have a "disproportionately positive impact on perceptions" (p. 180). The authors, however, do not elaborate on why minimal contact can already have such large effects.

An important role for the development of social connections is ascribed to refugee community organisations, which both serve to "strengthen bonding social capital within refugee groups (through ties of gender, religious affiliation or regional proximity)" and help to promote "bridging between ethnic communities" (Ager and Strang, 2010, p. 591). Ager and Strang (2010) propose that in order to avoid the emergence of 'parallel societies', defined as "separate, very bonded but disconnected communities," integration is dependent on the "complementary development" of 'social bonds' and 'social bridges' (p. 598). While opposing the development of parallel societies, the authors do not address, which impact it could have for the formation of social connections, when refugees or asylum seekers are allocated to or move to areas that are widely perceived as "parallel societies", such as Berlin Neukölln, one of the case studies selected for this study.

Ager and Strang (2004) propose a third form of social connection relevant for integration, namely 'social links', which they define as relations "between individuals and structures of the state, such as government services" (p. 181). To further build on this rather vague definition, one can look at Woolcock's definition, since he informed Ager and Strang's conceptual framework. According to him, social links refers to vertical relations

"of trust and respect between people across power and authority gradients" that "aid people in accessing services and resources" (Woolcock, 2004, p. 656, as cited in Amlani, 2010, pp. 7-11). He claims that social links are particularly important for "poor or marginalised groups who, without links to formal institutions, cannot change their situation no matter how many horizontal ties in the form of bonding and bridging social capital, they have" (Szreter & Woolcock, 2004, p. 656, as cited in Amlani, 2010, p. 11).

The social capital theory of Putnam and Woolcock, from which Ager and Strang borrowed the three social connection domains, has been criticised for the difficulty of quantifying and accurately measuring these relations in a comparative way, as well as for the vagueness and broadness of the terms trying to categorise a range of different relations (Durlauf 2002, as cited in Haynes, 2009, pp. 4-12; Maraffi, 1994; Morlino, 1995). Despite these valid criticisms, the concepts are still of great value for the qualitative study of local refugee integration and proved suitable to serve as an analytical lens in this research (Zetter et al., 2006, as cited in Ager and Strang, 2008, p. 178). To circumvent the risk that the broadness of the terms would lead to vague findings in this study, the concepts have been further specified to fit the underlying study. The present research defines social bonds as strong ties with family and people with a shared sense of identity, based on a similar ethnic, cultural, national or religious background, social bridges as relations with German citizens and social links as relations to social service providers or civil society organisations.

While the conceptual framework of Ager and Strang proposes a variety of domains that in interdependence allegedly constitute integration, it does not elaborate on the way in which the four dimensions of the framework interact with each other. In particular, the framework leaves open if and how social connections and markers and means develop, if foundational rights or facilitators, such as language skills and cultural knowledge are not yet given, which is the case for most of the Syrian and Afghan refugees and asylum seekers

studied in this research. Despite the argument made by Ager and Strang that integration processes start with the moment of a refugee's arrival in the host country, the framework is especially set up for researching integration in the long-term and does not provide any information about the early stage of integration. This is one of the key aspects, in which the underlying study aims to contribute to social integration theory and in particular Ager and Strang's conceptual framework, by means of exploring the development of social connections of Syrian and Afghan refugees and asylum seekers in the initial integration phase.

Research Methodology

Introduction

The following chapter on methodology describes and substantiates the main methods employed in this study to answer the primal question. The overall aim of this research is to identify the most relevant social connections of Syrian and Afghan refugees and asylum seekers in their early phase of integration and - on the basis of that evidence - to contribute to the theory on social integration. For the purpose of this study, a qualitative explorative research methodology was chosen, since this approach is most suitable for gathering "in-depth knowledge" and for "the refinement and elaboration of images and concepts" (Ragin, 2011, p. 113). Moreover, qualitative research is a fitting approach for the representation of "groups outside the mainstream" (Ragin, 2011, p. 114).

The present chapter elaborates on the research design of this study, thereby addressing the challenges encountered during the research process, the various data collection and sampling techniques, the settings in which this research took place, the population that was studied, as well as the limitations and ethical considerations essential to this study.

Research Puzzle

The study at hand aims to research how single, male Syrian and Afghan refugees and asylum seekers between eighteen and thirty-five years old that arrived in Germany within the last year, develop social connections in their early phase of integration. To answer this question the study looks at a sample of Syrian and Afghan refugees and asylum seekers that are hosted in two different refugee accommodations, located in socioeconomically and ethno-culturally contrasting neighbourhoods in Hamburg and Berlin. The following sub-questions were guiding this research:

- (1) Which types of social connections are most important to Afghan and Syrian asylum seekers and refugees in their first year of living in Germany?
- (2) How do refugees and asylum seekers develop social bonds with co-ethnic, co-national or co-religious groups, social bridges with the German host-community and social links with structures of the state?
- (3) How are these social integration processes affected by other factors, including the receiving neighbourhood, the refugee accommodations and the operating social service providers, as well as volunteers and local, civic refugee organisations?

Research Design

The underlying study was carried out in the natural setting of the refugee accommodations, in which the Syrian and Afghan men are currently hosted. This permitted a greater understanding of their current way of life and the way in which they form social connections amongst each other, with volunteers and social workers within the accommodation and with external people. The data was gathered from multiple sources, in particular participant observation, in-depth interviews and document analysis. This

triangulation allowed for an understanding of the complexity of the given research context. Following the desire to understand the "complex social phenomenon," of social-connection-making, understood as one key dimension of integration, a case study approach was chosen, as this method "allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events (...)" (Yin, 2009, p. 4).

Research Process.

The initial idea guiding this research was to explore the effect of the neighbourhood on the social integration of refugees and asylum seekers accommodated in refugee shelters. Realising that the effect of the receiving neighbourhood is not necessarily of primary importance in the initial integration phase of young men, the focus was changed to investigate the social-connection-making behaviour of refugees and asylum seekers. To answer the underlying research questions, two accommodations, both of which opened in January 2016 and are located in socioeconomically and ethno-culturally contrasting neighbourhoods in Berlin and Hamburg, were chosen. Gaining access to these locations was challenging at first. The directors of the accommodations are very reluctant to let researchers speak to their residents, mainly because they do not wish to put the environment of trust and safety, which has been laboriously established, at risk from outside intrusion. However, a lot of persistence allowed me to find agreements with both directors. In Berlin I assisted for one week as a volunteer in the accommodation, with the permission to conduct interviews on two of these days; in Hamburg I volunteered for a week in the tearoom of the accommodation, but I was not allowed to reveal my 'researcher-identity', which also made it impossible for me to conduct official interviews with residents. Meeting residents outside of the accommodation was also prohibited. Instead, I spoke with residents in my role as a volunteer and based my findings on these conversations; moreover I predominantly relied on data triangulation and interviews

conducted with staff, volunteers, members of local civil initiatives and the managing director of the accommodation.

Research Setting.

The study at hand was carried out in two refugee accommodations located in Hamburg and Berlin. This approach enabled access to the research population, staff and volunteers all at the same time, whilst also allowing for participant observation. The precise research locations were chosen for two main reasons, firstly on the basis of their particularly contrasting socioeconomic and ethno-cultural make up and secondly because they both opened at the same time. This enhanced comparability, by guaranteeing that the studied sample had lived in both accommodations for the same period of time. The characteristics of the research setting will be discussed in more detail in chapter three.

Unit of Analysis and Sampling Method.

Unit of Analysis.

Single male Afghan and Syrian refugees and asylum seekers aged eighteen to thirty-five, who have arrived in Germany over the past year, make up the primary unit of analysis in this study. As mentioned in the introduction, they constitute the largest group of refugees and asylum seekers coming to Germany. However, the age group had to be expanded by five years to accommodate the available sample. The distinction between refugees³ and asylum seekers⁴ is made in this study, because the studied population consists of both men with an official refugee status (mostly Syrians) and men, who are still waiting for their status to be clarified (mostly Afghans). These two groups were also chosen for their

³ By definition, a refugee is a person, who resides outside of his or her country of nationality and is unable or unwilling to return because of a 'well-founded' fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality or membership in a particular social group or political opinion (The 1951 Refugee Convention).

