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## **A place for integration: refugee experiences in two English cities**

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## **Abstract**

*This paper seeks to inject an appreciation of place into analysis of refugee integration. A framework of integration sensitive to interactions between people and places is operationalised to facilitate the systematic comparison of the refugee integration process in different places. In particular, this paper explores variations in key indicators of integration within a cohort of refugees arriving into the UK from the same country of origin (Iraq), at the same time, granted the same legal status and afforded a similar package of support and assistance but settled in two cities in England (Hull and Sheffield). Variations in the integration experiences of refugees in the two cities are spotlighted and related to the contextual, compositional and collective aspects of the places into which they were settled. The findings highlight the importance of recognising that refugee integration is grounded and embodied in space and place and that despite proceeding under the same general operative processes can evolve in distinctive ways in different places.*

## **Introduction**

Relatively large numbers of asylum seekers and refugees have arrived into the UK over the last 20 years. The number of people seeking asylum in the UK rose from around 4,000 in 1987 to a peak of over 80,000 per year in 2002, before falling back to about 20,000 per year from 2005 onwards (Blinder, 2013). A major body of literature has emerged documenting the integration experiences of these refugees. Building on conceptualisations of integration as a two-way process involving change for migrants and host societies, research has set about revealing different settlement processes and experiences and establishing the conditions or relationships necessary for integration to occur. Different individuals and groups have been revealed to be integrating in different ways, at different velocities along different trajectories and with variable outcomes (Favell, 2001).

Factors informing the integration process have been recognised as including prevailing notions of nationhood and citizenship (Ager and Strang, 2008), which shape legal status frameworks, the institutional environment of the receiving society and the rights and opportunities granted to refugees (Da Lomba, 2010; Johnson et al., 2009; Mulvey, 2010; Valenta and Bunar, 2010). The demographic characteristics, cultures and capacities of the settling population have also been identified as important determinants of the integration process (Castles et al., 2002; Cebulla et al., 2010; Strang and Ager, 2010; Threadgold and Court, 2005; Phillimore, 2011). Social connections and relations and, in particular, bonding relationships between refugees, have been spotlighted as key to the experiences of many refugees (Atfield et al., 2007; Cheung and Phillimore, 2013; Losi and Strang, 2008; Spicer, 2008; Valtonen, 2004; Vreecer, 2010).

Despite these insights, understanding of the factors informing the integration experiences of refugees and their interconnectiveness remains relatively weak (Phillimore, 2011). Rutter (2013) suggests a number of reasons for this, including a lack of conceptual clarity about what integration 'looks like', the insensitivities of available administrative data to migrant situations, a tendency toward cross-sectional analysis of a long-term process, and the failure to recognise diversity within the migrant population, for example, in relation to the pre-migration experience. Research has also been criticised for failing to acknowledge the subjective nature of the integration process and for being insensitive to the views and opinions of refugees (Phillimore, 2012). This paper puts forward

an additional reason why our understanding of the integration process remain relatively weak; the failure to fully understand the importance of local context to the integration experience.

The integration process has been recognised as dependent upon the migrant *and* the opportunities open to them in the localities where they live (Spencer, 2011). The form and nature of integration is reported to vary widely across different settings (Ager and Strang, 2004; 2010; Lewis, 2010; Robinson et al., 2007; Smyth and Kum, 2010; Valtonen, 2004). Yet, there has been little systematic analysis of the precise ways and extent to which integration is playing out in different ways in different neighbourhoods, towns or cities. Claims have also been made about aspects of the local context likely to inform the integration experience, including housing, the local labour market, service provision, history of same or other ethnic group presence, patterns of prejudice and tolerance, and cooperative activity and group interchange (Atfield et al., 2007; Castles et al., 2002; Fyvie et al., 2003;). However, there has been a tendency to consider the importance of each of these factors to the integration process in isolation, as if they are mutually exclusive and competing explanations, rather than inter-related and overlapping aspects of local context. Consequently, little progress has been made unpicking the interplay between different factors informing the integration process. This paper argues that this reflects a failure to engage with geographical understandings of place. Consequently, although particular aspects of context have been identified as important to the integration process, it is difficult to point to the intersection of different dimensions of place associated with more positive and productive integration outcomes.

One possible explanation for this failing is the tendency for integration research and analysis to focus on the tangible, quantifiable determinants of the integration process, in a bid to establish universal laws that can help guide integration strategies (Phillimore, 2012). Whatever the cause, the consequence is to impede understanding of integration experiences and outcomes. Arguing that place matters is not to deny that differential packages of rights and opportunities associated with refugee status in different jurisdictions is an important determinant of the integration process; that the individual resources, dispositions and actions of refugees are important; or that people can prove resourceful and exercise agency in the most constrained of circumstances. Rather, it is to recognise that integration proceeds in locations across the UK under the same general operative processes, but there is potential for it to evolve differently in different places.

This paper explores how integration proceeds differently in different places and seeks to cast light on how contextual, compositional and collective aspects of place inform integration outcomes through analysis of the experiences of a cohort of refugees who arrived into the UK under the auspices of the Gateway Protection Programme in 2009 and were settled in different towns and cities across England. Data were collected through repeated questionnaire surveys and focus group sessions with refugees during their first 18 months of life in the UK. This data set provides a unique opportunity to compare and contrast the integration experiences of refugees from the same nationality groups, arriving into the UK at the same point in time, afforded the same legal status but settled in different local contexts. It also provides glimpses into the mechanisms through which the particulars of the place into which a refugee arrives and settles - the physical and material context, the composition of the new refugee and settled populations and local notions of community and belonging - inform the integration experience. Discussion begins by outlining the framework guiding analysis of the integration process, before proceeding to discuss methods and the approach to data collection, including the rationale for focusing on the experiences of Iraqi refugees living in Hull and

Sheffield. The Iraqi refugees and the places where they settled are then profiled, before attention turns to compare and contrast the integration experiences of the refugees in the two cities.

