

HOW MAINSTREAMING AND MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES EMPOWER  
PLACE-BASED APPROACHES TO REFUGEE INTEGRATION:  
THE CASE OF ALTENA, GERMANY

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## **ABSTRACT**

Alexis V. Strang: How Mainstreaming and Multilevel Governance Structures Empower Place-Based Approaches to Refugee Integration: The Case of Altena, Germany  
(Under the direction of Banu Gökariksel)

This thesis explores the importance of strong place-based techniques for refugee integration. The integration of refugees, when understood as a two-way process between the host community and refugees, is vital in moving away from dehumanized, national level representations, towards a more realistic view of refugees as individuals who are attempting to live and belong in their new communities. The German system mainstreams integration efforts at the national level by formulating policies of education, health care, and employment for the population as a whole (rather than specifically for refugees as a group). This system empowers towns and municipalities to apply more targeted, effective approaches to integration that fit the specific needs of their communities. Multilevel governance structures also aid in the ability of local level governments to apply targeted integration approaches, as they prevent potentially ill-fitting top-down initiatives from disrupting place-based measures. This thesis examines Altena, a German town known for its progressive integration techniques, through secondary sources and interviews with the mayor and integration team. Their efforts include valuing practicality over formality; emphasizing communication between civil society, the local government, and refugees; creating open, accessible social spaces; and conducting integration initiatives with the spirit of moral responsibility. Ultimately, this thesis examines how processes of multilevel governance and mainstreaming empower the local level to create policies and programs that promote more targeted forms of integration. From Altena, we learn just how valuable this relative autonomy is for the local level.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	4
CHAPTER TWO: NATIONAL AND LOCAL MODELS LITERATURE REVIEW.....	9
What is Integration? .....	9
National Models of Integration.....	11
Mainstreaming.....	14
A Turn Towards Local Level Integration Policies.....	16
How Multilevel Governance Plays a Role.....	17
CHAPTER THREE: GERMAN HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE & CONTEXTUALIZING THE GERMAN INTEGRATION APPROACH	
Towards a Country of Immigration. ....	20
Acts & Plans Since 2000.....	22
German Framework for Integration.....	26
How Does Germany Display a Mainstreaming Approach via Multilevel Governance?.....	28
North Rhine Westphalia.....	29
CHAPTER FOUR: ALTENA AS A CASE STUDY.....	32
Who is Altena? .....	32
From a Local Perspective.....	32
From a Regional Perspective.....	35
Interviews.....	37

Mayor Hollstein..... 37

    Integration Team..... 37

        Practicality, not Formality..... 38

        Process of Trial and Error.....41

        Communication.....42

        Social Space.....43

        Duty and Responsibility.....45

CHAPTERS FIVE: CONCLUSION..... 47

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....49

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

During November 2018, commuters of Berlin's public transportation system were greeted by a particularly controversial poster from Germany's Interior Ministry headlining the message, "Dein Land. Deine Zukunft. Jetzt!" (Your Country. Your Future. Now!). Consisting of 2,400 posters nationwide, each including the message in seven different languages (Arabic, Russian, English, Farsi, Pashto, German, and French), the logic of the campaign was to maximize the scope of the viewership. Every element, from the multiple and specific languages featured, to the colorfully composed banner of flags alongside the headliner, to the very placement of the posters in high trafficked areas, were tactics intended to proliferate the message and expedite results.

Devised to target asylum seekers, and to encourage their voluntary return to their countries of origin, the posters are part of the "Returning From Germany" campaign. The campaign promotes repatriation through a deal in which the German government agrees to provide housing assistance in the form of one year's worth of rent in the returnee's home country. In exchange, asylum seekers must agree to rescind their asylum application and renounce further legal proceedings to remain in Germany. Although the message received backlash from members of the public for its exclusionary and xenophobic tone, the preparedness of the federal government to offer deals for speedy and voluntary return, signifies a strong preference on the part of the federal government to limit and reverse migration. Evidently, the "Willkommenskultur" promoted by Chancellor Angela Merkel at the start of the European refugee crisis has ended, and Germany's once open doors are now slamming shut and kicking their guests out behind them.

Since the beginning of the migration crisis in 2015, European Union member states have experienced significant political, social, and economic tension posed by the challenges of regulating,

legislating, and managing mass migration in national and supranational contexts. The crisis has contributed to the destabilization of politics throughout member states, changing the face of their domestic politics, and in some cases, compromising their relations with the EU as a whole. This tension can be understood from the German perspective in the form of government initiatives meant to limit migration: the “Returning From Germany” program; the election of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party into the parliament with their anti-EU, anti-immigrant platform; and the rising rate of subsidiary protection being granted to asylum seekers, effectively halting family reunification and tightening control on the number of people seeking asylum, among other developments. The effects are also felt more broadly across Europe, as seen through the construction of border walls to keep migrants out, the suspension of rescue ships such as the Aquarius in the Mediterranean, the increased power of far right parties in Austria (FPO), Hungary (Fidesz), Switzerland (SVP), Denmark (Danish People’s Party), and Poland (Law and Justice), among others, and debates about European values and identity in an atmosphere of rising Euroscepticism.

At a time when, at national and international levels, migration has been utilized by right wing movements as a political tool to foster fear, tension, and exclusion, the local perspective provides a vital sense of reality and humanity. This is especially important when the public discourse is continually dominated by a national discourse in which voices such as AfD are elevated. While initiatives are in place to relocate asylum seekers, to fully externalize the application process, or to initially and permanently settle people in areas outside of Europe, the fact remains that asylum seekers and refugees are living within Germany today. Despite initiatives to encourage them to return to their homelands, they are present in local communities and are attempting to cope and survive. As large-scale migration has already occurred, it is time now to tend to the integration of these populations.

National models of migration and integration have historically received the most attention. This can be attributed to post-war years where state sovereignty was prioritized, as well as the fact that state governments are the loudest consolidated voice speaking for a country’s interests in the international realm. This necessitates that each sovereign state constructs an approach to migration and integration; thus, it is these constructions which have been studied in comparison to one another. While these national structures

are important in providing a sense of cohesion and accountability during the process of refugee integration, each region, municipality, and city faces its own issues, and tends to adopt local methods of adaptation to address those particularities accordingly.

As such, a growing body of research focusing on the importance of local level integration initiatives is coming into focus. Although local, place-based developments in refugee integration may not garner much media attention amongst the national discourse circulating about migration and the refugee crisis, the local dimension is indeed immensely influential to the refugee integration process. The local context impacts the degree to which integration efforts may successfully develop; therefore, local discourse surrounding issues of integration are a daily reality with which local governments and organizations must have a pulse.

This thesis seeks to contribute to migration and integration research by analyzing local-level integration policies. I argue that local-oriented integration measures can produce more effective and positive integration outcomes for refugees and their host communities. The foundation for this argument is two-fold. First, there is an analysis of frameworks for integration, which is necessary in order to understand how localized approaches have formed and how they function. This thesis specifically analyzes the German context where there is a generic, poly-centric approach to integration that is called “mainstreaming” (Scholten, et. al., 2016) at the national level. More specifically, mainstreaming refers to a shift in policy from specific to generic approaches whereby integration policies are intended for society at large, as opposed to specific policies aimed at target groups in isolation, such as refugees. Often, policy is impacted by the construction of target groups, and that construction may be dependent upon a national conceptualization of ‘who’ a migrant is, which may be based on criteria such as ethnicity, religion, first or second generation migrant, etc. (Scholten, et. al., 2016, p. 286). Additionally, governance-wise, mainstreaming represents a shift from state-centric efforts (horizontal concentration of competencies in one department with top-down coordination from the national level) towards poly-centric modes of coordinating integration policy (competencies are horizontally fragmented and there is a more multilevel governance approach) (ibid.).



Second, I examine the processes of multilevel governance for their influence on empowering place-based integration approaches. The ultimate argument is that mainstreaming integration efforts allows for a generic approach to integration on the national level, but through the matrix of multilevel governance, place-based approaches on the local level are able to thrive because they are able to apply more targeted approaches to integration. Thus, the combination of mainstreaming and multilevel governance enables local governments to devise integration policies and practices that meets their specific needs and are suitable for their communities. My analysis focuses on the case of Altena, a town in Western Germany which has been recognized nationally and internationally for its progressive integration techniques. Through studying Altena's example, this thesis argues that the ability of local level governments to apply targeted approaches to integration without vertical interference allows them to achieve integration success that may, through horizontal communication, foster success in other locales.

Chapter two begins by defining the term integration. Then, there is a review of the literature about national and local models of integration, including the trend towards local level integration policies. Most importantly, this section introduces the concept of mainstreaming, and how mainstreaming methods function within multilevel governance structures. The following chapter contextualizes the German historical experience with integration by tracing the process with which Germany accepted a position as a country of immigration, and then discussing integration-related acts and plans following that recognition. Then, the role of mainstreaming in Germany's fragmented, decentralized, and generic integration approach is discussed, particularly as it applies to a local level.