⁴ An asylum seeker by contrast, is a person that has crossed an international border in search for protection, but whose claim for refugee status has not yet been decided (UNHCR Asylum seekers, 2016).

differing legal statuses, as this study aims to reveal if and how the asylum status is influencing the integration process.

Sampling Method.

For the selection of the interview participants, a non-probability sampling method was chosen. With regards to the interviews conducted with refugees and asylum seekers a purposive sampling method allowed to select interview participants, who met the criteria of being a single, male Syrian or Afghan refugee or asylum seeker between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five. Since purposive sampling bears the risk of overweighing subgroups that are more readily accessible, it was important to also interview professionals and volunteers, who in their different functions could provide further insight into the studied population. The volunteers were partially chosen through convenience sampling and partially on purpose, based on their experience and knowledge of the case. In addition to this, expert sampling was used to select professionals working at the refugee homes, as well as founders or directors of local civic action groups for refugees, who have demonstrable experience and expertise.

Data Collection Techniques.

Semi-Structured Interviews.

For the purpose of this study, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted. The interviews lasted between thirty and ninety minutes and were held in Farsi, Arabic, English or German. Translators were hired to assist in conducting the interviews in Farsi and Arabic. Nineteen interviews were conducted face-to-face, while two took place over the phone. The questions that were asked were predominantly open-ended, whilst a topic guide was prepared, which was adapted accordingly to suit the individual participants. Given participant consent, all interviews were recorded and transcribed. The transcribed

interviews were systematically coded and analysed with MAXQDA, a software programme that is designed for computer-assisted qualitative data analysis. A full list of the interviewees can be found in the appendix; the names of the interviewed refugees and asylum seekers were changed on grounds of confidentiality. All conversations held with volunteers and refugees or asylum seekers that were not declared as official interviews, thus comprising all dialogs with residents in the accommodation in Hamburg, are not listed. Hence, the number of persons spoken to, over the course of this research, largely exceeds the number of officially declared interviews. Their expertise or experiences were also documented and entered into the empirical findings.

Participant Observation.

In addition to in-depth interviews, participant observation was used as a mode of data collection. This method was applied to study phenomena of social interaction amongst refugees and asylum seekers and between refugees, asylum seekers and various host-society members, as they arose. Moreover, this instrument offered me the "ability to perceive reality from the viewpoint of someone "inside" the case study rather than external to it" (Yin, 2009, p. 111). How the participant observation looked in practice, will be discussed for each case hereafter.

Case I: Berlin Neukölln.

For one week I was a participant observer in the emergency shelter "Karl-Marx-Straße" in Berlin Neukölln. In agreement with the director of the accommodation, I actively emerged in the research setting as a volunteer and participated in a variety of activities with the inhabitants. These included playing billiard and table soccer, eating lunch with the residents, drinking tea and chatting, tutoring German, distributing and organizing clothing donations and going for walks around the neighbourhood.

Case II: Hamburg Harvestehude.

Similarly to the week in Berlin, I engaged for a week as a participant observer in the refugee accommodation "Sophienterrassen", located in Hamburg Harvestehude. However, my engagement here was rather limited, as the only way to get in touch with the inhabitants was to take part in the daily tearoom session (16-19.00h), as a volunteer or 'disguised researcher', which is how the director referred to me. The tearoom is seen as the centrepiece of the accommodation, as it functions as a place for refugees and asylum seekers to meet and mingle with German volunteers from the neighbourhood, to chat, ask general questions, get help with their German homework and relax.

Document Analysis.

In addition to interviews and participant observations, document analysis was used as a secondary instrument for data collection. The studied documents included the websites of the operators of the refugee homes, websites of the local, civic refugee initiatives, the house rules of both accommodations, as well as meeting notes and publications of the respective district administrations.

Limitations

The main limitation of this study is related to the limited sample size, which is only comprised of a very small proportion of the entire population of Syrian and Afghan refugees and asylum seekers in Germany, wherefore the findings must be interpreted with caution. Nonetheless, interviews with experts, professionals and volunteers, who were able to make claims about a much larger sample of male Syrian and Afghan refugees and asylum seekers, reinforced my own findings. Nevertheless, research studies with a much larger sample size are necessary to ensure appropriate generalisation of the findings.

Moreover, the data collection was confined to two refugee accommodations or respectively two contrasting neighbourhoods in Hamburg and Berlin. The replication of the study in more cities and neighbourhoods would likewise enable better generalizability. Another shortcoming of this study is related to the restricted access to refugees and asylum seekers in the accommodation in Hamburg, which however was less of a problem after all, since data triangulation allowed gathering most of the desired information about the social-connection-making behaviour of the studied sample.

With regard to the non-probability sample of refugees and asylum seekers a further limitation is that it was impossible to create a sample in which the members were perfectly comparable in terms of educational and socioeconomic background, which could have been improved if the refugee accommodations would have been more co-operative in pointing out potential interviewees. This however would have conflicted with their intent to not let their residents feel like studied objects. Lastly, the present study has relied only on qualitative methods for data collection and is therefore restricted. Thus, it would be recommendable that future research in this field combines a quantitative and qualitative approach, to substantiate the findings obtained in interviews, with data representable for a greater number of refugees and asylum seekers. Conclusively, since this research is the first of its kind and no data exists on the early-stage integration processes of the studied population, it is recommendable that more data is gathered on this issue over a longer period of time. It would be ideal to study a representable sample of refugees and asylum seekers over the course of several years to see how the social integration processes and social-connection-making patterns evolve over time and investigate how big steps, such as changes regarding asylum status, finding an apprenticeship place, a job or a flat, impact the studied phenomena.

Ethical Considerations

The upholding of ethical standards and practices is fundamental in the "study of a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context" (Yin, 2009, p. 73). Since the unit of analysis in this study consists of individuals, it was ensured that the case study was conducted with special care and sensitivity. Therefore, informed consent was gained from all persons that were interviewed for the present study, after the nature of this research was explained and it was made clear that participation was voluntary. With regard to the interviewed asylum seekers it was highlighted that participation in this study had no effect on their asylum process and could not lead to any repercussions. Privacy and confidentiality was guaranteed to the participants at all times and the names of the interviewed refugees and asylum seekers have been changed. For the conversations held with refugees and asylum seekers in the Hamburg accommodation, it was impossible to get informed consent, but no names or confidential information is published in this study.

CHAPTER III

SETTING THE SCENE

Introduction

The present chapter discusses the local context, in which this study is embedded, by outlining the in many cases diverging policy situation for Afghan and Syrian asylum seekers and refugees in Germany and describing the two case study settings in more depth. Thereby attention will be paid to the hosting neighbourhood, the refugee accommodation, as well as the operating organisations.

Situation for Afghans and Syrians in Germany

In 2015 Germany experienced the highest influx of refugees since the 1990s. The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) registered a total of 476.649 asylum applications, of which 162.510 came from Syrians and 31.902 from Afghans (BAMF, 2016). Of the Afghans that applied for asylum in 2015, around twenty-eight per cent were granted refugee status based on the United Nations-Convention and around fourteen per cent of the applications were rejected. In comparison, around ninety-five per cent of the Syrians that came to Germany received refugee status, which carries a right to residence for at least three years and a claim to family reunification and not a single asylum application was rejected.