### **A framework for analysis**

Place is a geographic location with material form, which constitutes and contains physical resources and social relations and is invested with meaning and value (Gieryn, 2000; Tuan, 1975). Different places provide different opportunities in terms of access to resources, services and facilities. The cultures and identities that dominate in a place can serve as a source of safety, security and belonging to some, whilst defining others as distinct and different or as outsiders (Sandercock, 2003). Thus, place is not merely a setting in which social life unfolds, but also a medium through which social relations are produced and reproduced (Gregory and Urry, 1985). The challenge for this study was to insert this appreciation of place into analysis of integration. This involved integrating a conceptualisation of place and place effects into an operational model of the integration process, allowing distinctions in the experiences and outcomes of integration in different places to be explored and charted.

A useful starting point in developing this contextual theory of integration proved to be the broader literature seeking to map and explain the variable geography of change associated with new migration (Cheong et al., 2007; Glick Schiller and Caglar, 2009; Hickman et al., 2008; IPPR, 2007; Kesten et al., 2011; Netto, 2011; Phillips et al. 2010; Robinson et al., 2007). Surveying this evidence base, Robinson (2010) argues that studies have hinted at some of the ways in which effects of new migration are emerging in different ways and at different rates in different places, but that analysis is in urgent need of a conceptualisation of place and place effects to better comprehend this variable geography. To this end, he draws on lessons to be learnt from the resurgence of interest in place effects to develop three explanations for geographical variations in experiences and outcomes of new migration. Compositional explanations focus on who lives there and capture dimensions of place relating to both the profile and characteristics of the established and the newly arrived population. This includes socio-economic circumstances and personal resources, established rights and opportunities and the size of different groups within the population. Contextual explanations focus on the local social and physical environment, including material conditions, aspects of deprivation and disadvantage, locally available provision and resources, and opportunities for interaction and engagement. Collective explanations capture the sociocultural and historical dimension of place, including aspects of collective social functioning, local identities and place-based notions of belonging and experiences of accommodating diversity and difference. These explanations are represented as overlapping and interrelated aggregating concepts. The challenge is not to establish the relative importance of one particular explanation over others, but to explore patterns and linkages between them. This study set out to apply this conceptualisation of geographical variations to analysis of the integration process.

In line with other studies, integration was understood to be a two-way process involving change for migrants and host societies. Early conceptualisations of this process focused on issues of co-existence and social and economic equality, and acknowledged the right of refugees to maintain their original culture and identity, whilst participating freely in their adopted society (Bulcha, 1988). Integration was understood as the opposite of marginalisation. Berry's (1988) model of acculturation provided further clarity, contrasting integration against three alternative outcomes -

assimilation, separation and marginalisation - and defining integration as a situation in which a group may maintain its own identity but become part of wider society to the extent that the host population and refugees can live together in an acceptable way. This raised the question of exactly what might be deemed 'acceptable'. Kuhlman (1991) argues that answering this question inevitably involves a value judgement that is dependent upon social and cultural norms regarding what represents an acceptable standard of living. Integration is therefore recognised as being context specific. A second important point of clarification provided by Kuhlman is the recognition that refugee settlement can promote social and cultural change for the host society and that any definition of integration should consider these consequences. Consequently, Kuhlman (1991) states that:

"if refugees are able to participate in the host economy in ways commensurate with their skills and compatible with their cultural values; if they attain a standard of living which satisfies culturally determined minimum requirements (standard of living is taken here as meaning not only income from economic activities, but also access to amenities such as housing, public utilities, health services, and education.); if the socio-cultural change they undergo permits them to maintain an identity of their own and to adjust psychologically to their new situation; if standards of living and economic opportunities for members of the host society have not deteriorated due to the influx of refugees; if friction between host population and refugees is not worse than within the host population itself; and if the refugees do not encounter more discrimination than exists between groups previously settled within the host society: then refugees are truly integrated." (p.7).

This definition might never be satisfied in reality, but it provides a useful yardstick for measuring progress. It also has the benefit of recognising integration as a complex, multi-dimensional process. This is an important point, for as Castles et al. (2002) point out, refugees might secure access to certain opportunities, such as welfare or education, but continue to be disadvantaged in relation to others, such as the labour market or everyday forms of social interaction. Integration is best understood as a set of overlapping processes operating within different spheres, which can proceed at different velocities, along variable trajectories and with distinct outcomes (Favell, 2001).

Various attempts have been made to operationalise this understanding of integration through a focus on key indicators. Perhaps the most notable attempt to bridge theorisations of integration and the practicalities of monitoring and analysis is Ager and Strang's (2004) indicators of integration framework. The framework is an organising device that focuses attention on a series of factors (or indicators) that both inform and are outcomes of the integration process. In doing so it addresses issues of equality, cultural connections, relations with the host community and safety and security (Phillimore and Goodson, 2008). The framework is structured around ten indicators, which are organised into four domains (see Table 1). The '*means and markers*' domain focuses on functional indicators - employment, housing, education and health - and is so named because it includes factors that both support integration and are markers of being integrated. The '*social connections*' domain contains three indicators - social bonds, social bridges and social links - that focus on ties or bonds within a refugee's own community, bridges to other groups and links to key institutions in society. The '*facilitators*' domain contains two indicators that focus on the skills and situations that help refugees confidently engage within society - language and cultural knowledge and safety and

stability. Finally, the '*Foundation*' domain contains one indicator - rights and citizenship - that focuses on rights and obligations expected of the refugee, other people and the state.