The fourth chapter examines the specific efforts of Altena, Germany, as a case study for how place-based approaches may function successfully. It is not realistic for every Länder (which are the 16 states in Germany) or town to implement the same programs; however, identifying particular successful practices may provide a beneficial tool in developing local level integration programs elsewhere. The subnational context for integration has already been elevated as the area of focus in Germany, and so as more place-based initiatives are implemented, being able to identify how local governments and civil society groups are able to develop targeted approaches to local needs may yield beneficial outcomes as these actors

exchange their ideas. The examination of efforts in Altena will attempt to identify key aspects of their efforts that are contributing to their success, and to argue that despite a popular focus in the news on the national and supranational developments in migration issues, the policies of the local level are also critical in the narrative of refugee integration.

Finally, with Altena having served as the case example, I will conclude that place-based integration measures are a powerful approach to producing positive integration outcomes, and that horizontal and vertical communication among different levels of governance is vital to a more productive integration process. The final chapter summarizes how the success and failures of the local level is just as important to integration as the decisions of national policymakers. While national models for integration are important for establishing goals and cohesion, giving localities the space to implement targeted approaches to integration is vital. This section also discusses what future studies may focus on when studying local level integration efforts more closely.

## **CHAPTER TWO: NATIONAL AND LOCAL MODELS LITERATURE REVIEW**

The system of global order today is a function of post-war years whereby nation-states and their sovereignty are placed at the utmost important scale of governance. It follows that in a world order predicated on national models, migration and integration studies would grow within these frameworks and be dominated by an interest in national-level policies. Much of the literature about migration and integration initially focused on comparing and contrasting national models. However, the impacts of Europeanization and globalization are now being studied for their influence on how EU member states develop migration policy, as well as the increased sharing and passing of significant power to the EU level.

At the same time, in the arena of integration policy, there has been a recognition of the capacities of local level policymaking, thus encouraging the field of integration studies to explore how place-based approaches to integration might function. This section outlines national models of integration within Europe, focusing specifically on the concept of mainstreaming. Then, there is a discussion of developments in integration policy that are contributing to a shift towards a more local level focus for integration. These developments include the increasing differences in regional approaches to integration and the increased multilevel interactions and coordination between national and local governments. Ultimately, this chapter seeks to depict the context in which mainstreaming has developed, and how this model may relate to multilevel governance structures that enhance the integration capacities of place-based approaches.

### **What is Integration?**

Integration is a contested term in which there is “no single, generally accepted definition, theory, or model” (Castles, 2002, p. 12). Yet, this term remains significant as a policy goal, as well as an outcome

for migrants and refugees within the European Union. Broadly, integration includes incorporating migrants into the social, economic, cultural, and political fabric of receiving communities through structural integration in domains such as employment, housing, education, and health, as well as through cultural adjustment such as the adoption of shared social norms, acquisition of language and cultural knowledge, and building of social connections (Penninx & Vermeulen, 2000). While there is dissensus within academic literature and especially in practice, this thesis understands integration as multiple scholars (Strang & Ager, 2010; Scholten, Collett, & Petrovic, 2016) and leading global organizations (IOM, UNHCR, OECD) do — as a *two-way process* of mutual adaptation between migrants and the societies in which they live. This emphasis on integration being a two-way process is important because some approaches, such as assimilationist practices, place the responsibility to integrate on migrants only. They emphasize the need for migrants to adjust to their new community, and to learn and do like natives in this new environment might.

The integration of migrants and refugees has become a key topic in the arena of refugee politics, and is an important issue for the European Union from both an economic and social standpoint. From an organization perspective, specifically that of the IOM, integration is a process of incorporating migrants into the social, economic, cultural, and political life of the host community through a joint set of responsibilities for migrants and communities (IOM, 2012). As such, in order to make possible a two-way process of integration, the host society, whether through government or civil society, must facilitate social inclusion. This inclusion can be in the form of granting rights, responsibilities, and/or opportunities. Likewise, migrants must also make an effort to become members of the society, by respecting shared values, learning the local language, engaging in community events, etc.

From the perspective of migration and integration studies, the term integration boils down to imaginaries of the nation-state. Strang and Ager (2008) argue that the theme of citizenship and rights provides the best foundation for understanding integration, as the definition for integration usually adopted by a nation depends on that nation's sense of identity and its "cultural understandings of national and

nationhood” (Sagger, 1995, p. 106). How a nation perceives and builds identity significantly shapes the way integration is defined and approached.

For example, Faist (1995) identified two dominant models for understanding the linkage between concepts of nationhood and refugee integration: ‘ethno-cultural political exclusion’ which was common in Germany before 2000, and ‘pluralist political inclusion’ which is common in the United States. Ethno-cultural political exclusion generally aligns with ‘assimilation’ models of integration, which place an expectation upon refugees that they adapt so much to their host community that they become indistinguishable (Ager & Strang, 2008, p. 175). This approach to integration has become less acceptable broadly across Europe, and Germany more specifically. There have been arguments for migrants to have the right to maintain cultural and religious identity, exemplifying how understandings of integration have changed. Conceptions of integration have also changed with the influence of the European Union and the increased participation of subnational actors in developing integration policy (Myrberg, 2015; Careja, 2018).

### **National Models of Integration**

The regulation of migration has traditionally been a competency of the state. As such, migration research has been driven by a methodological approach focused on nation-centric models (Bertossi & Duyvendak, 2012; Schmidtke, 2014, p. 79). A bulk of the early comparative literature within migration studies focuses on the juxtaposition between German and French approaches to nationalism and citizenship. A key study in this field is Brubaker’s (1992) comparison of the French model of citizenship, which is based on *jus soli* (citizenship as territorially defined) and the German ethno-cultural model based on *jus sanguinis* (parents have citizenship or ethnic origins). A series of reforms to the German citizenship laws in the late 1990s and 2000 has changed the *jus sanguinis* model in Germany. Castles (1995) expanded upon this idea by asserting that beyond structural similarities, there are different attitudes and policies towards immigrants in different countries. As such, national integration models incorporate political ideas and institutional practices in order to create a unified national approach to integration (Anghel, 202, p. 321). This nation-centricity is evident in the progression of national model developments in Europe.

Integration literature distinguishes between several models of integration including: differentialist, multiculturalist, assimilationist, interculturalist, and more recently, mainstreaming. (Scholten, et al., 2016, p. 288). As this thesis seeks to build upon Scholten, Collett, and Petrovic's (2016) argument that mainstreaming is a new trend in the field of integration, the following description of the national models of integration is presented in a similar way as their article. They focus on whether integration governance is state centric or poly-centric, and whether integration policies are specific or generic. This thesis utilizes the same terminology, with poly-centric meaning that there are multiple nodes of power within the structure of governance from which integration approaches are influenced, as opposed to just the state; and with generic policies meaning that policies towards integration are adopted in regards to certain geographical areas or policy fields, as opposed towards specific groups of people according to their religion or culture.

During the 1960s and 1970s when Europe was engaged in labor migration schemes, many countries applied a differentialist approach to integration policy, meaning that policies were meant to “emancipate migrant groups as much as possible via their own group structures” and “preserve group cultures and institutions” (Scholten, et al., 2017, p. 288). This approach worked through poly-centric governance structures, and group-specific integration policies. Later, when many countries adopted multiculturalist approaches, policy development remained group specific because the government recognized that the plethora of different groups in society needed attention. They involved state-centric governance efforts to manage the relations between the different groups.

During the 1990s, there was a common assumption that immigration and integration in Europe would gradually and steadily move towards more multicultural policies (Luedtke, 2005). However, the political climate during the first decade of the 2000s changed sharply. Shaped by a post-9/11 climate where public concern was growing over the cultural and religious diversity that accompanied immigration, there was a backlash against multiculturalist approaches (Vertovec and Wessendorf, 2010). At the time, many migrants to Europe are coming from the Middle East and North Africa, regions with majority populations of Muslims. Therefore, migration was also occurring in the context of Islamophobia. As many countries began to worry about the socio-economic and security ramifications of immigration, integration policies

shifted from the “public endorsement of cultural diversity and migrants’ entitlements towards a stronger emphasis on state-monitored processes of integration” (Schmidtke & Zaslove, 2014, p. 1855).

Brubaker (2001) sought to capture this transformation by asserting that countries were moving towards assimilationist models. These models focused on migrants adapting to society not only in economic ways, but also through being able to participate more fully in a social-cultural sense (Alba and Nee, 2009; Brubaker, 2001). Scholten (2016) argues that similar to multiculturalism, promoting assimilation was a state-centric effort; however, contrastingly, assimilationism did not apply group-specific policies. Rather, this model elevated generic policy approaches, and demanded generic integration from migrants, meaning that they should be able to adapt and participate widely and fully in economic and social institutions.

This assimilationist approach was also associated with a “citizenship approach” towards integration (Poppelaars & Scholten, 2008, p. 5) whereby the main focus was on the individual, emphasizing that each individual must learn the norms, values, and language(s) of the host country (Favell, 1998). This citizenship approach implies that once national level interests trickle down to the local level where implementation and integration actually occur, that there will not be a need for local-oriented measures or policies aimed at those specific communities and their needs (Poppelaars, Scholten, 2008, p. 5). This approach is flawed because it seeks to generically craft migrants as ‘individuals’ of the host country without taking into account the individuality they already possess. The citizenship approach also does not consider local realities. This gray area in integration policy, where the state does not intervene directly into the integration techniques of the local level, could actually be a positive element of a generic approach. Localities may be able to utilize this absence of national involvement in local policies to create local-oriented integration initiatives that suit their specific needs. Yet, at the same time, if the locale does not have the initiative or resources to facilitate integration, then this approach could also hinder progress.

