

LOCAL INTEGRATION POLICY TOWARDS PERSONS UNDER INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION IN BERLIN. INNOVATIONS AFTER 2015+*

ABSTRACT: In this article we analyse innovative integration programmes functioning in Berlin after 2015 for persons living under international protection. We focus on socio-spatial initiatives. Our main hypothesis is that the only effective way to integrate is to live in one's neighbourhood. Therefore, we present programmes such as BENN or *Berlin Mondiale*.

Our work also reaches out to educational innovations, such as coding schools for international protection beneficiaries. They confirm our hypothesis that effective integration requires cooperation of government and NGOs with the private sector. We identify voluntary participation of persons under international protection and co-creating the image of integration programs. The article is informative and may serve as a basis for further analyses of local integration at city and neighborhoods level.

KEYWORDS: local integration, asylum seekers, Berlin, refugees, international protection

INTRODUCTION

In this article we analyze the local integration of beneficiaries of international protection in Berlin. We concentrate on the period after the so-called migration crisis of 2015. Between 2015 and 2017 more than 1 300 000 asylum applications were submitted in Germany alone. The number of people applying for international protection in Germany in 2015 increased by 155% compared to the previous year (*International Migration Database*). This period marks the beginning of a new discussion on the integration of people with a migration and refugee background.

Our article contributes to the multilevel discussion on the integration of beneficiaries of international protection in Germany. Sophie Hinger's work (2020) provides an interesting insight into this subject (Hinger, pp. 19–39). She concentrates on the issue of 'integration through disintegration'. Schäfer and Pott (2016) also take part in the discussion on locality in integration and migration research. They point, however, that paying attention only to the local dimension may not be sufficient. They elaborate their deliberations with a constructivist spatial theory (Hinger, Schäfer, Pott, pp. 440–463). Majority of the available studies ignore aspects of cities' responsibility for managing the integration of newcomers, and the role of local authorities and communities in managing long-term socio-demographic processes is usually marginalized.

The local dimension of integration, even before the crisis of 2015, was included in the work of Dekker, Emilsson, Krieger, Scholten (2015). According to their research, in many cases the local integration policy does not really differ from that at the state level

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(Dekker, Emilsson, Krieger, Scholten, pp. 633–658). Majority of the researchers, however, focus their attention on the national policy framework or on the EU level (Funk; Okyay; Adam, Föbker, Imani, Pfaffenbach, Weiss, Wiegandt).

Therefore, we propose to include an integration policy at the level of the state of Berlin. At the beginning, we identify important changes in the understanding of integration and migration in Germany on the one hand and in Berlin on the other. It is essential for us to identify the most effective solutions and innovations in socio-spatial integration.¹ Gericke, Burmeister, Loewe, Deller and Pundt (2018) also recognize the importance of social capital in integration processes in Germany (pp. 46–61). Our hypothesis is that the most effective form of integration of newcomers with refugee background is life in neighborhood and projects on the local level.

It is our opinion that the most effective integration takes place not at state or even regional scale – but at neighbourhood and district level. We distinguish the concept of the so-called micro-local level that indicates the strengthening of integration processes not only at the level of the city, but also of its districts and smaller communities.²

Our subsequent research problem is to identify innovations in the education system for beneficiaries of international protection. There are already a number of works devoted to this subject (Kreimer, Boenigk; Crul, Lelie, Keskiner; Jungblut, Vukasovic, Steinhardt). That is why we specify coding schools for people with refugee and migration backgrounds. An additional motivation for our choice is a coherent combination of the described initiatives with the sectors of activists, business and government solutions. In our opinion, an effective integration program uses the resources of each of these groups.

Assuming the subject's inability to objectively know the surrounding world, we have applied an interpretative paradigm. This has allowed us to obtain the necessary flexibility and to take into account the evolutionary nature of integration processes. We base our work on found data using mainly qualitative research methods.