Insert Table 1

Such a mid-range theory inevitably risks oversimplifying a complex and contested concept. However, this framework has a number of strengths. It focuses on both processes and outcomes and succeeds in capturing the full gamut of issues identified within the literature as key to integration. It recognises integration as a two way process involving the interchange of culture and understanding between the host community and the refugee, which begins with arrival and ends when refugees are in an equal position to the majority (Phillimore and Goodson, 2008). This process does not necessarily proceed in a linear fashion and interruptions may occur that impede integration (Atfield, et al., 2007). In response, the framework avoids presuming that one domain inevitably leads to another and no one domain is deemed to be more important than any other. Rather, it allows for complex inter-linkages to exist between domains. This is a key point for our purposes. Recognising integration as a non-linear process allows the framework to accommodate the possibility that the basis, form and character of integration might vary across settings (Ager and Strang, 2010). Another feature of the framework of particular relevance to this study is the sensitivity of the indicators to interactions between people and places. Nine of the ten indicators in the framework speak directly to explanations for geographical variations in experiences and outcomes of new migration outlined by Robinson (2010), facilitating analysis of why variations might be apparent between different settings:

- Indicators in the '*means and markers*' domain (employment, housing, education and health) are closely associated with contextual explanations and the specifics of the local social and physical environment, including material conditions and available resources.
- The '*social connections*' domain (bonds, bridges and links) is intimately associated with the profile of the new migrant and settled population in the local area. The opportunity to forge social bonds with a refugee's own community is informed by the matter of 'who lives there' - the composition of the local population - and issues of mobility and accessibility within the local context. Social bridges to other groups are informed by the collective dimension of place in the form of the local community; aspects of collective social functioning, including the history of norms and values associated with shared identities, the history of accommodating diversity and difference, shared understandings, and contact and interaction between different groups. Collective functioning and the nature of the local context inform social links to key institutions in society, which are frequently forged through engagement with the local agents of the state (such as local authorities, GPs, Jobcentre Plus, the Police) through which citizen rights are exercised.
- The '*facilitators*' domain (language and cultural knowledge, and safety and security) is informed by aspects of the local context, including availability and accessibility of English language training in the local area and opportunities for positive interactions with local residents. Access to safe environments at home, work and play is dependent upon compositional and collective factors. For example, residential isolation from family, friends and people with a shared language and culture, compounded by the corrosive effect of

harassment, can have an alienating affect and leave people fearing for their safety and feeling unwelcome in their local neighbourhood, the city, and the UK more generally (Buck, 2001; Chahal and Julienne, 1999; Craig et al, 2004; Robinson et al., 2007).

The Ager and Strang framework captures the key factors known to inform the integration process. It also accommodates the fact that these factors inevitably interact and overlap and can be configured differently according to context and circumstance. In doing so, it displays a sensitivity to the relationship between the specifics of the places into which refugees settle and the particulars of the integration process. For these reasons, it was considered ideal for the purposes of this study and the focus on analysing the integration process and the factors underpinning the distinct form and nature this might take in different places. The practical application of the framework is discussed below.

## **Methods and Data**

This paper draws on data generated during an evaluation of the Gateway Protection Programme commissioned by the Home Office, that monitored and explored the integration experiences of a population of 146 refugees during their first 18 months in the UK (Platts-Fowler and Robinson, 2011) . These refugees arrived into the UK through the Gateway Protection Programme between February and May 2009 and included 105 refugees originally from Iraq, 18 from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and 23 Rohingya, a minority ethnic group from Burma (Table 2).

Insert Table 2

The Gateway Protection Programme is part of an international programme operating under the supervision of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The Programme offers a legal route for a specific number of particularly vulnerable refugees to settle in the UK each year, separate from the standard procedure for claiming asylum. The UNHCR receives resettlement applications from refugees. These are forwarded to the UK Home Office, who interview applicants in refugee camps where they are currently living and has the final decision on selection. Selected applicants are brought to the UK, usually in groups of about 60, granted permanent residency, resettled and provided with support to help them integrate into their new life. A lead agency in each resettlement site is contracted by the Home Office to meet the immediate needs of refugees upon arrival in the area (housing, health and education, including English language training) and to provide practical orientation and targeted casework support tailored to household needs (UNHCR, 2011).

There were two key elements to the research approach: a questionnaire survey of refugees; and focus groups with a sample of refugees in different settlement sites. Each element was conducted at six, 12 and 18 months after the refugees arrived in the UK. Analysis was guided by the application of Ager and Strang's (2004) indicators of integration framework. The refugee questionnaire addressed the ten indicators identified in the framework. Questions were typically closed, some had been used in previous evaluations of the Gateway Protection Programme and some, such as those exploring perceptions of safety in the local area and feelings of belonging to the local neighbourhood, were drawn from national surveys, such as the Place Survey (DCLG, 2009). Some questions were repeated in more than one phase of the research to explore change over time. Other questions were relevant to a particular stage in the resettlement process and were only asked once. The Iraqi refugees were sent the questionnaire by post in English and Arabic, together with a pre-paid return envelope. Low



levels of literacy among the DRC and Rohingya refugees required that questionnaires were completed via face-to-face interviews.