Within the typology of integration policy, Scholten (2016) situates interculturalism, which works through poly-centric governance structures and generic integration policies, as one of the most recent models. Interculturalism focuses on inter-ethnic contact and intercultural relations as a strategy for defining a shared sense of belonging, as well as emphasizes cooperation across policy domains (Scholten et al.,

2016, p. 290). While this approach involves a less invasive national government and more cooperation across governance levels, there is still the need for the consideration of local level integration policy. This need is realized through the mainstreaming approach.

One of the critiques of these national models is that they are too rigid. They characterize nations under coherent political and cultural models that are supposed to result in migration developments having particular consequences (Bertossi & Duyvendak, 2012, p. 420). Despite the failure of national models to live up to expectations at the turn of the century (Bertossi & Duyvendak, 2012, p. 422) these models persist because they are a useful framework for comparative research. They serve a vital purpose in that they provide a history of how a nation has developed a particular understanding and approach to policy-making (Bertossi, 2011; Scholten, 2011). Joppke (1999, p. 62) clearly portrays this idea when discussing how the narrative of Germany denying being a country of immigration influenced the notion of German citizenship, culture, and nation-building, as well as policies aimed at preferred immigration, and the subsequent interactions of the state with immigrants (Geddes & Scholten, 2016, p. 13). While this progression of migrant integration models has been mostly nation-centric and created expectations that were not met, there has been an argument recently (Scholten, et al., 2016) that a key part of revisioning integration approaches across Europe is the mainstreaming of immigrant integration policies into generic policies.

### **Mainstreaming**

The article “Mainstreaming migrant integration? A critical analysis of a new trend in integration governance” by Scholten, Collett, and Petrovic (2016) is the vital text that introduces mainstreaming as a concept within integration studies. Mainstreaming applies to both integration policy and governance. It is a process whereby integration policies are purposely shifted from specific to generic, and governance structures are shifted from state-centric to poly-centric, so as to accommodate for diversity in integration experiences. Policy-wise mainstreaming does not target specific groups according to the national conceptualization of ‘who’ a migrant is; instead, generic policies are developed in certain policy areas such as education, health, housing, and others or a national plan is devised (Scholten, et. al., 2016, p. 284). This means that on the national level, there is a national plan for integration, but policies are not aimed at specific



groups; however, at the subnational levels, integration policies are more targeted. Mainstreaming involves a ‘reframing of diversity,’ and seeks to involve the whole society in the integration process (p. 286). For example, all Länder have introduced obligatory language testing for all pupils, regardless of background, before enrolling in school (p. 293). Governance-wise, mainstreaming demands poly-centric governance structures that support the horizontal allocation of integration responsibilities amongst different actors and departments, and the vertical coordination of integration policies amongst multiple levels of government. (p. 284).

Germany is an interesting case to apply mainstreaming. As discussed in more detail in the following chapter, integration policies have evolved differently in Germany compared to other European countries. As a federal state with a high degree of decentralization, integration policies are fragmented between the national, Länder, and local level governments, with each level possessing authority over certain policy domains. For example, the German national government cannot pass a generic education policy that is meant to impact the integration of refugees because education policy falls within Länder-level jurisdiction. Germany is also a special case because it was one of the last countries to accept being identified as a country of immigration, which means that national integration efforts are a recent development (Schneider, 2009; Scholten et al., 2016). The German case will be explored more explicitly in the next chapter.

For the European Union more broadly, the recent swell in migration presents a nearly impossible task to apply truly targeted approaches to integration, as there are a plethora of migrant categories, migrant groups, and diversity within those migrant groups (Vertovec, 2007). Generic approaches to integration policy at the national level allow for a coherent system across the board, in theory. In practice, however, emerging literature points to the different outcomes of regional and municipal measures in comparison to national ones (Caponio & Bokert, 2010; Poppelaars and Scholten, 2008; Scholten, 2013). This literature suggests that diverse policies exist not only among, but within, nation states. Municipalities and cities are increasingly understood to be political sites of policy innovation, and play an important role in policy formation due to mechanisms of multilevel governance that aid in the gradual empowerment of the subnational level. Regions and cities have become important sites for deliberation, development, and

implementation of integration policies, and often result in the creation of more coherent initiatives for outcomes than those formed at the national level (Schmidtke & Zaslove, 2014).

### **A Turn Towards Local Level Integration Policies**

In recent literature, the idea of national models has been challenged by a growing interest in the local dimension of integration policy because local policies and politics are increasingly recognized for their capacity to influence national policies and to impact integration outcomes (Dekker, et al., 2015, p. 633). Studies have also shown that local governments do not just implement national policies, but are working to form their own approaches to integration, and that those regional and municipal outcomes actually differ from national ones (Alexander 2003; Penninx et al 2004; Poppelaars & Scholten, 2008; Scholten 2013).

This development of varied integration schemes and results is understandable considering that local levels of government experience the successes and shortcomings of integration daily and more acutely than the national level. While a nation may be defined by one or several interpretations of national models over time, what is evident is that for the local level, integration is a process influenced by multiple levels of governance. Ultimately, the process of integration, whether it is a neighborhood within a big city or an entire tiny town, is the site where the interests and policies of different actors are implemented and where results are felt first and foremost.

Accordingly, local level governments must work closely with civil society organizations and volunteers in order to develop effective place-based strategies that respond to context-specific issues (Alexander 2007; Penninx et al., 2004). While local integration policies differ from national policies in many ways, it is argued that one vital difference is that local integration approaches are more accommodating of diversity and more willing to work in tandem with migrant organizations in order to manage needs and differences (Borkert and Bosswick 2007; Schmidtke & Zaslove, 2014; Vermeulen & Stotijn 2010).

As found in Schmidtke and Zaslove's study of the North Rhine Westphalia state in Germany and the Emilia-Romagna region in Italy, subnational discourses and plans of action are strongly driven by needs

on the ground, specifically in this case, socio-economic concerns (Schmidtke & Zaslove, 2014). They found, in stark contrast to the great divisiveness in the national debate about the threats assumed to be associated with cultural and religious diversity, that regional governments are more focused on providing opportunities and resources to migrants. The move away from dramatic discourse around migration towards a logic of managing diversity allows for significant opportunities for policy development (Schmidtke & Zaslove, 2014, p. 1869). More importantly, they found that the adoption of this ‘pragmatic localism’ has allowed for the mainstreaming of migrant issues in regional policy making (p. 1870). The more integration is mainstreamed on national and regional levels, the more likely that pragmatic, interest-driven, targeted approaches will develop (p. 1869). This method of mainstreaming fits well within the matrix of multilevel governance due to its influence on the formation and power of local level integration initiatives.

### **How Multilevel Governance Plays a Role**

While multi-level governance literature was originally developed to understand European integration (Hooghe & Marks, 2001), it provides a useful lens through which to examine how a national mainstreaming approach to integration may benefit place-based integration initiatives. The increasing multi-level nature of government structures in Europe has encouraged the sharing of integration responsibilities across various levels of governance. Within Europe, involved actors include the European Union, the nation state, the subnational regions, and local levels (which includes towns and municipalities). While the EU may be gaining more ground through the Common European Asylum System in terms of migration policy, integration policy is becoming increasingly localized (Scholten and Penninx, 2016).

Studies have found that while multilevel governance processes in the realm of migration and asylum policy elevate the role of the state in institutionalizing cooperation for restricting and controlling migration, integration policies on the other hand seem to lack a “dominant level” (Scholten & Penninx, 2016, p. 105). Local level governments appear to be claiming and acquiring increasingly powerful positions in relation to their national governments over integration policy, with the EU level playing a mediating role (Scholten & Penninx, 2016, p. 105). Multilevel governance intensification of relationships have been between levels, both vertically and horizontally, as well as top-down and bottom-up. In terms of national

and local level relationships, some countries, like Germany, allow for localized policy measures and agreements between the levels to ensure there are no gaps or overlaps in coverage of integration issues. This shift of integration policies toward more multilevel responsibilities presents both challenges and opportunities.

To note, integration for all newcomers is a process that is either facilitated or hindered by national policies, but refugees, who typically arrive in more vulnerable circumstances than other migrants, are particularly impacted by social and political contexts of integration (Hynie, 2018, p. 266). Refugees are generally less likely to know the language of the country they will settle in, have fewer economic resources, limited social networks, and have a higher likelihood of having been exposed to trauma prior to and during migration (Hynie, 2018; Li, Liddell, & Nickerson, 2016). Their resettlement experiences are also subject to more restrictive policies that may limit their access to employment resources, social services, housing, and education (Hynie, 2018, p. 266; Bloch & Schuster, 2002). Therefore, mainstreamed approaches to migrant integration, and refugee integration more specifically, allow for a generic approach on the national level, but through multilevel governance structures, actually allows for local level integration approaches in Germany to be more autonomous, powerful, and responsive in applying targeted approaches.