“WE ASKED FOR WORKERS. WE GOT PEOPLE INSTEAD”.³

GERMANY'S PATH TO AN IMMIGRATION STATE

The Federal Republic of Germany is one of the **main** destination countries for migrants. According to OECD statistics for 2017,⁴ nearly 1 384 018 million migrants arrived in Germany (*International Migration Database*). Thus, Germany has overtaken the countries traditionally considered to be migratory – the United States, Great Britain and Australia. Germany has been growing in importance as an immigration country for decades. Over the last 70 years Germany has experienced several stages of intensive migration flows. Their size and nature have significantly influenced Germany's migration and integration policy.

In 1960, for the first time in the post-war Germany, number of job vacancies was bigger than total number of available workers. Gaps in the market began to be filled by contract workers called *Gastarbeiters*.⁵ They were shipped into the Federal Republic under

¹ On local integration at Berlin level, see: Kyuchukov, pp. 219–223.

² A similar phenomenon was also noticed by Seethaler-Wari. Researcher point out the significance of urban planning in the integration process. Our analyses correspond with his results (Seethaler-Wari).

³ Quote by Swiss novelist Max Frisch (Muchowiecka).

⁴ In the statistics there is no distinction between voluntary and forced migration.

⁵ *Gastarbeiter* – (literally) ‘guest worker’. It refers to foreign or migrant workers, particularly those who had moved to West Germany between 1955 and 1973, seeking work as part of a formal guest worker program (Germ. Gastarbeiterprogramm).

bilateral agreements (Szeniawska-Schwabe, p. 4). Subsequent increases in the intensity of migration have been observed since the mid-1980s (especially 1989–1995). At that time, more than one million foreigners came to Germany every year (Dobrowolska-Polak, p. 408).

Until the 1990s, no action was taken in Germany to create a long-term immigration and integration policy. The policy of the CDU-CSU government in the 1980s was based on three pillars: promotion, integration of legal immigrants and their families, reduction of immigration from countries outside the European Community and measures to encourage voluntary return. Subsequent governments formulated programmes to adapt the inflow of foreign workers to the needs and requirements of the German labour market. Over time, the existence of temporary social integration was recognised. Further changes occurred with the takeover of power by the SPD-Green Party left-wing coalition.

The system of residence and work permits **was** liberalised. A programme for highly qualified professionals was implemented (Lesińska, pp. 115–116). The issue of coexistence and confrontation of cultures and attitudes towards foreigners in Germany emerged in the mainstream of political discussion in the 1990s.

This **was** linked to the neo-Nazi attacks on asylum seekers in Rostock Lichtenhagen, Hoyersweld, Möln and Sollingen. In 1996, in opposition to the term multi-culti, the notion of *Leitkultur* was coined – a guiding culture, closer to conducting assimilation policies towards immigrants (Dobrowolska-Polak, p. 414). For a long time, the German parties were divided over the methods of integrating foreigners. The Left spoke openly about the need to integrate a modern multicultural society. The Greens, agreeing with this approach, stressed the necessary development of pluralism, tolerance and mutual recognition. At the opposite political pole were the Christian Democrats. It was them who introduced the concept of German “leading culture” (Germ. *Leitkultur*) into the public debate. They favoured the opinion about the need to assimilate foreigners. They also coined the slogan “parallel societies” (Germ. *Parallelgesellschaften*) which could have been viewed as a call for disintegration. The SPD, FDP and the Left did not refer to the concept of German Leitcultures in their programmes. Nevertheless, they did not support the concept of multiculturalism (Szeniawska-Schwabe, p. 12).

In 2013 the right-wing populist party AFD (Germ. Alternative für Deutschland) joined the discussion⁶. The representatives of AFD are in favour of anti-European, anti-immigration and anti-refugee policies. AFD’s anti-establishment rhetoric is parallel to other right-wing populist parties such as the National Front in France, the Freedom Party in the Netherlands or the Northern League in Italy (Medina Serranos, Shahrezaye, Papakyriakopoulos, Hegelich, p. 214).