The survey secured a high response rate, 125 out of the total of 146 Gateway refugees (86 per cent) who arrived into the UK in early 2009 completing the first survey six months after their arrival. Inevitably, the proportion of the population responding to the survey reduced over time as refugees left the Gateway programme, opted out of the research, moved home without leaving a forwarding address, or died. Just less than half of the total of 146 refugees responded to the third survey 18 months after arrival in the UK. The inevitable risk with non-response is that this might introduce some level of bias into the research findings. Based on findings from the first survey, there was some evidence that the refugees who dropped out of the research had lower satisfaction and sense of belonging than those who remained engaged.

Initial analysis of the refugee survey revealed major variations in key indicators of integration across the resettlement sites. Distinctive findings were apparent in different settlement sites in relation to functional indicators (in particular, housing), social connections (social bonds, bridges and links) and important facilitators of the integration process (language, safety and stability). However, it was not possible to extrapolate any conclusions about the importance of place as a determinant of refugee integration from these variations. The Gateway programme purposely resettled refugees from the same country of origin together in the same town or city in the UK. The refugees living in the different sites therefore tended to be from different countries of origin (see Table 1), possess distinct migration histories and be able to draw on different packages of individual and collective resources once in the UK. For example, the vast majority of the Iraqi refugees, who were living in Hull, Sheffield and Greater Manchester, had attended school at least up to the age of 14 years and many had completed further education and were engaged in professional occupations before leaving Iraq. More than half of these Iraqi refugees could understand English fluently or fairly well upon arrival in the UK. In contrast, the refugees from the DRC who were settled in Norwich had typically received a small amount of formal school education and only one-quarter could understand English fluently or fairly well upon arrival in the UK, whilst the Rohingya refugees settled in Bradford had little or no formal schooling prior to their arrival and only one in ten could understand English fluently or fairly well upon arrival. These and other demographic characteristics, cultures and capacities are important determinants of the integration process and could help to explain many of the observed variations between resettlement sites. Recognising this fact, analysis sought to control for this variability and compare and contrast the experiences of refugees with a shared background and history who were settled in different places. This was made possible by the fact that a relatively large number of Gateway refugees from Iraq who had arrived into the UK at the same time were settled in different sites (Hull, Greater Manchester and Sheffield). Discussion below therefore explores commonalities and particularities in the experiences of these Iraqi refugees, focusing on the importance that place might have played in shaping their integration experiences. Analysis focuses, in particular, on the stories of refugees settled in two specific cities; Hull and Sheffield.

In addition to the refugee survey, a total of six focus groups were conducted in a bid to investigate issues raised in the questionnaire responses in more detail. Three of these focus groups were conducted with Iraqi refugees in Hull and Sheffield: one focus group was held with Iraqi women in Hull six months after settlement in the city; one focus group was held with Iraqi men in Sheffield 12 months after settlement in the city; and one focus group was held with Iraqi women in Sheffield 18

months after settlement. A total of 15 refugees participated in these three sessions. Each of these focus group was facilitated by one or two members of the research team, working in partnership with a researcher or interpreter fluent in Arabic. The interpreter was not known to the focus group participants. The interpreter was briefed regarding research ethics, the practicalities of the interview process, the background to the research, and the objectives of the group sessions, as well as her role. Issues of impartiality, selectivity and reliability were also discussed (Murray and Wynn, 2001). Following Edwards (1998) and recognising the practical impossibility of providing an exact, unequivocal translation of dialogue during a dynamic group discussion, it was accepted that the interpreter might provide translations in third person. All interviews were translated and transcribed into verbatim text for analysis.

### **The research setting: people and places**

The demographic profile, pre-arrival experiences and settlement support received by Iraqi refugees in Hull and Sheffield was very similar. This is an important point that makes it difficult to explain away observed differences in integration experiences revealed below through reference to the different characteristics, resources and dispositions of the two groups. Both populations were made up of an equal split of men and women and had similar age profiles, the majority being between 25-34 years of age and no respondent being over 50 years old. The majority of refugees in both cities had received ten or more years of schooling and attained similar levels of literacy in their main language (Arabic). The two groups also reported similar English language ability, with half being able to understand and speak English fairly well or better. Similar proportions in each cohort reported having been in employment before coming to the UK. Many had formal qualifications, although this was more common within the population in Hull (71 per cent had an exam certificate, diploma, or degree, compared to 47 per cent in Sheffield). Respondents were not asked about their health status in the six month survey, but similar health profiles were apparent 12 months after resettlement. A majority in each city reported some kind of physical health problem. The emotional health of refugees in Hull was marginally worse. This could reflect their experiences within the UK, discussed below. Iraqi refugees in the two cities were supported by the same Gateway provider, a national refugee charity. Local practices were not evaluated in detail, but interviews with managers and front line staff in the Gateway provider suggested similar approaches to supporting and assisting refugees in the two cities. The refugee survey responses also suggested similar levels of contact and satisfaction with support workers.

Sheffield and Hull are cities in the North of England. Both have an industrial heritage, Hull as a major port and centre for the fishing industry and Sheffield as a centre for the steel industry. Both experienced a period of post-industrial decline during the 1980s and a related rise in unemployment and deprivation (Parkinson et al., 2006). However, the two cities have very different migration histories. Sheffield can be described as a more established contact zone of migration with a rich history as a destination for new immigrants into the UK since 1945 and a long tradition of offering a welcome to refugees (Wainwright, 2003). Rather than being dominated by any single group, migration into Sheffield over the last 60 years has involved the arrival of relatively small numbers of immigrants from a wide range of national and ethnic backgrounds. The consequence is an ethnically and culturally diverse, minority ethnic (non-White British) population. The 2001 census of population categorised 10.8 per cent of Sheffield's population as belonging to a minority ethnic group and this figure had increased to 19.2 per cent by 2011. There is a strong and long-standing

commitment to refugee settlement and integration in Sheffield. This is reflected in the fact that Sheffield was the first UK city to join the Gateway Protection Programme. Sheffield is also home to a social movement known as the City of Sanctuary, which is focused on promoting the city as a place of refuge and welcome towards asylum seekers and refugees (Darling, 2010). The City of Sanctuary network was established with the support of Sheffield City Council and over 70 organisations in the city and has since grown to become a national movement (Squire, 2011). There are a relatively large number of refugee community organisations in Sheffield, reflecting the city's long and varied history as a destination for refugees, that provide advice and signposting to statutory agencies. There are also well established and better funded organisations working with and supporting refugees and asylum seekers, such as the Northern Refugee Centre, which have built up expertise over a number of years.