## **CHAPTER THREE: GERMAN HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE & CONTEXTUALIZING THE GERMAN INTEGRATION APPROACH**

### **Towards a Country of Immigration**

As discussed briefly in the previous chapter, Germany's immigration and integration policies (or lack thereof) were impacted greatly by the national narrative that Germany was not a country of immigration. Yet, the reality after WWII, and throughout the 20th century, was that Germany did experience a great deal of migration in varying degrees. The German relationship with migration began during economic recovery efforts after the war when the subsequent boom in industry forced the federal government to rely on the recruitment and temporary employment of foreign workers to offset labor shortages. The first "Agreement on the Recruitment and Placement of Workers" was negotiated with Italy in 1955, and further contracts followed with Greece and Spain (1960), Turkey (1961), Morocco (1963), and others throughout the end of the 1960s (Migration History, 2018). During this time, guest workers arrived as individuals, generally possessing little human capital, and typically migrating from economically depressed areas in their home countries to Germany as a means of quick, mostly unskilled labor (Kogan, 2011, pg. 92). The German policy towards integrating labor migrants was reflective of a common European tendency at the time — to do nothing. Neither the government nor the migrants themselves expected long stays in Germany; thus, no steps were taken to integrate the workers.

Official labor recruitment halted in 1973 with the OPEC oil embargo and the European Economic Community (EEC) ban on the entry of guest workers from lands that did not hold EEC membership (Migration History, 2018). As a result, Germany assumed that labor migrants would voluntarily return to their home countries, but, ultimately, that was not the case. In fact, many migrant workers opted to stay due to the probability that remaining in Germany would be safer economically than returning home to uncertain

and potentially worse economic conditions (Jørgensen, 2012, p. 249). Following the realization that their situation was transforming into one of possible permanent residence, labor migrants began utilizing their right to family reunification to bring their families to Germany (Kogan, 2011, p. 92). Following, in the mid-1980s and continuing into the 1990s, immigration to Germany became more humanitarian in nature. Geopolitical tensions including the collapse of the Soviet Union, the wars in Yugoslavia, and the human rights crisis in Kurdish regions of Turkey contributed to an influx of migrants and asylum seekers (Migration History, 2018).

This unprecedented and unexpected situation paved the way for new immigration policies, which, while not focused on integration, did spur Left parties to talk about equal opportunities in the labor market, and the Right to discuss the preservation of migrants' cultural background (Jørgensen, 2012, p. 249). Today, the institutional framework for integration policies is set forth by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF). Originally founded in 1953 under the title of the Federal Authority for the Recognition of Foreign Refugees, this authority was primarily responsible for handling asylum applications under the guidance of the Geneva Convention (Federal Office, 2011). As the number of asylum applications continued to increase after the fall of the Soviet Union, so did the capacities and number of offices around the nation. In order to respond to migration developments, the Authority underwent a major restructuring process, and was in 2005, renamed the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (Federal Office, 2011).

While Germany's ethno-cultural model of migration was exclusionary towards immigrants seeking to gain German citizenship, there were inclusionary efforts in terms of rights and access to the labor market and welfare state (Geddes & Scholten, 2016, p. 14). Of course, the policies were not officially targeted at migrant integration, as that would denote an admittance on the part of the government that Germany was a country of immigration (Bommes, 2010). Therefore, while migrants were provided access to social rights, Bommes (2000) argues that by the 1990's, Germany had become a 'community of contributors', meaning that those who contributed to the system were part of the German community. However, this community of contributors excluded those who deemed "undeserving", such as asylum seekers, refugees, contract laborers, and returning ethnic Germans (Geddes, 2016, p. 89). Therefore, when the 1994 Asylum Seeker

Benefit Law reduced welfare benefits for asylum seekers, the narrative transformed into one of social inclusion, but political exclusion because accessing these rights meant being part of German society. While these restrictions on political and citizenship rights may have limited immigrant integration in an official political sphere, the absence of a formal state approach to immigrant integration paved the way for churches, labor unions, NGOS, and other civil society organizations to shoulder the bulk of the efforts to integrate migrants (Geddes & Scholten, 2016, p. 14).

### **Acts & Plans Since 2000**

Until the early 2000s, Germany had neither an official approach to immigration nor migrant integration. Yet, by 2015, the country had developed a relatively liberal approach to migration. The origins for this shift can be traced back to the formation of the Social Democrat and Green Coalition government of 1998, which sought to modernize Germany's immigration and citizenship policies (Klusmeyer and Papademetriou, 2009). While a national framework for migrant integration was budding at this time, local and Länder level approaches had actually already been developing, with variation across the nation (Schonwalder, 2010; Geddes & Scholten, 2016). For example, Berlin in 1981 had already appointed a Commissioner for Migration and Integration, embracing diversity as one of the city's defining characteristics from the start of the integration process (Alexander, 2007; Geddes & Scholten, 2016).

### 2005 Immigration Law

The first immigration law passed in 2005, and codified a relationship between Germany's labor market needs and directing immigration law strongly towards economic interests. The 2005 Immigration Law was significant in promoting the integration of migrants specifically as a governmental duty, and for commissioning the BAMF to regulate integration support measures (Bither and Ziebarth, 2016, p. 7). It placed the BAMF as the federal authority in charge of migration and integration issues such as the registration and repatriation of migrants, as well as carrying out and deciding upon asylum proceedings. The Law also set out to coordinate the plethora of formerly uncoordinated integration projects administered vertically by the federal government, Länder, local governments, and civil society groups, as well as horizontally among different governmental ministries on issues such as education, labour, urban

development, and more (Bendel, 2014). Even more importantly, the Law allowed for a new form of collaboration between federal and regional levels on integration matters, as well as provided a framework for new funding opportunities for these subnational authorities (Schmidtke & Zaslove, 2014, p. 1861).

The focus of the law on highly skilled migrants was reflective of wider developments occurring within the German economy and welfare state at the time (Geddes & Scholten, 2016, p. 10). Through a process of horizontal convergence, where EU member states exchanged ideas about immigration policy, Germany developed specific integration requirements that reflected a European-wide trend of linking admission to integration (Michalowski, 2010 ).

#### 2007 National Integration Plan

Clearly, the development of integration policies in Germany is a complex operation. On one hand, there is the conglomeration of unorganized, indirect, mainstream measures leftover from a system reluctant to officially recognize migration as a key part of German history. On the other hand are the fragmented integration policies stemming from the federalist, decentralized nature of the German government. These conditions make successful top-down coordination difficult, which is one reason why the 2006 National Integration Summit brought together the federal, the Länder, and the local level governments, as well as a range of civil society actors and migrant community organizations (Germany, 2008) to discuss the burgeoning concern of integration. Through joint efforts, the 2007 National Integration Plan was developed, and contained measures and commitments for all levels of governance (Geddes & Scholten, 2016, p. 17). Included in this plan was the implementation of nationwide integration courses, which consisted of German language instruction and an introductory course on German society and culture (Bendel, 2014). These courses are made possible in practice through cooperation between the federal government and the Länder, and are monitored and evaluated by the BAMF (Bendel, 2014)

#### . 2012 National Action Plan on Integration

The next step in the development of the NIP was the National Action Plan on Integration, adopted in 2012 at the fifth Integration Summit. Shared goals were identified between the federal government and the Länder, including: a) boosting individual support, b) improving the recognition of qualifications



acquired abroad, and c) increasing the percentage of employees with a migrant background in the public sector (Schneider, 2012).

It has been argued that even though Germany at the federal level requires integration courses and language training, the integration initiatives are rather mainstream (Klusmeyer & Papademtriou, 2009). Most measures dealing with integration are not specific to the topic; rather, they are routed through policies that are developed in areas such as education, employment, and housing. This allows integration issues to be impacted without framing them as migration or integration policy. It is clear through this mainstreamed avenue of policy development that integration efforts in Germany are framed by wider debates, particularly those surrounding the welfare state and the labor market (Bommes, 2010). However, it may be argued that while Germany's approach to integration on a national level is more mainstream in nature, other levels are actually able to implement more targeted approaches that address the specific issues in their city or town or neighborhood. This is partly because there is not a central, formal national model to implement at that level.

#### 2016 Integration Law

In 2015, Germany took a leading role in accepting Syrian asylum applicants by circumventing the Dublin system. This allowed applicants to make an asylum claim in Germany, regardless of their country of first entrance. Chancellor Merkel received both internal and external criticisms for this openness towards large-scale refugee migration. Outside of Germany, countries such as Austria and Czechia were concerned about refugees migrating across their borders and through their countries in order to reach Germany (Geddes & Scholten, 2016, p. 11). Within Germany, local authorities were concerned about the arrival and dispersal of asylum applicants across the country, and how there might be a quick and heavy strain on local resources such as housing, education, health care, and public feelings of safety (Geddes & Scholten, 2016).