This difference can be explained by the way Germany assesses the security situation in both countries. While the German Federal Government does not question the significantly dangerous situation for people living in the civil war torn Syria, the situation in Afghanistan is rated as safe for some regions and as not generally legitimising to seek protection outside of Afghanistan. At the "Conference of Ministers of the Interior" in December 2015, it was decided that the security situation in some regions of the country permits increased deportations to Afghanistan, a practice that had been suspended for many years (Innenministerkonferenz, 2015). Human rights and refugee organisations strongly criticise this practice and underline that the situation in Afghanistan is more devastating, with regard to the humanitarian and security situation, than it had been over the past years (Pro Asyl, 2015). As can be seen in the table below, only a low proportion of the applications for asylum made by Afghans have been processed in 2015. The reason for this is twofold: on the one hand, the BAMF had a general backlog of around 350.000 asylum applications in 2015 alone, on the other hand, some voices argue that Germany uses a strategy of disconcertion to let Afghans wait in limbo, with unprocessed asylum

applications and thereto connected limited rights, to increase the number of "voluntary" returns (Pro Asyl, 2016).

Breakdown by Country of Origin	Applications for Asylum (Jan-Dec 2015)	Decisions on Asylum Applications (Jan-Dec 2015)							
		Total	Recognition of Entitlement to Asylum (Art. 16a and Family Asylum)	Recognition of Refugee Status (§ 3 I Asylum Law)	Subsidiary Protection	Prohibition of Deportation	Total Protection Rate	Rejections (unfounded / manifestly unfounded)	Closed Proceedings
Afghanistan	31.902	5.966	0,8 %	27,8 %	5,4 %	13,6 %	47,6 %	13,7 %	38,6 %
Syria	162.510	105.620	1,1 %	94,7 %	0,1 %	0,2 %	96,0 %	0,0 %	4,0 %

Table 1. Decisions on Asylum Applications by Afghans and Syrians in 2015, including official numbers by the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF, 2016)

The contrasting asylum statuses have considerable impact on the day-to-day lives and opportunities of Afghan asylum seekers. First and foremost, mandatory integration courses on German language, culture and history, as well as Germany's legal system and societal values, are reserved to people, which according to statistics, have good prospects to remain in the country (BAMF, 2016). Whether people with an uncertain asylum status are classified as such, depends on whether the official protection rate for applicants from their country of origin exceeds a fifty per cent threshold. Since the protection rate for Afghans was only 47.6 per cent for 2015 (see table above), which is also a result of the many undecided asylum applications, most Afghans were not allowed to attend integration courses, but had to depend on non-official German classes offered at refugee accommodations, by local, civic action groups or pay for courses themselves. Apart from that, Germany has not yet provided enough German courses for refugees and asylum seekers with a good prospect of permanent residence; there is a current lack of approximately 200.000 spaces (Caspari, 2016, p. 2). Nonetheless, a new "Integration Law"

still provides that entitled refugees, who refuse to visit the integration courses, will be sanctioned.

With the alleged goal of promoting integration and reducing the risks of failed integration, the German Federal Government passed a disputed "Integration Law" in July 2016 that is aimed at regulating the rights and responsibilities of asylum seekers in Germany. While the law shall not be examined in detail in this research, a few aspects are worth mentioning. The new law provides that people with official refugee status have better access to vocational trainings, integration courses and social benefits. The Expert Council of German Foundations on Integration and Migration stresses that asylum seekers, especially from Afghanistan are discriminated against through these measures and that the policy is counterproductive for integration (Caspari, 2015, p. 1).

On arrival in Germany refugees are allocated to a federal province and an initial reception centre by means of a distribution key, named "Königsteiner Schlüssel" that takes the population size and tax revenues of the sixteen German federal states into consideration. According to the "Königsteiner Schlüssel" Berlin was responsible for five per cent of the refugees that came to Germany in 2015 and Hamburg for 2,5 per cent, with both cities being responsible for approximately the same proportions in 2016 (BAMF, 2016). In Hamburg, refugees stay at the initial reception centres for three months and then either move into a more long-term refugee accommodation, like the one chosen for this study, with higher standards than the reception centres (e.g. kitchen facility, bathroom shared with a small number of people) or their own flat with government subsidies. In Berlin, refugees can stay in the reception centres for up to six months before they can move into more long-term accommodations or their own flat. However, on the ground reality looks different; due to a serious housing shortage in Berlin, many refugees exceed this time period and/or live in emergency shelters for long and often uncertain periods of time. These

were opened as a result of a reception centre shortage, often having even lower standards.

Due to the new "Integration Law" after the allocation to initial reception centres, both asylum seekers and recognised refugees will in future, as long as they have not found a work placement, no longer be allowed to choose their place of residence. The reasoning behind this is twofold: firstly, many refugees are attracted to the metropolitan cities Berlin, Hamburg, Munich and Cologne, especially because of the large migrant communities in these cities, which leaves many towns and villages with often better integration offers with empty facilities, while the popular cities are overrun; and secondly, the objective behind this regulation is to prevent refugees from settling in purely migrant areas, to prevent the formation of "migrant ghettos" (Caspari, 2015, p. 2). The integration law authorises regional governments to decide where refugees are allowed to reside for the following three years, either through allocating them to specific areas, or by banning them from living in certain districts, especially when it can be expected that the migrant will not use German as the main lingua franca in that area (Caspari, 2015, p. 2). How this policy will look in practice and whether the Berlin government will prohibit refugees from residing in areas such as Neukölln, which will be described hereafter, is still to be tested.

The contrast between most Syrians and Afghans in Germany is also reflected in their right to work. Officially recognised refugees with a residence permit face barely any working restrictions. Unlike asylum seekers and 'tolerated' persons, who are not allowed to seek work in Germany in their first three months and for the following fifteen months thereafter, the Federal Labour Office must agree to each job they want to take up; this is often impeding, as the Labour Office does a "priority review" to check, whether another German or EU/EEC citizen is available to do the job (BAMF, 2016).

Conclusively, this section has illustrated how the asylum status, as well as the statistic for the prospect of permanent residence impacts the lives of refugees and asylum

seekers in Germany in various realms and especially, how being an Afghan or Syrian can largely impact ones new life and integration in Germany. In the following sections the case study settings, Hamburg Harvestehude and Berlin Neukölln, as well as the refugee accommodations and the operating organisations will be described.

Case Study Settings

Neukölln (Berlin)

Neukölln is a socially disadvantaged district with around 167.000 inhabitants in the South-West of Berlin. The neighbourhood is known to be a highly diverse neighbourhood with the Berlin wide highest rate of residents with immigration background, amounting to fifty-three per cent of which most are from Turkish or Arabic descent (Statistik Berlin Brandenburg, 2016). The unemployment rate is 15,1 per cent (amongst foreigners thirty-eight per cent) and the proportion of people on social security is twenty-nine per cent (amongst foreigners thirty-eight per cent).⁵ Over twenty per cent are without a school leaving qualification and thirty-four per cent without a vocational training qualification. These statistics clearly demonstrate, why Neukölln is seen as a so-called 'problem-neighbourhood' and is often stated as an emblem for failed integration in the German media landscape (Göll, 2016, p. 6; van Laak, 2016, p. 7; Magnis, 2016, p. 8). Nonetheless, Neukölln is a magnet point for German and international students and young professionals, not only because of its fairly cheap rents, but also for its vibrant multicultural atmosphere that often reminds of a Turkish bazar blended with young and 'hip' cafés and bars.

⁵ The underlying statistic defines a foreigner as someone without a German passport (Neukölln-Programm 2015/2016, 2015).

Emergency Shelter "Karl-Marx-Straße".

Neukölln is currently officially housing about 1500 refugees. 600 of them live at the emergency shelter "Karl-Marx-Straße" from which I drew my sample. The first 200 male residents moved in in January 2016 and only after I had conducted most of my research the number of residents rose to 600. The emergency shelter is housed in a former 'C&A' fashion retail store that is four storeys high and spans across 9.200 m². Partition walls separate the sleeping rooms that are designed for eight people to share. The single men live separated from the families that started moving in, in April. The fourth storey is in the process of being used as a recreational room. The ground floor functions as a dining room, where a Lebanese caterer provides three meals per day and as a common room, where the residents hangout, drink tea and chat with one another, play table soccer or billiard.