In contrast, Hull can be described as a relatively new contact zone of migration, with a limited recent history of immigration in the post-1945 period. This is reflected in the fact that, until very recently, only a very small proportion of the population were recorded as being from a minority ethnic (non-White British) background; only 1.9 per cent of the population of Hull was from a minority ethnic background in 1991. However, the city experienced a relatively rapid increase in diversity between 2001 and 2011 after becoming a dispersal location for the national asylum programme and experiencing the arrival of European Union accession state migrants and Gateway refugees (in addition to the Iraqi refugees surveyed). In 2001, 3.3 per cent of the city's population were recorded as belonging to a minority ethnic group. By 2011, this had risen to 10.3 per cent. There are examples of informal, grassroots minority ethnic and refugee community associations and groups within the city and there is also the Asylum Seekers and Refugees of Kingston upon Hull (ARKH), a registered charity providing advice, support and training to asylum seekers and refugees, which in 2013 merged operations with the Sheffield based Northern Refugee Centre.

The refugees in Sheffield were largely settled in neighbourhoods close to the city centre. Most were living in two council wards where more than 25 per cent of the local population in the 2011 census of population reported belonging to a minority ethnic group. In Hull, one of the two council wards where the majority of the refugees were living had a relatively small minority ethnic population (less than five per cent). The other ward had a relatively large minority ethnic population for the city (15 per cent), although only a very small proportion of people reported a Black, Asian or Arab background in the 2011 census. Refugees in both cities were living in locations with relatively high levels of unemployment and deprivation. The claimant count was particularly high in the Hull; 14.2 per cent in one of the wards where the refugees were settled, compared to a city-wide average of 7.9 per cent and a national average of 3.6 per cent. The majority of residents in these neighbourhoods were living in rented accommodation. Private rented accommodation dominated in the two key areas where refugees were settled in Hull, whereas social renting was the predominant form of renting in the two wards in Sheffield where the majority of refugees were settled.

### **Integration experiences of Iraqi refugees in Hull and Sheffield**

Analysis revealed the process of integration to be playing out in different ways for the two groups of Iraqi refugees who arrived into the UK from the same country of origin, at the same time, were granted the same legal status and afforded a similar package of support and assistance but settled in

different cities. In particular, integration appeared to be proceeding more positively in the Sheffield context.

Reviewing developments across the 10 indicators of integration in the Ager and Strang framework, similarities were apparent in the integration experiences of refugees in Hull and Sheffield in relation to employment. Few refugees in either location secured full or part time employment in the first 18 months after resettlement in the UK. This is not a surprising finding. It takes time for refugees to settle and to start looking for work, and various barriers limit access to employment once they commence the job search (Bloch, 2007). A survey of new refugees in the UK found that employment rates were still relatively low 21 months after arrival (49 per cent, compared to 80 per cent for the UK working-age population) (Cebulla et al., 2010). The Iraqi refugees in our study also arrived into the UK at a time of recession and were settled in cities with relatively high levels of unemployment compared to the national average. Similarities were also apparent in relation to rights and citizenship, reflecting the fact that refugees in the two cities were granted refugee status prior to their arrival in the UK. In contrast, distinct differences were apparent in relation to many of the other eight indicators of integration within Ager and Strang's (2004) framework. It was not possible to establish a direct causal link between these observed variations and the contextual, compositional and collective features of the neighbourhoods and cities where the two groups refugees were living. However, it was possible to draw some strong inferences, building on existing evidence and understanding.

Twelve months after resettlement, all respondents in Sheffield reported being fairly or very satisfied with their life in the UK. In contrast, one third of respondents in Hull reported being dissatisfied with life in the UK. This headline finding is indicative of the particular challenges encountered by refugees in Hull in relation to a number of key *contextual features* of the localities in which they were settled. Six months after arrival, the Sheffield Iraqis reported greater levels of satisfaction with their housing, 96 per cent being fairly or very satisfied with their accommodation, compared to just 57 per cent of the Iraqis living in Hull. The reasons for this variation were unclear. Refugees in both cities were housed in private rented accommodation sourced by the same housing association specialising in housing and support for refugees in the early phase of settlement in the UK. Relatively poor conditions have been recorded in the private rented sector in both cities; 45 per cent of private rented stock in Sheffield and 34 per cent in Hull was deemed to be below decent homes standards in 2009 (Hull City Council, 2009; Sheffield City Council, 2009). Different levels of satisfaction with accommodation were still apparent 18 months after resettlement, when all of the Sheffield respondents reported that they were satisfied with their accommodation compared to less than two-thirds of Hull respondents. Iraqis living in Hull were less satisfied with the size of their home, the cost of heating, their neighbours and the local area. At 12 and 18 months after resettlement, Iraqis living in Hull also reported greater levels of dissatisfaction with various physical aspects of their local area, such as parks and open spaces, libraries, and shopping facilities. They also expressed greater levels of dissatisfaction with communal aspects of their local area; the majority of the respondents in Hull reported being dissatisfied with the friendliness of local people and community activities, whereas the majority of respondents in Sheffield expressed satisfaction with these aspects of the local area.