These concerns were attempted to be addressed through the most recent national development in the integration of asylum seekers and refugees — the Integration Law of July 2016 with the motto, “support and demand” (fördern und fordern) (Rietig, 2016, 14). It was a direct response to the heavy influx of asylum seekers, and was specifically created to amend laws to further facilitate the integration of refugees into Germany. These amendments included the provision of more integration courses, vocational training,

employment opportunities, assigning of residences to avoid concentration in select areas, and the option for permanent settlement permits for refugees who show a willingness to cooperate and complete integration courses (Gesley, 2016).

The law was also meant to promote labor market participation through supporting asylum seekers' freedom to choose a place of residence. Generally, the "residence rule" is in place, which restricts refugee movement to other Lander. However, the obligation to live in a certain State or municipality can be lifted for reasons such as family issues, educational opportunities, and employment purposes (Asylum Information Database, 2016). However, unless the asylum seeker found a job that would cover at least some of their expenses, then they were required stay in the county of original assignment. Movement was also predicated upon German language acquisition. Importantly, this law also announced the creation of 100,000 jobs for low- and unskilled asylum seekers so as to get them into the job market more quickly and to avoid them having to face long periods of unemployment (Rietig, 2016, 14). In staying true to the motto, the law supports refugee integration through different labor market schemes, but in return also places linguistic, labor, and social expectations upon integration.

### **German Framework for Integration**

The federal German framework for integration functions within a decentralized system that is characterized by a mainstreamed approach and relies on mechanisms of multilevel governance in order to actualize integration initiatives. The way that immigrant integration policy has been framed at the national level reveals several important characteristics. First, while there is a national integration measure in place in the form of integration courses, the German system remains largely decentralized. Second, Germany's integration measures are an attempt to learn from, and not to repeat, the past. As a consequence of ignoring a national identity that was influenced by migration, Turkish migrants remain one of the least integrated groups in German society (Woellert et. al., 2009). It is clear that Germany has attempted to learn from this example through making sure that there are integration initiatives in place, and that refugees have access to integration resources.

A majority of literature regarding migration and integration focuses on migrants' relationship to the labour market and economic ramifications. This is because, initially, the German integration approach was structured around a similar framework as German immigration — economy and employment. Yet recently, an insecurity over German identity has arisen. This tension regarding identity is a recent theme that plays a significant role in far right parties rising in popularity in Germany, and Europe more broadly. Populists play on this idea of refugees as a monolithic “other” and as being dangerous to German identity and life, both in an economic sense that they will drain the country's resources, and a social way in that they will change the fabric of German society and culture.

Corroborating this assertion is the fast and sudden rise of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party which managed to enter the Bundestag with an anti-immigrant stance and opposition to liberal asylum laws. Some scholars have connected natives' concerns about possible negative implications on the welfare state and local amenities due to the growing presence of migrants and refugees as being a major driving force behind far-right parties (Otto & Steinhardt, 2014; Steinmayr, 2016). As German identity and national security continue to shift towards the center of the migration debate, Germany has attempted to go beyond the economic and labor aspect of integration. They are attempting to address cultural aspects through the nationwide integration program focusing on language acquisition and cultural, historical, and political instruction (Hubschmann, 2015).

Despite the cooperation of multiple actors in the creation of policy and the carrying out of integration initiatives, the decentralized and federalist nature of integration programs are complex and inconsistent across Germany. While the federal government may outline general conditions and legal parameters for the integration process, the multilevel structure of governance in Germany assigns different responsibilities for levels of the government to enforce and regulate certain policy areas. For example, the federalist system ensures that some key policy areas, such as health, education, and cultural affairs falls within the jurisdiction of the Länder (Rechel, 2018). This means that each region has the duty and authority to carry out integration initiatives in these realms as they see fit, but there is little involvement on the part of the national government to ensure that local governments go beyond these initiatives to promote further

integration. As the national integration program is currently designed, integration courses are one of the only modes of integration directly supported by the national government.

While there is an acknowledgement within German mainstream discourse about the need for better integration measures, initially the biggest debates regarding integration initiatives were not about what content to include, but about who would provide the funding (migrants, the federal government, or the regional government?) and how implementation and participation would be enforced (Hubschumann, 2015). The compromise reached was that the federal government would provide a majority of funding for the courses, with participants making a small contribution. Incentives and punishments were also introduced whereby those who finish a course will receive an Integration Course Certificate and will be eligible to apply for citizenship earlier (Hubschumann, 2015). If someone who is required to participate in the courses does not do so, then their unemployment benefits may be reduced, their residence permit may not be renewed, and/or a fine may be imposed, among other punishments (ibid).

While this top-down approach does acknowledge that language and cultural knowledge are vital aspects to integration, this national integration structures fails to facilitate a direct two-way connection between the host society and refugees to participate in the integration process. Additionally, even though the federal government attempts to incentivize or punish migrants and refugees who do not take the required courses, they are less prepared to enforce reluctant regions to enhance their integration efforts.

#### How Does Germany Display a Mainstreaming Approach via Multilevel Governance?

In Germany, jurisdictions are divided between the federal, the Länder, and the municipalities. The federal level has full jurisdiction in all areas regarding citizenship, social security measures, country-wide measures for economic prosperity, and for the most part in taxes, among other areas. The Länder holds responsibility over education, regional economy and culture, as well as oversees the municipalities. While municipalities do not possess as extensive a voice in many policy areas, they are chief actors in integration processes, especially when it comes to implementing federal and Länder legislation. By law, they are autonomous entities within the German government's administrative scheme, and beyond having

transferred funds from the Länder for the implementation of certain tasks, they have considerable flexibility outside of the scope of federal legislation (OECD, 2017, p. 27).

Despite the National Integration Plan, Germany's policy is characterized by decentralization, and relies on systems of multilevel governance to carry out integration schemes. Germany has a strong history of poly-centric approaches to integration, as most of the work to integrate migrants was done informally via civil society groups and local governments attempting to meet local needs. However, even with the development of a general policy framework on the national level, many actors at different levels are involved in implementation. While from a federal perspective, Germany addresses integration through needs-based or area-based policies that impact the whole population (Scholten & Collen, 2016, 297), integration is a process conducted through the vertical and horizontal efforts of multiple institutions and social actors working together. This includes authorities on national, state, and local levels, as well as various agencies, organizations, volunteers, and community members. Despite the fact that local authorities do not have as far reaching legal competencies as the federal government, they do play an important role in local integration, frequently working with civil society organizations in order to deliver services to immigrants in a supportive, individualized environment.

#### North Rhine Westphalia

North Rhine Westphalia (NRW) is the most populous German state, and in the twentieth century attracted a lot of labor migration due to its booming manufacturing economy. It is still home to many migrants, of first and second generations, as well as the site Altena, the case study town in this research. Accordingly, as the German federal state has gradually allowed for the empowerment of subnational levels of governance in regards to integration policy, the NRW has been at the forefront of the states developing their own integration policies (Schmidtke & Zaslove, 2014, p. 1861). It is thus a great example for how policy development on local levels can be targeted. While the national arena experienced much debate in addressing the challenge of incorporating migrants, the NRW was able to develop a minister of integration in 2005 in order to spearhead the creation and implementation of policies. Their approaches are designed

to attract and retain newcomers, with much of the legislative initiatives directed toward access to the labor market and education opportunities (Schmidtke & Zaslove, 2014, p. 1862).

In comparison to dialogue about immigration and integration on the national level, discourse in NRW is “de-dramatized” and steers away from using issues as an emotional tool to mobilize certain party politics (ibid). NRW approaches issues pragmatically, framing immigration and integration as day-to-day concerns for the state’s socio-economic needs. As Schmidtke and Zaslove note, the difference between the regional and national level is their frame of interest (2014). For example, the regional level of NRW frames cultural diversity and integration in terms of inclusion and economic contribution. They do so partly because they recognize that they have pressing daily demographic and socio-economic concerns that require the regional government to innovate new policy approaches that are more inclusive and better at accommodating change. At the national level, the Immigration Law is an example of how these concerns of inclusion, retention of newcomers, and socio-economic need on the regional level are sidelined the by emotional, identity-and-security-driven priorities of national-level politics that are intended to appease the fears that some groups have attached to immigration (ibid).

At the regional level in Germany, there is a less politicized environment for policy-making than at the national level, which allows for policies that are more targeted and conducive to integration. In addition, Schmidtke and Zaslove (2014) find that, due to the strong involvement of civil society actors, regional and local levels have more inclusive political processes that empower migrants at these levels to be involved and vocal in the integration process. This communication and cooperation between civil society organizations and local government offices on how to integrate migrants is credited as a main factor in producing less politicized, more pragmatic and targeted integration approaches on subnational levels of governance (ibid).