The refugee accommodation is operated by a Catholic aid organisation, called *Malteser Hilfsdienst*⁹. The *Malteser Hilfsdienst* employs twenty social workers at the accommodation, as well as an around-the-clock security service and cleaning personnel. The German classes, which take place three times a week, are supported by two local civic organisations. Since the high refugee influx to Germany in 2015, the *Malteser Hilfsdienst* operates refugee homes throughout the country for over 50.000 refugees.

Harvestehude (Hamburg)

Harvestehude, known for its Wilhelminian and art nouveau villas surrounded by parks and the Alster (river), is a wealthy neighbourhood with approximately 17.500 inhabitants in the heart of Hamburg (Hamburger Stadtteil-Profil, 2015). It is a quiet and idyllic area not far from the city centre. A protestant church, a weekly market, small boutiques, a few cafés,

⁹ The *Malteser Hilfsdienst* operates over 700 projects in Germany, including facilities for elderly and homeless people, hospitals and hospices, first aid and nursing education programmes, civil protection, emergency service, refugee aid, youth work and addiction work (Malteser in Deutschland, 2016).

delis and supermarkets in the high price segment characterise the borough. The average income per taxpayer was 88.273 € in 2010 (compared to 35.567 € average for Hamburg) (Hamburger Stadtteil-Profil 2015, 2015). Demographically speaking, Harvestehude is an 'old' neighbourhood, with a proportion of residents over fifty as high as forty per cent compared to only thirteen per cent being between eighteen and twenty-nine years old (Hamburger Stadtteil-Profil, 2015). The unemployment rate amounts to 3,3 per cent and the percentage of social housing to 1,1 per cent. The proportion of residents with immigration background lies at twenty-four per cent, with most residents coming from Northern-/Western Europe (GB, NL, DK), Southwest Europe (PT, IT, FR) and the Near East (mostly Iran).¹⁰ The refugee accommodation, which will be described hereafter, is located in the street "Sophienterrassen" in walking distance to the Alster, where currently the most exclusive quarter of premium-apartments is being built, with a square meter costing up to 6.500 € (Veit, 2013).

Refugee Accommodation "Sophienterrasse".

In January 2016, the only refugee home in Harvestehude, comprised of twenty-three flats for 190 refugees and asylum seekers mostly from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and Eritrea opened its doors after two years of legal dispute. The refugee accommodation, which is situated on former army premises that were converted into flats for refugees for around 2.8 million euros, was being planned since 2013 but was disrupted by provisional construction-blocks that resulted from complaints filed by a few residents (Sophienterrasse: Die

¹⁰ Statistic Nord uses a wide definition for people with migration background: "the population group with a migration background consists of all persons who have immigrated into the territory of today's Federal Republic of Germany after 1949, and of all foreigners born in Germany and all persons born in Germany who have at least one parent who immigrated into the country or was born as a foreigner in Germany. The migration status of a person is determined based on his/her own characteristics regarding immigration, naturalisation and citizenship and the relevant characteristics of his/her parents." (Persons with a migration background, 2016)

Flüchtlinge sind da, 2016). Finally, a settlement was reached, in which it was agreed that 190 refugees and asylum seekers would move into the premises instead of the originally planned 220 and that the building would only be used as refugee accommodation for a set period of ten years (Sophienterrasse: Die Flüchtlinge sind da, 2016).

The accommodation houses primarily families from Syria and Afghanistan and forty single men from mixed backgrounds that live together in shared apartments. Each flat has a kitchen facility and a bathroom, which offers more independence and privacy than the reception centres, where refugees in Hamburg are accommodated in their first three months. The building comprises several community rooms in the basement, including a tearoom, which functions as a daily meeting point for volunteers and inhabitants, a child care room, a bicycle repair shop and a larger event room for special occasions. The refugee accommodation in Harvestehude is operated by the city owned social service provider, *Fördern & Wohnen*¹¹ (*Supporting & Living, F&W*) that is in charge of most reception centres and refugee accommodations in Hamburg.

In February 2014, during the time of uncertainty and legal dispute, fifty-eight citizens, mostly residents from the neighbourhood founded the *Refugee Aid Harvestehude Association (RAHA)* to advocate in favour of the refugee accommodation and to set up structures to support and welcome the refugees that would hopefully be able to move once the dispute was settled. By the time the refugee accommodation opened in January 2016, the association was around 200 members strong and welcomed the new neighbours with a variety of leisure activities and working groups, including language courses, a buddy programme that connects refugees with citizens wanting to offer support to an individual, child care and groups for gardening, theatre, job placement and many more activities.

¹¹F&W also operates over eighty residential and care facilities including accommodations for homeless people, people with mental and physical disabilities, people with addictions and nursing homes.

RAHA volunteers also organise the tearoom of the accommodation. Both *F&W* and *RAHA* see it as their main task to support the refugees' integration process in all its facets.

Conclusion

In conclusion, chapter three has set the scene for the subsequent data analysis, by outlining a few important asylum statistics and integration policies relevant to understanding the conditions for Syrian and Afghan refugees and asylum seekers in Germany and describing the two contrasting research settings more closely.

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

The present chapter is devoted to the analysis of the empirical findings obtained in this study. It aims to answer the question of how single, male Syrian and Afghan refugees and asylum seekers between eighteen and thirty-five years old, develop social connections in their early phase of integration. First and foremost, the data collected in this study emphasised that the initial integration phase of the studied population is as Kossolapow (1987) characterises it: Syrian and Afghan refugees and asylum seekers in this study have unrealistic expectations regarding their educational or vocational prospects, they lack a material base and are in a support-receiving position, experiencing socio-cultural and psychosocial insecurity. The young men find themselves waiting in limbo, living in overcrowded refugee accommodations with a lack of privacy and independence, without a job or profoundly developed German skills, and in many cases without a clarified refugee

status in a foreign country. In such a precarious situation, social connections are assumed to be of utmost importance. Moreover, integration theory highlights that social connections are an integral component of integration.

Against this background, the present chapter aims to answer the following questions: which forms of social connections are developed at this stage and to what extent, and which factors seem to affect the social integration processes of Syrian and Afghan refugees and asylum seekers? This chapter is divided into three sections: section one discusses the most important social relations and support contact points for refugees and asylum seekers in their initial integration phase; the second section covers how refugees and asylum seekers develop social bonds, social bridges and social links during this settling-in period; and lastly, the third section examines, how the receiving neighbourhood, the hosting refugee accommodations and their operating social service providers, as well as volunteers, local civic initiatives for refugees and other factors affect the early social integration processes of the studied sample.

Who Matters Most?

All respondents that have fled to Germany in hope of a better or more secure life have left their families behind; either in the cities or towns they fled from, or in refugee camps in Jordan, Turkey, or Lebanon. For the majority of the interviewees, the family constitutes the most important social contact and resource for emotional support, which they are greatly missing in their current situation. Most are in touch with their families on a daily basis, through various social media channels. Many are very concerned about their safety and these worries often keep them from focusing on things that are currently expected of them, such as learning German. Due to strong regulations concerning family reunifications and the dangerous exodus routes, most respondents have to endure not seeing their relatives for

an undefined period of time. One of the respondents, who is in touch with his parents and siblings in Syria almost everyday, phrased his situation like this:

*"I miss my country, my family, my friends. If I do anything, I always think about Syria and my family."*¹²

Besides family, the most important social contacts for the refugees and asylum seekers studied are their housemates. Many friendships have developed between the residents over the past months, often amongst people with the same ethnic or linguistic background, but also across cultures. Some already knew each other from the initial reception centres and others are friends with people they met on the flight to Germany or upon arrival. The men support each other, mostly by distracting one another from the serious problems and hurdles many are faced with, through for example, engaging in joint leisure activities. Nevertheless, it appears that at the end of the day everyone is alone with their problems, fears, or traumas and that few have found someone that can provide for the support they would normally receive from their families or closest friends.