These issues were explored during the focus group with Iraqi women in Hull. All the women participating in the focus group commented that they had been allocated housing that was in poor

condition and located in "*bad areas*". The women commented at length about the poor physical quality of their accommodation, reporting problems of damp, mould and infestation by mice: "*the council was notified about the matter [the mice]. They came and set traps, which got filled with mice, and then they left. It is disgusting!*". The Iraqi refugees had been settled in different neighbourhoods across Hull. The majority expressed unhappiness with their neighbourhood and with the specific location of their accommodation: "*none of us got houses on the main street either. They are all tucked away in alleyways*". They all reported not having gardens and commented that there was nowhere for their children to play. They also complained about their distance from Halal shops, which were in the centre of town, as well as being dispersed away from friends and family, resulting in them sometimes having to take two buses to meet up. Many of the women in Hull reported wanting to move, some out of the city completely, although one woman commented that there are some 'good' areas in Hull, a comment informed by her recent experience of being re-housed to a different area within the city. Twelve months after resettlement, four of the respondents in Hull reported having moved house, possibly in an attempt to address some of such problems. In contrast, an Iraqi man in a focus group in Sheffield commented on how important it was for him to be able to access "*Arabic products*" and buy "*some things that we have lost from back home*" from a Lebanese supermarket and bakeries selling Iraqi bread near to where he lived. He reported that these shops also attracted Iraqis from outside the area, making shopping an opportunity for social interaction. The focus groups with Iraqi men and women in Sheffield did reveal some concerns with the condition of accommodation and frustration with the time landlords took to undertake repairs, but no issues on a par with the problems raised by respondents in Hull.

Variations in integration experiences also appeared to be associated with *compositional features* of the neighbourhoods into which refugees in Sheffield and Hull were settled. Respondents in Sheffield reported being settled relatively close to each other. Some respondents reported living in predominantly White British neighbourhoods, whilst most reported living in more ethnically mixed neighbourhoods, but the vast majority reported that local people were quite friendly towards them. One woman reported that her neighbours always replied when she said hello. She reported sometimes helping out her neighbours and recounted that her Iraqi-Kurdish neighbour would often take her children to school in his car. One of the Iraqi men commented about how nice his local area was, partly because his friends and family lived there too, making him feel "*comfortable and... safe*".

These reports are consistent with the benefits reported to flow as a result of being settled in more cosmopolitan neighbourhoods, which have a long history of accommodating diversity and difference. Hickman et al. (2008), for example, report the tendency for such places to be characterised by local attitudes, identities, interactions and activities that favour more positive social relations and provide greater opportunity to capitalise on new migration, socially and economically. This includes greater potential for building positive intercultural relations between established and newcomers. This is in contrast to the stories emerging from the focus group with Iraqi refugees in Hull, who talked about the population in the local neighbourhood having little understanding of people from different backgrounds. The Iraqi refugees in Sheffield also appeared to benefit from the capacity and infrastructure that can exist in established areas of migrant settlement, securing support and assistance from specialist refugee agencies and more generic services. In contrast, refugees in Hull reported being largely reliant on fellow refugees for support and assistance.

These findings are indicative of the associations frequently observed between compositional and collective aspects of place. This was particularly apparent in relation to the issue of personal safety, an important facilitator of integration. Living in fear of abuse or harassment can undermine well-being and serve to limit opportunities for interaction, engagement and participation (Ager and Strang, 2004). Twelve months after arrival, two-thirds of the Iraqi refugees in Hull reported feeling 'unsafe' when outside in their local area, compared to one fifth of refugees in Sheffield. This difference may be linked to the more common experience of victimisation in Hull, where twelve refugees reported having been verbally assaulted (insults or racial abuse) and two reported having been physically assaulted on at least one occasion during the first 18 months of settlement. In contrast, five refugees in Sheffield reported being verbally assaulted and no respondents reported being the victim of a physical attack. The issue of personal safety was explored further in the focus group with Iraqi women living in Hull. The women reported that they themselves and members of their family had experienced racial harassment, often from young people in the neighbourhood and from neighbours. The women also recounted stories of recent incidents involving friends and associates who were Iraqi refugees. Examples include an Iraqi man who received a threatening letter; a couple who had been threatened by a teenager with a knife; and a couple who had been threatened and told to "get out" of the neighbourhood (the couple were reported to have stayed at a mosque until they were found alternative accommodation). The women reported that many of the neighbourhoods where Iraqi refugees were living are intolerant of diversity: "*honestly, there is racial discrimination in it [the neighbourhood]. Only the British are able to live there, even the Black British can't live there*". Another woman suggested there is little understanding of people from other backgrounds in the area because there is no history of people from different ethnic backgrounds living in the area: "*There are no other nationalities whatsoever; no Indians, no Pakistanis, no Arabs, nothing. When I go out wearing the Hijab, it is as if I come from outer space*". Nagel and Staeheli (2008) argue that integration is not about where refugees live but how they understand their membership in the places where they live, work and raise families. The clear impression given by Iraqi refugees in Hull is that they understand their position to be that of an outsider, isolated for being 'different' and 'distinct'.