This level of government also gears political and social participation towards grassroots involvement, as opposed to the generic, trickle down approaches on the federal level. While federal integration summits include the input of different groups including local governments, civil society organizations, and migrants themselves, their policies are limited in reach and impact. Although they state

integration as a goal, provide supporting measures through courses, and demand particular results, the federal government does not provide avenues for the actualization of integration. This falls within the responsibility of local governments, who are entrusted to utilize community partnerships to encourage progress (Schonwalder, 2013). As Schmidtke and Zaslove (2014) argue, subnational levels of governance have taken on distinct roles in integration policies in Europe, and while the regional context provides vital understandings in how to integrate newcomers, the field is understudied and needs to be re-conceptualized outside of the national models that have traditionally dominated the field. Their article identifies the multilevel governance system as empowering the subnational level of governance in their efforts to create and implement new integration policies. They also report that mainstreaming migration-related issues in key policy areas allows for a logic of ‘pragmatic localism’ to develop for integration policies, meaning that local levels are able to be more targeted in their integration approaches. The following chapter examines Altena, Germany as a case study for how mainstreaming and multilevel governance structures empower place-based approaches to integration.

## CHAPTER FOUR: ALTENA AS A CASE STUDY

Altena is a sleepy town. At least, this is what the mayor, Andreas Hollstein, will say with a small chuckle when you ask him about Altena. While sleepy may be his description, the town is actually quite active when it comes to integrating the refugees who are now calling Altena home. In fact, the town has received a lot of attention, both from the national government and the EU, because of their successful integration efforts. In order to provide an understanding of Altena and what efforts they employ, this chapter is divided into two parts. Part one provides a description of the town gleaned from secondary sources, mainly news articles and the extensive OECD study conducted about Altena in 2018. The second part breaks down the interviews I conducted with Mayor Hollstein and members of the integration team. Ultimately, this case study serves as an example of what kind of integration results are possible on a local level through an integration system influenced by mainstreaming practices and implemented through multilevel governance structures.

### **Who is Altena?**

#### From a Local Perspective

Altena is a small industrial town with less than 20,000 inhabitants located in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany. While the dominant industry in Altena is steel wire production, producing nearly 20% of the world's supply alongside many other kinds of springs, screws, and bolts (Hollstein, 2018), the town is more well-known for their progressive approaches to welcoming refugees. The integration program in Altena, called 'From Refugee to Altena Co-Citizen,' was honored in May 2017 by Chancellor Merkel with the first National Integration Prize for their achievements in refugee integration (The Local, 2017).

In 2015, when migration to Europe was in full swing, the German government implemented a quota system to disperse asylum seekers and refugees as a percentage based on tax receipts and the population in



each state. Quickly following the inflows were concerns from many local authorities about the economic and spatial difficulties in accommodating the newcomers. Meanwhile, the tiny town of Altena was voluntarily accepting 100 more refugees in addition to the 270 people they had already been assigned. When writing a piece for the OECD forum, Mayor Andreas Hollstein shared that the community welcomed so many newcomers partly because they needed them for economic and demographic recovery.

The city has experienced a significant decline in population since the turn of the century, with a nearly 20.8% drop between 2000 - 2015 (OECD, 2018, p. 11) due to a mixture of less migration to the area, lower birth rates, and younger people moving to cities for more opportunities. Mayor Hollstein has emphasized in interviews how the local government has attempted to maintain Altena's industries and develop its tourism sector, partially through attracting attention to the historical castle in town. However, in order to spur growth, more people were needed, and quickly. Therefore, migration became an essential element of Altena's overall strategy for development.

Additionally, the town's integration team recognized that fast tracking refugees into the workforce would require efforts that extended beyond the bare bones federally mandated language and integrations courses. Labor market participation requires more than simply having access to the market — it also requires social connections and a supportive environment. Thus, the integration team began implementing programs focused on social cohesion and communication. As part of extending a welcoming hand to refugees as new neighbors and new citizens, the Altenan local authorities encourage person-to-person contact and communication as one of the main elements of their integration approaches.

This support structure for integration has only been recently developed. Before 2015, integration in the city took place through volunteering, either through individual initiative or access to public and collective services such as work, school, friendships, etc. While there is no formal plan in place for integration, the city's vision to include migrants and refugees into the social and economic fabric of the town may be described as 'From Refugee to Altena Citizen'. This vision promotes a two-way process of integration whereby both migrants and host community members are involved in integration measures. This support structure is individualized, as well, taking into consideration accommodation details, and going

beyond basic sustenance provisions to include social care and, in some cases, counseling. This individualized, hands-on approach allows for flexibility in the kind of resources provided.

The Stellwerk & Kummerer models are the main backbone propping up Altena's local horizontal integration structure. The Stellwerk, which is a municipal institution that interweaves the conglomeration of volunteer activities in Altena with the Town Hall's integration policies, is vital to Altena's integration efforts. Kummerer, which are citizens who voluntarily engage with migrants to help ease their arrival, are coordinated by the Stellwerk. They work in cooperation with the integration team, who keep track of the newly arrived and their needs. Together, the integration team, Stellwerk, and the Kummerer create a coordinated support structure for integration that is fortified by relationships between the public service sector (town hall, local police, fire brigade) and the civil society sector (churches, associations, other volunteer groups).

While the Stellwerk creates formal relationships between migrants and town resources, the Kummerer approach is instrumental in forging informal, direct relationships between newcomers and local citizens. In establishing these relationships between Stellwerk and the city administration, as well as between the Kummerer and incoming migrants, both of these models foster proximity and an active awareness of what needs need to be met and which programs are effective. The close relationship between Stellwerk and the city administration is further intensified via the geographical nearness of their headquarters. This web of community relationships, both formal and informal, that is built up volunteerism, allows for greater flexibility and accountability, but also makes Altena's approach dependent upon positive public interest and strong local government leadership.

#### From a Regional Perspective

Altena operates within a complex network of actors who hold different competencies within the field of integration. Therefore, these different entities must coordinate their efforts in order to prevent overlaps or gaps in service provision. Altena is part of the North Rhine Westphalian Associations of Towns and Municipalities, which is a voluntary conglomerate of municipalities, cities, and towns (OECD, 2018,

p. 40). Each of the 16 Länder have an association, which then join together under an umbrella organization on the federal level. It is through these municipality associations that the mayor of Altena may represent his city, by transmitting the interests of his town in a compilation of municipality interests which is then presented to the federal level.

As a small town, task and resource sharing with neighboring municipalities is vital in providing services; thus, municipalities holding membership at the same county level contribute money that is then allocated to support shared tasks. For example, Altena belongs to the Märkischer Kreis district within the state of North Rhine Westphalia. Within Märkischer Kreis, it is Altena's neighboring municipality of Iserhold which houses the Youth Migration Service and provides assistance for migrants until the age of 27 (OECD, 2018, p. 41). There is also the Integration Center (Kommunales Integrationszentrum) in Lüdenscheid, which provides educational support for migrant children and their parents. They offer education counseling, childcare, and implement projects like intercultural meeting venues, and education and language courses that are financed through a Länder fund for integration (OECD, 2018, p. 41). This Länder fund for integration, "KOMM-AN NRW" aims to support volunteer work for refugee and migrant integration in cities, with municipal integration centers being the key site for implementation. For Altena specifically, it was through these Länder funds that Mayor Hollstein was able to secure funding to buy the Freiheit26 space for a community center in downtown.

North Rhine Westphalia is the population-richest land, and thus receives the highest percentage of asylum seekers and refugees in Germany at 21.2% (OECD, 2018, p. 45). While the decision on the status of asylum seekers and refugees is under the jurisdiction of the federal Ministry of Interior through the BAMF, Länder do have room to extend federal regulations. For example, in August 2016, the Wohnsitzauflage came into force, allowing asylum seekers and recognized refugees to stay in the area they were allocated to during the dispersal process for at least three years (OECD, 2018, p. 45). Länder are responsible for providing basic sustenance, such as housing and healthcare, and most of them delegate this responsibility to municipalities. After being granted asylum, refugees are entitled to federal social welfare

benefits that are funded through federal means but are administered through local level job centers or social welfare agencies.

Through examining Altena via secondary sources, it is apparent that local integration polices focus on social cohesion and communication between refugees and host community members. This focus is important because it highlights often neglected aspects of integration such as the responsibility of the receiving community to be an active part of the integration process, as well as the importance of viewing refugees as individuals with distinct experiences rather than a monolithic group. Through horizontal coordination schemes on the town level, as well as vertical governance structures linking the town to regional, national, and EU support structures and beholdng them to certain policies, Altena manages to be one of the most progressive towns for integration within Europe.

While Altena has experienced much integration success through this holistic approach, there are still some people who reject these integration efforts. The Mayor's office has reported receiving hateful voicemails from locals dissatisfied with the changes. In fact, in November 2017 Mayor Hollstein was rushed to the hospital after being slashed with a knife at a local kebab shop. Authorities believe that the attack was politically motivated, and related to dissatisfaction over the open migration policies. Yet, these bumps in the road have not dissuaded Altena's efforts. In fact, the programs remain strong. The following section delves into interviews with the mayor and the integrations team to gain a better understanding of where Altena has been, where Altena is now, and where they plan to go from here.

## **Interviews**

In February 2019, I conducted two phone interviews — one with Mayor Hollstein, and the other with two out of the three women who work as the town's integration team. Our conversations were both a little over an hour each, and consisted of questions regarding their conceptions of integration, the specific programs they implement, and what their guiding ideology might be. During the course of our conversations, I noticed three main themes, and have divided them below as a way to structure my findings. I will start by describing my interviewees.