At the third level, the organisations operating the refugee accommodations, in this case the Catholic aid organisation *Malteser Hilfsdienst* and to a lesser extent the social service provider *Fördern & Wohnen*, play a fundamental role in the social support network of the newcomers. Every respondent in the "Karl-Marx-Straße" accommodation highlighted the *Malteser* staff's friendliness and pronounced readiness to help. One respondent formulated it this way:

"Everyone who works here is my friend. Not friends friends. But they help me a lot and I really enjoy to speak to them."¹³

¹² Author's interview on 11 March 2016 with Ismail (19), Syrian refugee.

On a personal and social level, the *Malteser* staff is more important to the refugees and asylum seekers in Neukölln than the staff at *Fördern & Wohnen* is to the residents at the "Sophienterrassen" (Hamburg). This follows from the fact that the *Malteser* accommodation, which hosts three times as many people, has a lot more social workers that are daily contact persons for the residents, and the life of the residents in Berlin revolves much more around their accommodation, than is the case in Hamburg Harvestehude. This has to do with various factors, including the daily full board and the large communal and recreational areas, which attracts many residents to spend a lot of their time there. Another reason may be that the *Malteser* team comprises of several employees, who speak Arabic or Farsi, which eases the language barrier for many refugees and asylum seekers and encourages them to turn to the *Malteser* staff with their problems and concerns. In contrast to this, the refugee home in Harvestehude is comprised only of German and English speaking staff members who strictly do not work with interpreters. Their idea behind this measure is to promote a fast German-learning process and they are convinced that this can increase interpersonal trust building between staff and the residents.

Outside of the accommodation, the mosque plays an important role for many Syrian and Afghan men in their new life in Germany. Many of the Syrian refugees visiting Arabic mosques go there not only to pray but often also to socialise with other Arabic men. For the Afghans, who mostly go to Turkish mosques, the mosque is in most cases only a spiritual room and less of a social meeting point, because of the linguistic and cultural barrier.

¹³ Author's interview on 11 March 2016 with Samir (34), Syrian refugee.

Developing Social Connections

Social Bonds

'Social bonds', referring to relations between refugees or asylum seekers and persons of the same ethnic, linguistic, religious or cultural background or persons with a shared social identity, are the most pronounced form of social relations Syrian and Afghan refugees and asylum seekers experience in their initial integration phase in Germany. The most important social bonds refugees and asylum seekers have, continue to be with close relatives. Next to that, relations with fellow housemates in the refugee accommodations make up important social bonds, and for some, especially Syrian respondents, contacts at the mosque are important bonds. All Syrians underlined that they liked Neukölln for its Arabic flair and the fact that the neighbourhood is populated and frequented by people "like them". Similarly, the refugees and asylum seekers accommodated in Hamburg Harvestehude spend most of their time in areas where they encounter people from similar backgrounds. This strongly underlines the importance of having a sense of belonging in the otherwise foreign country and connecting with people with a shared identity.

Social Bridges

In the context of this study, the term 'social bridges' is used to define ties and loose contacts between Syrian and Afghan refugees or asylum seekers and German citizens. Nearly all refugees and asylum seekers report that they have barely gotten in touch with Germans outside their accommodation. Most social interactions with Germans outside the accommodation are limited to small conversations in the supermarket and the street or public transport, when for instance a young man asks the way. Several respondents highlighted the friendliness and patience they experienced, when in contact with Germans. However, a few also reported that they received suspicious looks, when greeting

pedestrians on the street and especially when offering help to women, for example when offering to carry their heavy bags or making a seat free for a woman on the subway; small acts of friendliness that are seen as completely normal in their home countries, where it is even considered rude not to do them.

Overall, more pronounced social bridges between refugees or asylum seekers and German citizens that go beyond brief superficial contacts prove to be rare in the initial integration phase. The relations between refugees or asylum seekers and volunteers at the accommodations are reportedly also on a more superficial level, and relationships at eye-level have not yet developed. As a reason for this, all respondents highlight the language barrier and some make reference to the cultural barrier, stressing that they first need to understand, how Germans think and act, before they can properly interact with them.

Social Links

According to the definition of Woolcock, 'social links' refer to vertical relations of "trust and respect" between refugees and asylum seekers and "people across power and authority gradients" that "aid people in accessing services and resources" (Woolcock, 2004, p. 656, as cited in Amlani, 2010, pp. 7-11). In the current study, the third form of social contacts consists of the social links between the studied population and staff of the *Malteser* and *Fördern & Wohnen*, as well as civic refugee support organisations. As mentioned earlier, these links prove to be very important for the studied refugees and asylum seekers, as they function as a gateway to the wider German society and the connected formal institutions. The described organisations function as the primary contact points for refugees and asylum seekers for all sorts of bureaucratic or formal requests. Moreover, the organisations running the studied refugee accommodations are very concerned with assisting their residents in getting into educational programmes and apprenticeship places, or helping them to find work or their own place, either in their own capacity, through volunteers, or by connecting

their residents to other relevant contact points, where they can receive support. In this way social relations with staff members of these organisations are the most success generating form of social connection in terms of professional advancement for the studied population of Syrian and Afghan refugees and asylum seekers in their early integration phase.

Conclusion

The obtained data suggests that the three types of social connections are not evenly balanced in the present case study. Social bonds amongst refugees and asylum seekers and with external people, who share the same or 'similar' ethnic, cultural, or linguistic backgrounds, strongly outweigh social bridges with German host society members. According to social integration theory and Ager and Strang's conceptual framework, such an imbalance is undesirable for integration. Moreover, the preferred 'mixing' of people who are sociodemographically and ethno-culturally different, which is crucial for the 'two way' interaction at the heart of integration, remains absent in the investigated initial integration phase.

Influencing Factors

Based on the conviction that external factors can have an influence on the social integration processes of Syrian and Afghan refugees and asylum seekers in their initial integration phase, the present study seeks to investigate the effect of a number of external factors on the social integration processes of the newcomers. The findings are presented hereafter.

Neighbourhood

Contrary to the initial assumption that the characteristics of the refugee-receiving neighbourhood remarkably impact the early integration phase of refugees and asylum seekers, the data gathered in Harvestehude (Hamburg) and Neukölln (Berlin) suggested

otherwise. The data clearly indicates that the Syrians accommodated in Neukölln feel at home there and enjoy the Arabic lifestyle, which is significant to the borough. Most respondents said something along these lines:

*"The atmosphere in Neukölln is very similar to Syria. There are many markets here and many Arabs. I can find everything here. For example I can buy halal food or go to the mosque close by, where I can practice my religion. I feel like in Syria. It helps me to feel at home here."*¹⁴

By contrast, the Afghan men feel less comfortable in Neukölln, since they feel excluded from the dominant Arabic and Turkish culture.

Both interviewed chairwomen and members of the *Refugee Aid Harvestehude Association (RAHA)* are convinced that Harvestehude (Hamburg) is perfectly suited for the task of integrating the newly arrived refugees and asylum seekers into German society, since the neighbourhood excels through its network, resources and the amount of people willing to help. The evidence suggests that this may very well be the case for the majority of families, accommodated at the "Sophienterrassen", but not for most single Syrian and Afghan men. The young men spend almost no time at the "Sophienterrassen", arguably because "they feel the social discrepancy," as S. Clasing, coordinator at the refugee accommodation in Harvestehude explained.¹⁵ Instead, they seek out the familiar in other areas, frequented by people with similar ethnic, cultural or religious backgrounds, such as the Central Station or the "Steindamm", a street, which could be referred to as the "Neukölln of Hamburg". Here they meet up with fellow countrymen, do grocery shopping,

¹⁴ Author's interview on 11 March 2016 with Akbar (32), Syrian refugee.

¹⁵ Author's interview on 20 April 2016 with S. Clasing, coordinator at the refugee accommodation, "Sophienterrasse" (Hamburg).

visit the mosque or just hang around and blend in with like-ethnic groups. A situation depicted by S. Clasing illustrates this phenomenon:

"Recently, at an outing where we went to the Alster, I heard that many of the residents have never been there before. When I suggested that we could grill here in the summer they said 'no, rather in the Stadtpark'. It is much more mixed there. They don't go to the Alster, but to the Stadtpark, even though they need to take the subway there and the Alster is only a few steps away."¹⁶

It follows, that in order for the male refugees and asylum seekers to benefit from the local network, for example in terms of finding an internship or improving their German skills, the association needs to put more efforts into establishing contact with the male residents to make clear to them that they can benefit from the local network in Harvestehude and from engaging with German volunteers. Currently, the organisation largely fails to reach this target group with its integrative measures.