These experiences appear consistent with the fact that Hull represents a relatively new contact zone of migration. Within such a context there is potential for residents to feel uncomfortable accommodating the diversity and difference resulting from migration, local service provision might be less sensitive to working with diversity and managing the associated challenges, and migrants might be more likely to be 'othered' on the basis of ethnic, cultural and religious difference, limiting interaction between new migrants and established residents and underpinning harassment and persecution. This narrative is certainly consistent with the neighbourhood experiences reported by the Iraqi refugees. Focus group participants in Hull recounted attempting to interact with neighbours, for example, taking food round on feast days, but commented that these efforts had generally proved unsuccessful. It therefore comes as little surprise that relatively few refugees in Hull responded positively when asked the national headline indicator survey question for measuring community cohesion: 'to what extent do you agree or disagree that this local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together'. In 2008, 76 per cent of the population in England agreed with this statement (DCLG, 2009). After 18 months in the UK, only half of the Hull respondents agreed that their local area was a place where people from different backgrounds got on well together, compared to 80 per cent of the Sheffield respondents. These findings are a

reminder that mixing in new multicultural neighbourhood spaces brings no guarantee of harmonious relations when set against a backcloth of racist discourse and suspicion, despite what the inter-group contact thesis presumes regarding the potential of intercultural encounters to serve to reduce prejudice and promote positive social interactions (Amin, 2002). Multicultural neighbourhoods are spaces of contradiction, with the particular patterns of conviviality and conflict reflecting local complexities (Phillips et al., 2014).

The development of bonding and bridging social capital is widely accepted as key to the development of good relations at the neighbourhood level (Allen and Cars, 2001). Social bonds with other refugees (bonding capital), which mobilise solidarity and promote mutual support and assistance, appeared to be more important to respondents in Hull than social bridges or links to other groups or services. Whilst Iraqi refugees in Sheffield appeared to benefit from the capacity and infrastructure that can exist in established areas of migrant settlement, securing support and assistance from specialist refugee agencies and more generic services, refugees in Hull reported being largely reliant on fellow refugees for support and assistance. The Hull refugees reported being scattered across the city and expressed a desire to live closer together so as to be able to support and assist each other better. In the meantime, close ties were maintained by meeting on a regular basis. For example, a year after their arrival, all the refugees in Hull regularly or sometimes attended a place of worship, compared to 30 per cent of refugees in Sheffield. In contrast, whilst the vast majority of the Hull respondents identified other refugees as useful sources of support 18 months after arrival in the UK, refugees in Sheffield were more likely to refer to the usefulness of formal sources of support, such as a local refugee community organisation, a specialist refugee/asylum support service, a Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB) or Job Centre Plus. For example, the vast majority of the Sheffield respondents reported that a CAB had been a useful source of support, compared to just one quarter of respondents in Hull. A possible explanation for this variation is that Sheffield has more to offer in the way of specialist refugee services and sensitised mainstream provision due to its longer history of refugee and asylum resettlement.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

Features of the local context are recognised as important determinants of the refugee integration process and it is acknowledged that integration can proceed at different velocities and along different trajectories in different locations. However, there has been a tendency to consider the importance of different aspects of local context to the integration process in isolation, rather than incorporating this into an appreciation of the importance of place, and few attempts have been made to chart the variable geography of refugee integration. This study set out to address these deficits in knowledge and understanding; to rise to the challenge posed by Phillips and Robinson (2015) of venturing beyond description of the variable geography of migration and exploring the factors shaping the contours of difference evident within the experiences and outcomes of migration. Rather than studying integration in a particular place, the focus was on systematically analysing the integration process in two different places. Recognising the importance of legal status, demographic characteristics, cultures and capacities to the integration process, analysis sought to control for these factors by focusing on a cohort of refugees from the same country of origin, with similar histories in relation to education and employment, who arrived into the UK at the same time, were granted the same legal status, but were settled in two different cities. This provided an opportunity to explore how place intersects with processes acknowledged as important to refugee integration.

Our approach integrated a conceptualisation of place and place effects that recognised compositional, contextual and collective explanations for geographical variations in the experiences and outcomes of migration into the operational model of the integration process provided by Ager and Strang's (2004) indicators of integration framework. This framework proved ideal for this purpose for two key reasons. First, the four domains and ten key indicators within the Ager and Strang framework spotlight dimensions of place associated with the three explanations for geographical variations in experiences and outcomes of new migration. Second, the framework avoids presuming that one domain inevitably leads to another or any one domain is more important than another. Integration is recognised as a non-linear process that might proceed in different ways in different settings. This allows analysis to search for patterns and linkages between explanations for geographical variations, rather than focusing attention on establishing the relative importance of one factor or explanation over others. This study therefore explored the importance of different aspects of place to the integration process through the analysis of variations in experiences and outcomes associated with key indicators in Ager and Strang's framework. The findings to emerge support the assertion that the different characteristics of places can foster the development of different kinds of intergroup relations and integration processes (Pastore and Ponzio, 2013; Wessendorf, 2010). A number of overlapping and interrelated aspects of place were found to be important in helping to explain the different integration experiences of refugees in Hull and Sheffield and reflexive relationships were apparent between these different aspects of place.