### Mayor Hollstein

Mayor Hollstein has served as mayor of Altena since 1999, and up until that point, was the Honorary 1st Deputy Mayor from 1994. Before moving back to Altena, he worked as a research assistant of Wolfgang Lehman MP and in the CDU/CSU fraction in the German Bundestag in the areas of social welfare and with the benefits act for asylum seekers. He is still a member of the(CDU) party, which is one of the largest parties in the Germany political system. The CDU is known as a catch-all, center right, Christian democratic party that is pro-EU, supports a free-market economy and social welfare programs, but is generally conservative on social issues.

Although Mayor Hollstein resides over a small town, his connections are large. When the integration team spoke about him, they mentioned how instrumental his connections with different levels of government have been in securing resources in Altena. In fact, Hollstein not only has connections within Germany, but is active in many international efforts to connect and share ideas about human rights.

### Integration Team

The integration team is composed of three females, each from a different discipline. Of the two who were able to interview over the phone with me, Sophia has a degree in management and economics, and Lina has a background in gender studies and pedagogy. When describing what brought them to working on the integration team, Sophia mentioned how at the start of the refugee crisis in 2015 she had wanted to get involved, but was limited until 2016 because she had recently become a mother. When she was ready to find work, she found an opening in Altena on the integration team and joined. Lina has been involved with Town Hall for twenty years, starting with topics of gender and then transitioning into general volunteering for town events and needs. Then, in 2015 when refugees began arriving, a lot of that general volunteering coordination transformed to take on an integration focus, and these integration efforts are her primary duties these days. The third team member, Zamiira, is from Palestine, and lives in an adjacent town. Her Arabic skills have been particularly helpful in communicating needs that refugees may not yet have the German skills to express. Recently, the team has been downsized, with the fourth team member, Lisa, being

on maternity leave. She had a background in town planning, and helped to conceive the idea of the Freiheit26.

### Practicality, not Formality

*“I remember the pictures of tens of people living on the bottoms of the Earth. It was raining and it was the worst. For me, as a father of four healthy children who are all now in their studies... This was not the reason I chose to engage in politics. I have a clear vision of Europe, and this was not the picture of Europe that I want to devote to the next generation and my children.” — Mayor Hollstein*

When describing why he and Altena chose to accept more refugees than the national quota system had assigned the town, Mayor Hollstein began by describing his engagement in a German-Greece assembly. The assembly is run by the head of the secretary of state of the German government, and works to connect the mayors of Greek and German towns. While the mayors meet periodically to discuss a wide range of topics, in 2015, the conference was specifically about migration. Mayor Hollstein relayed how it was made clear at this conference that the Greek government saw refugees mostly as a “logistical problem.” They wanted to spread refugees in the direction of the richer countries of the North. He vividly remembered seeing pictures of refugees living in the “bottoms of the Earth”, and started to think about what he could do to help. This led him to speak to politicians on the council, and out of these discussions came the idea to accept 100 more refugees in Altena.

As a mayor of a small town, Hollstein understands his limitations. He mentioned how he must work within the existing national and regional frameworks, and how as a representative from the local level is only able to approach higher levels of government with small ideas on how to change the system. While he mentioned that he can only really take a local level look at the whole picture in trying to bring his vision for Europe into reality, his voice is loud and heard on the town level. He said, “With my town, I can actually change reality with the help of civil society and politicians.”

Part of Mayor Hollstein’s vision for how Europe should address the challenges of migration and integration include creating stronger and stricter barriers for economic migration. He proposed that a point system might be a good way to give African migrants in particular a fair opportunity to come to Germany.

Mayor Hollstein said that while Germany has recently developed a system where companies can help migrants migrate, the nation must do more. In particular, labor market and language skills are top priorities. He said it is not possible for Germany to take in more people, as well as steer migration if there is still the possibility of people coming over the Mediterranean Sea. Therefore, he suggests that economic migration be penalized. That way, there is a clearer way for people to come in a fixed amount each year to Germany, with a second line of migration being open for humanitarian reasons with a different quota. At the end of the day, Mayor Hollstein firmly believes in more engagement with African and border countries, and being open to providing skills training so that migrants are provided the opportunity and resources to have a future in Germany if they are allowed in.

Furthermore, he said, “It is not fitting to humanity that so many people are dying in the sea because criminals are offering them a dangerous path to the future.” This moral responsibility is also a fixed element of the German constitution developed after WWII. The rest of Europe, he said, has a similar outlook to take in people who have a problem of war or an unstable national situation. The issue now is not so much the recognition of humanity and a need for shelter, but it is against time. One of Mayor Hollstein’s largest complaints about the German system, and Europe’s system of resettlement more widely, is the amount of time it takes to process decisions. In the last quarter of 2018, Germany authorities took a little over six months on average to process asylum requests. This was down from 9.2 months in the first quarter, and 7.3 months in the second quarter, but they are still missing their 3-month target (Bathke, 2019).

While the average wait time in Germany has improved, Hollstein thinks that it is still not optimal, both in terms of wait time and amenities. Refugees are humans, and they should receive “humanity from the very first point.” He discussed how the system in the Netherlands provides refugees with films in their own languages, with equipment to play sports, and with all of the basic amenities they might need. This is all while receiving a decision after six months. He wants to bring people to the point where they may have this sort of quick success in the application process, that they have lawyers helping them at every turn, and that the process be quicker and more streamlined. Afterwards, if they receive an acceptance, Mayor Hollstein prefers refugees be immediately relocated to German towns. He says it is the “only right way for

them and for us”. Part of this success would mean establishing a clear European system and standards.

Mayor Hollstein’s discussion of future movement of refugees throughout the EU signifies the crux of the importance of empowering the versatility of the local level. He strongly believes that cities and countries should work to integrate refugees now, and put in the efforts today to “do this process justice” because in the future, perhaps in 10 to 20 years, there will be even more internal migration within Germany and the EU. While it may take 5 to 6 years to gain permanent residency in Germany, these future migrations through the EU are on the horizon. The refugees of today will eventually gain full rights within the EU, including the freedom of movement to work and to settle elsewhere in the EU. Therefore, successful integration policies in local contexts not only improves local living conditions, relations, and opportunities, but also prepares host communities and migrants for the future.

On one hand, successful integration could promote refugees to stay where they originally settled, and to grow their families and businesses in that town or area. On the other hand, if they do chose to move for a host of reasons, proper and holistic integration experiences may prepare them to more easily and successfully settle elsewhere not only as a Germany citizen, but as an EU citizen. Altena’s understanding of integration then seems to act locally, but to think more broadly.

#### Process of Trial and Error

*“We are learning by doing, yes! (she chuckles a lot here). Everyday, everyone here in Altena is learning a new detail that we didn’t know before. It’s also for the refugees, they have to learn everyday a new German detail, so that is the only way I think.” — Lina, Integration Team Member*

As mentioned previously, Altena’s official integration slogan is ‘From Refugee to Altena Citizen’. Mayor Hollstein emphasized that while Altena has received attention for being a prime example of progressive integration, the town’s strategy for integration has been, and continues to be, a process of trial and error. He continued to embrace this notion throughout our interview, saying that neither the country of Germany nor the town of Altena have experienced a ‘perfect’ system of integration. This is partly because, from Mayor Hollstein’s perspective, there is no ‘perfect’ system. He mentioned that when discussing what steps would be taken to integrate incoming refugees, there was no formally agreed upon set of rules or



strategies, and that while no one could agree on formal decisions, they could agree on the sentiment of “refugee to citizen”.

The integration team heavily emphasized integration as being a process, as well. They said that they are upfront with refugees and volunteers about everyone needing to learn together, and that they do not pretend to know everything. They try to clearly communicate to everyone that their approach is to learn by doing, and to be responsive to needs that are expressed. In accepting integration as a process where trial and error is a necessary element of learning what works best, the integration team also acknowledges their role as a guiding, organizing force of integration, not as one which holds supreme power over all matters and processes. As such, they are not concerned with formality or propping up a particular agenda. Meaning, they do not want integration progress to be held back by their offices or resources appearing to be intimidating, tedious, or inaccessible. They prioritize practicality and comfortability.

#### Communication

*Me: If another town came to you asking for advice, what might you say to them?*

*Sophia: I think the first thing is being friendly. When someone is coming to your office, don't be like 'Oh, I don't want to talk to you.' Just be friendly. Ask, 'what can I do for you, how can I help you?' Things like that. Most of the people working in the Town Hall... I don't know how to explain it...*

*Lina: They aren't open enough, I think. They are so closed. If you are open to the people, if you smile at them... They had a big problem with this. You can smile, and try to help them. It is not all the time possible for us, but we try. That's a really important thing.*

*Sophia: I think also to work with the volunteers is one of the most important things. And also to show the volunteers how important they are is a really important thing for good integration work because the volunteers are doing it without money, just for charity, just for whatever kind of reasons they've got. You have to show them that they are really important, and that they are doing a really good job.*

The team focuses providing targeted, holistic approaches to the integration of refugees. Between all of the integration team members, they collectively know each refugee in town by name. They are able to recall their stories, and to check in on their progress in a personalized manner. When discussing what

kinds of problems refugees usually come to ask the office for help with, the team said that their days are different all of the time, as every person has a different problem. There are the general bureaucratic issues such as how to fill out job applications, how to enroll children in school, how to understand the benefits system, etc., but there are also questions about cultural procedures. For example, Sophia relayed that someone recently asked what the correct course of action was to take when moving out of an apartment and returning their keys to the landlord — do they leave them in the mailbox, do they meet up with the landlord, is there extra paperwork to do upon moving? Sophia commented how this openness to ask questions, big or small, was a mark of the success of Altena's individualized approach.