Overall, the evidence suggests that the receiving neighbourhood is of secondary importance in the initial integration phase, as the newcomers seek out the areas they feel most comfortable in - which are not the German-dominated, middle and upper class neighbourhoods - regardless of where they are accommodated.

Refugee Accommodations and Operating Social Service Providers

In both settings, the organisations operating the refugee homes are a very important contact point for the inhabitants. Their advice and support is sought in various different areas. A social worker at the *Malteser* refugee accommodation describes, how the requests vary between:

¹⁶ Author's interview on 20 April 2016 with S. Clasing, coordinator at the refugee accommodation "Sophienterrasse" (Hamburg).

"Can you find me a doctor - this person bullied me - can you give me condoms - can you patch up my wound."¹⁷

The directors of both of the studied accommodations are very concerned to know what problems and concerns their residents have. They are very supportive and see it as their principal task to promote the integration of their residents, by all possible means. The director of the refugee home in Harvestehude, C. Smolny instructed the volunteers that all more serious residents' requests ought to be directed to her and her two staff members. She thereby aims to prevent any misunderstandings and counteract wrong advice, especially with regard to asylum-related questions.

Furthermore, both directors are eager to create a trusting and warm environment in the refugee accommodations. However, they seem to have different approaches to reaching these goals. The director in Hamburg aims to achieve trust by treating all residents the same way and demonstrating that she will always stick to her word; for example by making sure everyone receives the same donations or if the number of spots for a soccer tournament is full, the director will ensure that the men, who did not get a chance to play this time, will do so next time, no matter how hard others might be begging. The director in Berlin aims to build up trust by being on an informal and casual basis with the residents, offering them a shoulder to cry on or a place to share their stories and problems. You also often see him fooling around with the residents and having informal chats.

A significant difference between the two accommodations is reflected in the way refugees are taught and expected to communicate. While the director in Hamburg attaches great importance to using the formal form of address and instructs all volunteers to only use

¹⁷ Author's interview on 16 April 2016 with Dominique, social worker at the *Malteser* emergency shelter "Karl-Marx-Straße" (Berlin).

the "Sie" form (comparable to the Dutch "U") in conversation with the refugees and asylum seekers, the refugee home director in Berlin comments on this strategy:

"A rule stating that the formal "Sie" - form must be used is completely absurd. Totally stupid. Because using the formal "Sie"- form is a question of respect, but here it is about friendship and trust and not about building a barrier between personnel and refugees. And in my opinion using the formal mode of communicating increases such a barrier. This is something we clearly do not want. Using the "Du" creates empathy and trust. I can use the "Sie"- form in a job interview."¹⁸

While this seems like a small example, it is very illustrative of the different environments experienced at the two refugee accommodations under investigation. While everything goes in an orderly, rather strict manner in the "Sophienterrassen" (Hamburg) and the contact between the young male residents and the managing director and her two staff members is more on a practical level, the relations between the residents and staff members of the "Karl-Marx-Straße" accommodation (Berlin) seem more friendly, close and informal.

Overall, it follows from participant observation and numerous interviews that despite the accommodation in Neukölln being of lower standards and privacy, the residents felt more at home there than in the accommodation in Harvestehude.

Volunteers

Volunteers wanting to support refugees and asylum seekers in a variety of ways, are numerous in both of the studied neighbourhoods. A few nationalised foreigners and especially German students and people from the creative industry, aged twenty to thirty-

¹⁸ Author's interview on 15 April 2016 with R. Düttemeyer, managing director of the *Malteser* emergency shelter "Karl-Marx-Straße" (Berlin).

five, make up the largest group of volunteers at the accommodation in Neukölln. In contrast to this, the volunteers at the accommodation in Harvestehude are predominantly retired, well off German women. Most Syrian and Afghan respondents reported that for the most part, they have only gotten in contact with volunteers through the German tutoring classes and a few joint leisure activities organised by volunteers, such as a soccer tournament or a picnic in the park.

German volunteers seem to not play an important role in the personal lives of the studied refugees and asylum seekers. Several reasons can be named for this: firstly, linguistic and cultural barriers, as well as socioeconomic and demographic discrepancies between German volunteers and refugees or asylum seekers can be named; secondly, fluctuation and unreliability of volunteers can make it difficult to build up personal relations; thirdly, the leisure activities that volunteers offer are often directed towards women and children and are less popular amongst men; lastly, volunteers in refugee aid are predominantly female and it is alien to many Syrian and Afghan men to build up friendships with women. However, volunteers from the same ethnic, cultural, or linguistic background proved to be of greater importance for the residents. One Lebanese volunteer, who also came as a refugee to Germany decades ago, was portrayed as the 'good soul' of the refugee accommodation in Neukölln. She spends all of her free time at the shelter and became like a sister to many residents. In an interview Majeda¹⁹ described that many of the young Arabic men share their worries and problems with her. This reinforces the earlier made claim that social bonds are of utmost importance to refugees and asylum seekers in the initial integration phase and that it is much easier for them to open up to someone with a similar background.

¹⁹ Author's interview on 30 March 2016 with Majeda (30), Lebanese, volunteer at *Malteser* emergency shelter "Karl-Marx-Straße".

Local Civic Refugee Support Initiatives

Local civic initiatives aim to support refugees and asylum seekers in all spheres of life in their settling-in phase and prospective life in Germany. They often fill the gaps, where government services prove insufficient and ease many of the hurdles refugees and asylum seekers are confronted with. Beyond that, many of these groups and organisations are especially concerned with promoting the integration of these newcomers and creating contact points between refugees, asylum seekers and citizens of the host society. For this study, interviews were conducted with three local refugee support initiatives. *RAHA* in Hamburg Harvestehude consists almost exclusively of German members and offers support to refugees and asylum seekers from all backgrounds, while the two initiatives interviewed in Neukölln are specifically targeted towards Arabic or Farsi speaking refugees and asylum seekers.

The data suggests that young Syrian and Afghan men mostly seek support from associations where their native language is spoken and the members and employees share a similar ethnic, religious or cultural background to them. This reinforces the finding that on a personal level, people with 'similar identities' play a more important role than Germans in the early integration phase of refugees and asylum seekers. *RAHA* is of interest to families and children living at the refugee home, mostly due to the leisure activities it offers. However, this seems to hold less true for young Syrian and Afghan men. They do attend their free German classes and it is imaginable that they will use *RAHA*'s services more, once they are more settled in Germany and for instance have acquired a work permit, as *RAHA* offers a working-group specifically targeted at assisting refugees and asylum seekers with job search, CV-writing and the likes. However, at the moment the interest in the activities offered by *RAHA* seems relatively minor, which might also have to do with the fact that Middle Eastern countries do not have such a pronounced leisure culture as

Germany, where it is normal that people have multiple hobbies. Nader Khalil, director of the *German-Arabic Centre*, who comments on the broad range of leisure activities offered by *RAHA* and many other German organised local civic initiatives and the seemingly absent interest of male refugees and asylum seekers in these offers, reinforces this finding:

*"They come with tea-room and knitting class and what not - now I got a flyer that invites refugees for gardening (laughs) - how shall someone come from Syria to then do gardening here. I mean there is nothing wrong with it, it is all good. But he is still occupied with the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees; he is with his thoughts by his family at home. It is not easy. Such a huge readiness to help is great and something I have never experienced before in Germany, but they are missing the intercultural competency, they do the things they can and are used to do, but that is often not complementary with what the refugees want and it does not fit together. But maybe this will be learned from experience."*²⁰

The comment of N. Khalil illustrates how the offers and intended integrative measures of many civil society organisations for refugees fail to generate interest among Syrian and Afghan men of the studied age group. As the quote strongly depicts, young men who have recently fled to Germany have more serious worries than to think about, which leisure activity they want to join, something that according to N.Khalil, H. Nowari²¹ and C. Smolny²² is in any case something alien to their culture.