The Iraqi refugees in Sheffield reported more positive progress in relation to a number of key integration indicators six, 12 and 18 months after arrival. It is difficult to prove that these observed differences were directly related to the particulars of the places in which the refugees settled. However, they appear consistent with established understanding of the importance of particular aspects of context, composition and community to integration. In particular, refugees in Sheffield appeared to benefit from being settled in more cosmopolitan neighbourhoods around the city centre, where there was an acceptance of diversity and difference - places characterised by what Wessendorf (2010) refers to as 'commonplace diversity'. This appears to be reflected in higher levels of satisfaction among refugees in Sheffield with their local neighbourhood as a place to live. These neighbourhoods appear to have provided what Wood and Landry (2007) refer to as 'zones of encounter', places where deeper and more enduring interactions between people engaging in shared activities with common goals can take place. Other spaces within the city were also found to be serving as contexts for interaction, as well as providing refugees with access to invaluable help and assistance. Refugees in Sheffield reported benefitting more than their counterparts in Hull from access to culturally sensitive amenities and services. This included shops and community facilities in the local neighbourhood, as well as services provided by specialist and mainstream providers in the city. These experiences are consistent with other studies that have found more positive attitudes toward migrants where there is an acknowledged history of migration and greater acceptance of cultural pluralism (Hickman et al., 2008).

In contrast, the residential neighbourhoods where many of the refugees settled in Hull were reported to have only limited recent history of accommodating diversity and difference. Diversity and mobility did not appear to be the normal condition in these neighbourhoods. In contrast to the reported situation in more diverse places, such as Hackney in London where international immigration is not specifically noticed (Wessendorf, 2010), the arrival of the refugees into these particular neighbourhoods appeared to be experienced as a specific, noticeable change. Refugee



experiences suggest these neighbourhoods represented spaces of social distance and limited contact between new arrivals and established residents and, in some instances, places of conflict. The boundaries between the public realm of the street and strangers, and the parochial realm of communal relations among neighbours or acquaintances developed through associations and informal networks, as described by Lofland (1998), appeared somewhat rigid rather than fluid and overlapping. References to 'transversal places' (Wise, 2007), parochial-realm spaces where people of different cultural backgrounds meet and where intercultural encounters and relationships are formed, were largely absent within the integration stories of refugees in Hull. Civility towards diversity (Lofland, 1989) was found to be missing from the experiences of many refugees in Hull. These experiences appear consistent with previous studies that have highlighted the potential for the arrival of asylum seekers and refugees to initially produce hostility from local residents who have lived in isolated and bounded communities for a long time, particularly when given little forewarning or support to manage the reshaping of their community (Hickman et al, 2008; Robinson et al., 2007). Refugees in Hull also reported limits in bonding capital associated with difficulties maintaining regular contact with each other refugees as a result of being dispersed across neighbourhoods. Accessing the mutual support and assistance of fellow refugees can be vital to getting by in the early months and years of settlement (Atfield et al., 2007). Evidence also suggests that that refugees who maintain regular contact with their co-national and ethnic groups also have more contacts with other-groups and organisations (Cheung and Phillimore, 2013).

These findings point to the importance of recognising that refugee integration is grounded and embodied in space and place. Recognising this embodiedness reveals the ever-present valency of place (Dunn, 2010). This is an important point, for despite the apparent consensus that place matters for refugee settlement, there have been few studies explicitly addressing how diverse contexts inform refugee integration or comparing the integration process in different places in an attempt to tease out key determinants of differential experiences. This study has attempted to address this lacuna, but there remains a need for further analysis regarding differences in the integration process across the variable landscape of refugee settlement if we are to be able to assert with more confidence exactly how different dimensions of place are interacting to inform particular integration outcomes. A useful first step might be to explore correlations between contextual measures of different cities and neighbourhood places and variations in integration outcomes. The challenge will then be to explore the causal pathways underpinning these patterns. A useful way forward here might be to consider what constitutes a positive place for integration, allowing policy and practice to be challenged to actively support the creation of such places.

Pursuing this research agenda will demand sensitivity to scale in recognition of the multiple influences on migrants' everyday lives (Phillips and Robinson, 2015). Analysis at the neighbourhood level offers the possibility of understanding the everyday realm within which people act, opportunities and constraints are manifest, and identities are forged, problematised and reformed (Robinson, 2010). Different cities can also offer different possibilities for integration. For example, *top-scale* cities (such as London), might offer the broadest range of possibilities for refugee incorporation and transnational connection, whilst *down-scale* cities which have not succeeded in (post-industrial) restructuring and where migrants are not highly valued and opportunities for integration are more restricted (Glick Schiller and Caglar, 2009). Research will also need to be mindful of the fact, which could not be addressed in this study, that the experience of place might be quite different for different groups (such as women, children and different nationality and cultural

groups). Finally, it will be important to recognise the interplay between integration and urban transformation. Places will be remade through the social practices of refugee settlement and integration. Understanding this process of transformation should be integral to our appreciation of integration as a two-way process involving change for refugees and host societies.

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Table 1: Domains and indicators of integration

| Domain             | Indicators of Integration       |         |                      |              |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|---------|----------------------|--------------|
| Means and markers  | employment                      | housing | education            | health       |
| Social connections | social bonds                    |         | social bridges       | social links |
| Facilitators       | language and cultural knowledge |         | safety and stability |              |
| Foundations        | rights and citizenship          |         |                      |              |

Source: Adapted from Ager and Strang (2004: 3)

Table 2: The original refugee population by resettlement area and refugee nationality

| Resettlement Area                                       | Nationality | No. of Refugees |
|---|-------------|-----------------|
| Hull  | Iraqi       | 32              |
| Sheffield   | Iraqi       | 23              |
| Greater Manchester<br>(Bolton, Bury, Oldham, Stockport) | Iraqi       | 25              |
| Bradford  | Iraqi       | 3               |
|   | Rohingya    | 23              |
| Norwich   | Iraqi       | 5               |
|   | DRC         | 18              |
| Bromley   | Iraqi       | 8               |
| Colchester  | Iraqi       | 9               |
| <b>Total Sample</b>                                     |             | <b>146</b>      |