The integration team emphasized that, equally important to communicating with refugees as individuals, is to make sure that volunteers know how important and invaluable they are in the experience of integration. Volunteers are an integral force for integration, and so it is imperative that they are shown the importance of their time and efforts. For example, the integration team discussed how the national model for integration excludes some groups. When asylum seekers and refugees arrive in Altena, people from Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Eritrea are able to go to German courses sponsored by the national government from day one. However, other groups, such as those from Guinea, Nigeria, Borneo, and others, do not have access to these courses. This is when the work of volunteers becomes vital. They serve as a soft place for refugees to land when they may otherwise fall through the cracks of government programs.

The team also noted that there are areas of communication between volunteers and refugees that need some more attention. For example, a bulk of the volunteer force in Altena is made up of females. They consider difference and diversity a strength of their program, and seek to recruit more male volunteers, especially because young men who come into their office are seeking guidance from other men, but this can often be difficult to provide.

### Social Space

When describing to me a brief history of Alena's relationship with migrants and refugees, the mayor acknowledged first and foremost the failings of the German system as a whole. He described how when migrants arrived, they were mostly left alone to focus on work, with no guidance on how to live

within German society. The only formal acquisition of language and cultural skills were attained in school by children. He described how up through the 1990s there were two approaches to migrants: either they should assimilate and act like Germans, or they should be left alone in their own bubble with their own culture. Nationally, this approach began changing in the early 2000s.

While Altena's approach to integration also altered during this time, one significant event that spurred a revamping of the integration approach was in 2011 when the migrant housing was destroyed in a fire. Instead of rebuilding the same kind of units, Altena opted to build multiple houses with multiple rooms, and to thoughtfully divide the migrant population amongst the housing. Before, regardless of familial status, age, country of origin, religious affiliation, etc., migrants would all be housed in the same block of units. However, the construction of new housing was also accompanied by a new dispersion structure. For example, in order to foster more comfortable living conditions and to encourage relationship-building from the start, the integration team tactfully assigned living arrangements whereby members of the same religion or country of origin would live in proximity to one another. In addition, families would be relocated to neighborhoods where local Altena families live so as to provide migrant families with a living arrangement that is experienced by families in the host community. Clearly, the Altena government and integration team are trying to focus on the details of the setting, and asking how a change of living situation may impact a refugee and alter their integration experience.

The integration team echoed this sentiment of taking a holistic approach with regards to spatial awareness. As a good portion of their daily duties are determined based on what needs the refugees come to their office with, it is incredibly important to the integration team that they are able to foster an environment in which refugees do not have any problem asking questions or requesting help, big or small. They understand that creating a welcoming and easily accessible office space is a key element of creating that environment, and therefore work to make sure that their office is accessible and open.

Social connections play a fundamental role in local level integration processes. Possessing adequate and available social spaces is vital in facilitating communication and relationships between refugees and the host community. Altena's integration team is cognizant of this need for space, both physical and social,

and works to incorporate social spatial awareness into their integration initiatives. When asking the team what advice they would give other towns, part of their response was as follows:

*Lina: And to find a place where you can do your work. Like, we got the chance to get the old restaurant and build it up for a meeting point [Freiheit26]. I think this is also a point I would say to another town if they ask me what they can do for integration work. That is also a good opportunity for us that we got this building where we can make events and everything we want to do.*

They heavily encourage refugees to be active at the Freiheit26 community center. It is one of the largest initiatives in town to spur integration. Once a restaurant in the city center, it now serves as a meeting place for refugees and other community members. The space is open for all who need a place to conduct group activities, such as a guitar group that needs a teaching and practicing space, as well as Turks who want to take German lessons. The integration team manages the time slot allotments, with some projects being ran by them, and others being run by groups themselves.

When asked if they thought that their individualized, close communication model of integration could be translated to other towns or cities, the integration team said yes. One of their biggest pieces of advice was to focus on small spaces. A space where people know each other and feel incentive to take care of one another is needed. For example, in big cities, they proposed that it might be possible to build up a neighborhood integration team. This way, refugees might feel that they have a smaller, more tangible community to access within a larger city network.

#### Duty and Responsibility

*Me: Why do you do what you do, what inspires you ?*

*Lina: People are coming from horrible situations like Syria or Afghanistan or maybe Eritrea... and we.. We have to help, you understand? I cannot think of the right word in English, but its... Charity. It's charity, yes. I think you have to do it..*

*Me: Perhaps, do you feel that it is like a moral responsibility?*

*Sophia: Yes, of course, I think because Germany is a rich country, and we have the possibility to help. No German people are getting poorer now because we have some refugees in our town. We have everything*

*we need for living. Of course we have to help people from our own country when they have problems, of course. But I think yes, moral charity is the right way for doing integration. Maybe the world is getting a bit better. (she chuckles under her breath here).*

*Lina: We help because we can do it! We have the possibility.*

One of the most profound parts of my interview with the integration team was when we discussed their motivations for working to integrate refugees. Their response centered on moral responsibility, on this idea of being charitable because it is not only a good thing to do, but the right thing to do. As with the earlier themes of approaching integration as a process of trial and error, of prioritizing open communication, and of providing social spaces, this understanding of integration as a duty and responsibility is made possible by a strong leadership. Unlike Mayor Hollstein's assessment of Greece's approach to refugees as a logistical issue, Altena continually engages in integration initiatives that humanize refugees. Through this strong leadership from the mayor's office and the integration team, they are able to pool resources in the form of government funding and volunteer assistance. While these direct, tangible elements of integration are vital, this sentiment of duty and morality is also a necessary condition.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

This research began with the observation that national governments occupy a lot of space within media and public discourse on migration issues. As such, the voice of subnational actors, particularly those at the city, town, and municipal level, do not as often have the chance to share their stories, techniques, and suggestions on the issues. Adding to the overshadowing of the local level by the national is that migration policy is related to a nation-state's concerns of maintaining its sovereignty, of defining its borders, and of exercising power over the population within those borders to form a cohesive nation-state. Yet, even so, with the integration of migrants, it is the local level which directly experiences the effects of failed or successful integration approaches in real time. Thus, it is vital for improving integration outcomes that voices at the local level are elevated and empowered.

In the case of refugee integration in Germany, we find that the mainstreaming of integration policy at the national level allows for successful targeted approaches on a local level when operating through multilevel governance structures. Mainstreaming, in particular, recognizes local level integration and its dynamism. Cooperation between vertical and horizontal levels, without top-down interference from the national government in subnational developments, fosters the success of place-based approaches. The role of the German national government is to pass legislation that is generic in that it does not single out refugees as a special group to be catered to at that level of governance; rather, refugees should have their concerns considered in the legislating process the same as other groups of citizens. The role of subnational levels is to be more targeted in their approaches, with the smallest level of governance caring for refugees as individuals in their communities.

The case study of Altena serves as a contribution to integration literature, exemplifying how place-based integration measures are a powerful approach to producing positive integration outcomes. All of the themes analyzed as part of Altena's approach to integration — valuing practicality over formality; emphasizing communication between civil society, the local government, and refugees; creating open, accessible social spaces; and conducting integration initiatives with the spirit of moral responsibility — conglomerate into an overall targeted approach to integration. Their approach has been facilitated by horizontal and vertical communication among different levels of governance. Of course, these approaches do not appear naturally — they are the product of strong leadership and moral conviction. They are also a result of economic pressures, and a pressing need to respond to demographic challenges of an aging town. Their approach considers refugees as individuals, and utilizes the absence of national involvement in local policies to create local-oriented integration initiatives that suit their specific needs.

When reviewing integration literature, much of the research about local level initiatives considers developments in larger cities such as Berlin, London, Paris, etc. One of the reasons why an American such as myself with little German skills or connections was able to find and study a small place like Altena is because they caught the eye of more prominent research organizations such as the OECD. While this research on Altena may contribute to future studies on different local level integration models, it is imperative that more small towns like Altena be studied. Research could compare different place-based approaches in smaller towns where horizontal and vertical communication is occurring (or even those where communication is poor or not present) and identify common challenges and successful techniques. In addition, as we learned from the case of Altena, studies could also focus more on comfort within a community and with local authorities, as comfort levels play a large part in Altena's integration successes.

Despite the fact that local authorities do not have as much influence as the federal government in forming effective policy, the supportive, individualized environment of integration initiatives at the local level will have far reaching impacts beyond their own towns or even national borders. Thus, in order to foster a future Germany, and ultimately EU, that has healthy, productive relationships with migrant

generations, it is vital that local level voices, such as governors, integrations teams, and civil society volunteers, are seen as critical participants in these integration deliberations.



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