The support or advice sought at the *German-Arabic Centre* and the *Association of Iranian and Afghan Refugees* is far-reaching, including legal counselling, bureaucratic requests, family reunification requests, requests for schooling or vocational training, mental health counselling, German classes and many more. Staff members of these associations

²⁰ Author's interview on 8 July 2016 with Nader Khalil, director of the *German - Arabic Centre*, Berlin.

²¹ Author's interview on 6 July 2016 with Hamid Nowzari, director of the *Association of Iranian and Afghan Refugees*, Berlin.

²² Author's interview on 18 March 2016 Caroline Smolny, director of the *Förder & Wohnen* refugee accommodation "Sophienterrasse", Hamburg.

also frequently visit refugee accommodations to play a mediating role between conflicting persons or groups, moreover they see it as their duty to educate their clients about issues like the German legal framework and the role and freedom of women in Germany. Both directors have emphasised that they have over fifty visitors daily and receive calls and emails from refugees and asylum seekers from all over Germany.

Conclusively, the study has found that male Syrian and Afghan refugees and asylum seekers are especially interested in receiving practical support that can advance their current position, instead of taking part in leisure activities offered by local civic initiatives; and ideally they want to receive this support from organisations where their language is spoken and they can relate to the staff members on the basis of their own background and identity.

Other Factors

The data has revealed that numerous external factors, such as the refugee accommodation, the neighbourhood, volunteers and local refugee support initiatives can have an influence on the (social) integration processes of male Syrian and Afghan refugees and asylum seekers, some more, some less. However, if, how, and how fast a refugee or asylum seeker integrates into German society also largely depends on his intrinsic motivation, willingness, and openness, and in many cases on his level of education. The discrepancy between the respondents reached from one Afghan asylum seeker, formerly an engineer in Kabul, who reached a B2 level in German after only eight months, through courses that he paid for himself with his monthly allowance, because he is not eligible to visit the official integration course and the classes taught in the accommodation do not meet his needs, to the majority of interviewees, who speak very little or no German and spend their days rather passively waiting in limbo, hoping for things like a job, a flat or an apprenticeship

place to come to them. In other words, a few, irrespective of their asylum status, try to take their fate into their own hands, wanting to integrate into German society and build a life as fast as possible, while most are inactive. To conclude, external factors, such as the ones discussed in this chapter can be important bridge-builders for asylum seekers and refugees, promoting their integration, but intrinsic factors are not to be underestimated.

Conclusion

The main conclusion to take from this chapter is that the three investigated forms of social connections are in imbalance. Social bonds between the studied population and people from a similar background with a shared sense of identity, and social links, mostly represented through contacts with the accommodation operators *Malteser Hilfsdienst* and *Fördern & Wohnen* strongly outweigh social bridges with German host society members. The following chapter summarises the most important empirical findings, discusses the consequent theoretical implications of these findings and presents the inferences and recommendations that can be derived from the research findings.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

Introduction

In light of the high influx of young, male Syrian and Afghan refugees and asylum seekers Germany experienced in the last year and a half and the related considerable challenge of integration, this research was set out to explore one aspect of the early-stage integration of this particular group of newcomers. More specifically, the underlying study investigated

how Syrian and Afghan single male asylum seekers and refugees between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five develop social connections in their initial integration phase in Germany. To answer this question a qualitative case study was conducted that involved interviewing refugees, asylum seekers, social workers, staff members, volunteers, and representatives of local civil society initiatives at two different refugee accommodations. The two are located in socioeconomically and ethno-culturally contrasting neighbourhoods in the German metropolitan cities Hamburg and Berlin.

Borrowing from Ager and Strang's multifaceted integration model, this study sought to dive into the "social connections" dimension of their conceptual framework, which they propose as one of the four core defining domains of integration. Informed by Putnam and Woolcock's social capital theory, this domain is divided into three types of social relations, namely social bridges, social bonds and social links, which have been defined in chapter two and were tested for their relevance and application in chapter four. This concluding chapter is divided into five sections, including a summary of the main empirical findings, a discussion of the theoretical implications, as well as policy recommendations and suggestions for future research.

Empirical Findings

First and foremost, the present study revealed that social bonds with families back home, as well as with fellow housemates, often from the same national or linguistic background, strongly outweigh social bridges with German host society members. Contacts with Germans had almost exclusively been established with volunteers and social workers at the refugee accommodations, but even these interactions were rarely "peer-to-peer". Aside from that, the population of the study established social links to the organisations operating the refugee accommodations, as well as with local, civic refugee support organisations. With regards to civic initiatives it was established that refugees look for practical support

that is tailored to their needs and is beneficial to their personal advancement, rather than for leisure activities, which are offered by many local, civic organisations. The importance of experiencing a feeling of belonging in a foreign country was clearly visible in the way in which the studied population sought out areas that are frequented by people with the same ethnic, cultural or linguistic background. Similarly, individuals tended to open up more easily to volunteers, social workers and members of refugee support organisations that spoke their language and to which they could relate.

Theoretical Implications

This study has contributed insights on the question how male Syrian and Afghan refugees and asylum seekers develop social connections in their early integration phase in Germany. Ager and Strang, whose conceptual framework informed the analytical framework of this study, underline that integration starts with the day of a refugee's arrival in a new host country. However, the authors do not provide any theory or empirical findings that focus on this particular settling-in phase. Therefore, this study has contributed to social integration theory by exploring how social connections, one of the four key domains of integration according to Ager and Strang, develop in the initial integration phase of refugees and asylum seekers. Moreover, it has added a gender perspective, by specifically focusing on the social integration processes of men and applying the framework in the particularly timely and relevant context of the latest migratory wave to Germany.

The present study reinforces Ager and Strang's proposition that relations with people that have a shared sense of identity, such as relatives and people from the same religious, cultural, linguistic or national background are a critical priority for refugees and asylum seekers. In light of the fact that the population of this study has hardly developed any social bridges with German citizens outside their accommodation environment, the present study reinforces the claim made by various social integration theorists (Bosswick

and Heckmann, 2006; Esser, 2001). They all have argued that the acquisition of certain cultural knowledge and competencies, including learning the language of the host country are essential requirements for the social integration of refugees and asylum seekers.

Moreover, the present study has reinforced Esser's claim that many behavioural patterns native to the home countries of refugees and asylum seekers become invalidated in their new surroundings, which is one potential impeding factor to the development of social bridges. Furthermore, it cannot be ruled out that Esser's proposition - that citizenship and the acquisition of an occupational position are indispensable for the establishment of such relations - holds true. Furthermore, no evidence was found supporting Rudiger's (2006) argument that the asylum status impacts the ability of refugees and asylum seekers to form positive relations with established residents. However, the study has revealed which difficulties many Afghans are subjected to as a result of their in many cases disadvantageous asylum statuses. Thus, Ager and Strang's proposition that differing legal statuses of refugees become irrelevant at the local level proves false for the investigated Afghans in this case study.

Various social integration scholars, including Ager and Strang stress the importance of local civic organisations for the integration of refugees. In regard to this, the present study found that such organisations often fail to attract young men with their offers. Instead, organisations tailored towards giving practical support to refugees and asylum seekers from certain, specific backgrounds constitute a more important point of contact for most. It was also revealed that male refugees rarely seek out contact with volunteers that are ethno-culturally and sociodemographically opposite to them. In addition, the predominant findings do not support the theory that personal relations between refugees and volunteers strongly contribute to easing psychological stress and dealing with the insecurities and hurdles many refugees are faced with. The present study confirmed Ager

and Strang's claim that the "intentions and aspirations of refugees themselves" play a large role for the success of their social integration.

Conceding that this study focused only on the initial integration phase of refugees and asylum seekers, it nonetheless seems that social integration theory assumes a type of 'ideal' integration, in which active mixing takes place and social bonds and bridges are in balance, that in reality is very rare and unrealistic. The view taken here is that it is natural for humans to develop social bonds with people that share a sense of identity with them and hence it is understandable that migrants or refugees in a foreign country connect more easily and willingly with people 'like them'. Against this background, the study forces the question of whether very bonded immigrant communities within our societies are a pitfall to prevent or a reality to be accommodated for in our idea of integration. It further begs the question, whether the end goal is to strive for active 'mixing' or whether a peaceful and tolerant coexistence is also a worthy aim.

Policy Recommendations

This study has generated numerous recommendations that would be of interest and importance to policy-makers, operators of refugee accommodations and civic refugee support initiatives. Several recommendations are presented below. It should be stressed that the ideas presented are by no means exhaustive. They are, however, intended to stimulate a discussion on how the social integration processes of Syrian and Afghan men could be advanced through the following policy changes:

1. Asylum applications must be processed at a much higher speed to avoid that asylum seekers are left with an unclarified status and limited rights for a lengthy period, as this strongly impedes integration.

2. All refugees and asylum seekers (irrespective of the protection quota for their country of origin) must be eligible to attend the official integration courses. Sufficient spaces must be provided and the courses must start immediately after arrival. Adequate literacy courses must also be provided.
3. Easier access to vocational programmes and the job market should be facilitated to prevent long periods of inactivity, which are counterproductive to integration. Moreover, the integration into the training sector or job market can promote social bridging between refugees and asylum seekers and German citizens.
4. Local, civic refugee support organisations, especially those that are tailored to the needs of refugees and asylum seekers from certain national or linguistic backgrounds should receive government funding, to significantly increase their scope and reach.
5. The offers of German civic refugee support initiatives must be better tailored towards the interests of young men. Moreover, strategies must be developed how young, single Syrian and Afghan men can be more successfully reached with integrative measures.
6. Local governments should only task organisations or social service providers dedicated to promoting the integration and well being of their residents with operating refugee accommodations.²³
7. Buddy systems aiming to create bridges between refugees or asylum seekers and German citizens should be supported and expanded.

The present study has emphasised the rights-related discrepancy between many Syrian and Afghan refugees and asylum seekers. Furthermore, it has stressed the importance of the

²³ Cases of refugee shelters being managed by racially biased directors have repeatedly come to light (Litschko, 2016; Mai, 2016), which is without doubt detrimental to the well being and integration of the residents.

refugee accommodation operators and underlined that many local civic refugee support initiatives fail to reach young men with their offers and integrative measures. Against this background it is very likely that the implementations of the aforementioned policy recommendations could significantly promote the integration of male Syrian and Afghan refugees and asylum seekers.

Directions for Future Research

The limitations of this study and consequent recommendations for future research that would enable better generalizability of the findings have been discussed in the methodology section of chapter two. Here, three new ideas for future research arising from this study shall be broadly outlined.

This research was set in two metropolitan German cities, with large communities of foreigners and established refugee support structures that are not representative for the average German town. Especially, in light of the residence obligation embedded in the new integration law, which has been explained in chapter three, it would be interesting to replicate this study in areas with very low proportions of foreigners, such as many rural areas or smaller towns, where many citizens tend to have higher hostilities towards foreigners (Radikalisierung in deutschen Dörfern, 2016). This would allow researchers to shed light on how refugees and asylum seekers develop social connections differently, when there are no pre-existing structures of immigrants they can connect to and they can feel more animosities towards them.

Moreover, this study has emphasised the importance that organisations operating the refugee accommodations play in the lives of the research population in their early integration phase. Both of the organisations examined are highly concerned with the well being of their residents and aim to promote their integration. Such a dedication is also not

representative of the average refugee home operator. Hence, it would be advisable to investigate how and where refugees and asylum seekers would seek support, when they cannot turn to the operators of their refugee accommodation.

In connection to this, it would be interesting to study the social integration processes of Syrian and Afghan refugees and asylum seekers that are not housed in refugee accommodations but that live in independent flats, as refugee accommodations are in charge of most integrative measures in the early integration stages.

Conclusion

The present study has provided a snapshot of the way in which a sample of young, single Syrian and Afghan men, who arrived to Germany during the latest migratory wave are socially integrating into German society in their early integration phase. Most importantly the findings have revealed that active 'mixing' and relations with German host society members - two conditions that are favourable for (social) integration - largely fail to materialize.

While most findings of this study may appear disenchanting, one should not forget that we are currently right at the start of an integration process that will arguably last for many decades and it would be premature to draw only negative conclusions at this point. The vast challenge ahead of Germany to integrate a large number of single, predominantly Muslim men, often with low educational backgrounds and from highly contrasting social environments into the country's economic, political, cultural and social life should not be downplayed. Nonetheless, this major challenge is also an opportunity for Germany and most importantly a humanitarian and ethical duty. In conclusion, the right policy choices, paired with continuous support from civil society, can hopefully lead to the successful realisation of Angela Merkel's words "Ja wir schaffen das."

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APPENDIX

Appendix A – List of Interviewees

Hamburg

1. Caroline Smolny, director of "Sophienterrassen" refugee accommodation, *Fördern & Wohnen*. 29 February 2016 and 18 March 2016, Hamburg.
2. Lara Hansch, head of the tearoom at the "Sophienterrassen" refugee accommodation, member of *Refugee Aid Harvestehude Association (RAHA)*, 16 March 2016, Hamburg.
3. Hendrikje Blandow-Schlegel, chairwoman *RAHA*, 30 April 2016, over telephone.
4. Heidrun Petersen-Römer, deputy chairwoman *RAHA*, 16 March 2016, Hamburg.
5. Sonja Clasing, coordination office "Sophienterrassen", *RAHA, Fördern & Wohnen*, political scientist University of Hamburg, 20 April 2016, over skype.
6. Cordula Gross, coordination office "Sophienterrassen", *RAHA, Fördern & Wohnen*, 18 April 2016, Hamburg.
7. Mr. Nissen, head of the bicycle repair shop in the "Sophienterrassen" refugee accommodation, member of *RAHA*.

Berlin

1. Akbar, 32, Afghanistan, 10 March 2016, Berlin, interview held in Farsi with translator.
2. Hakim, 30, Syria, 11 March 2016, Berlin, interview held in Arabic with translator.
3. Aman, 24, Afghanistan, 10 March 2016, Berlin, interview held in Farsi, with translator.
4. Ismail, 19, Syria, 11 March 2016, interview held in English.
5. Karim, 34, Syria, 10 March 2016, Berlin, interview held in English.
6. Samir, 34, Syria, 11 March 2016, Berlin, interview held in Arabic with translator.

7. Aziz, 21, Afghanistan, 10 March 2016, interview held in Farsi with translator.
8. Majeda, 30, volunteer at "Karl-Marx-Straße" emergency shelter, 30 March 2016, Berlin.
9. Alexandra, 24, volunteer at "Karl-Marx-Straße" emergency shelter, 25 May 2016, Berlin.
10. Yanis, 25, volunteer at "Karl-Marx-Straße" emergency shelter, 20 March 2016.
11. Dominique, social worker, "Karl-Marx-Straße" emergency shelter, 16 April 2016, *Malteser*, Berlin.
12. Raphael Düttemeyer, managing director of the "Karl-Marx-Straße" emergency shelter, *Malteser*, 15 April 2016.
13. Nader Khalil, director of the *German - Arabic Centre*, 08 July 2016, Berlin.
14. Hamid Nowzari, director of the *Association for Iranian and Afghan refugees*, 06 July 2016.

"Everyone can integrate anywhere.
It depends on the mindset of both sides,
not just the Syrians, because a process needs two sides.
So if you close your door (not talking about borders, but your mind),
like if you already have stereotypes about me and you don't want to accept me,
to contact me, to get to know me more. Even if I wanted, I couldn't.
Because it is sending and receiving at the same time. So it needs both sides.
Acceptance to get the emerging between the both."

Author's interview on 11 March 2016 with Karim (34) from Syria, Berlin