A comprehensive approach to immigration and integration of immigrants was set out in the 2013 CDU/CSU and SPD coalition agreement. It aims to strengthen the welcome-culture and recognition culture (Germ. *Willkommens- und Anerkennungskultur*). Furthermore, the agreement included the strengthening of pre-integration measures and the acceptance of labour migration within the European Union as well as refugee protection and humanitarian issues (*Koalitionsvertrag zwischen CDU, CSU und SPD*).

⁶ AFD is often referred to as a far-right party, but this status is debatable. Officially, the German Office for the Protection of the Constitution considers the far-right parties to be The National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD) or Civic Movement for North Rhine-Westphalia (Pro-NRW).

The coalition agreement of 2013 adopted a concept pushed through by M. Böhmer: a two-way adaptation in the admission process that applies to both the host society and newcomers. “Integration is a process that requires something from everyone, a task for the whole society” (*Koalitionsvertrag zwischen CDU, CSU und SPD*, pp. 103–107). The opening of the host society indicates a move away from the extreme politics of *Leitkultur*. Although the openness mainly concerned specialised, educated economic immigrants, it also largely referred to persons seeking international protection (*Koalitionsvertrag zwischen CDU, CSU und SPD*, p. 104).

The number of people applying for international protection in Germany in 2015 increased by 155% compared to 2014. In the following years, we could observe gradual decrease (Godlewska-Szyrkowa, p. 20).

Table 1. Number of applications for international protection in Germany 2014–2019

Year	Number of applications for international protection in Germany
2014	172 945
2015	441 800
2016	722 265
2017	198 255
2018	161 900
2019	142 400

Source: Own elaboration on the basis: EUROSTAT (2014–2020) <http://www.ec.europa.eu>.

Among people applying for refugee status in 2019, the three most represented nationalities came from Syria, Iraq and Turkey. The number of submitted applications does not equal the number of positive decisions granting international protection. In 2019, the number of positively granted applications in Germany stood at circa 45% (*First Instance Decisions on Asylum Applications in 2019*).

BERLIN – CITY OF DIVERSITY

Berlin has a dual role – that of capital and federal state. It is distinguished by a large number of people with migration experiences, compared to other European agglomerations. The most represented groups of foreigners are Turks (182 483), Poles (114 339), Russians (59 799) and Syrians (44 837) (*Statistischer Bericht...*). The total number of people with a migration background at the end of 2019 was 1 320 320 (with no distinction between voluntary and forced migration). Between 2015 and 2018, the number of decisions on proceedings for international protection reached 75 1131 persons. In 2018, the three most frequently accepted nationalities with the highest rate of positive decisions were from Syria (27.3%), Iraq (10.1%) and Iran (6.7%) (BAMF 2015–2018).

The rapid population growth posed serious challenge for Berlin, particularly in terms of infrastructure and capacity in administration, schools, childcare facilities or access to (social) housing. During the increased influx of asylum seekers, Berlin faced significant challenges. Nevertheless, the city witnessed solidarity campaigns and civil society. Their aim was to facilitate and strengthen integration processes (Koca, p. 568).

Berlin is a federal state and has a separate status (alongside Hamburg and Bremen) as a *Stadtstaat* ('city-state'). The mayor of Berlin has a double function as Minister-President. Each Land has its own budget and autonomy in the most important policy areas.⁷ Since the arrival of larger numbers of Syrian refugees, the emphasis has been placed on integration programs. This includes language, orientation and vocational training courses. Currently, participation in these courses is mandatory at the federal level (*Statistischer Bericht...*).

The dispersion of foreigners in Berlin is uneven. This is due to a number of factors, such as the administrative procedures for asylum seekers and the location of reception centres. This is also due to the necessity to organize appropriate social and living conditions as well as to ensure social security. The largest number of foreigners live in the districts of Reinickendorf, Kreuzberg, Mitte and Neukölln (*Statistischer Bericht...*).

INTEGRATION OR INTERACTION? LIVING IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

The appropriate development of policies to manage asylum and forced migration is often marked by the concept of integration used in multiple senses. Robinson suggested that integration is a chaotic concept: "a word used by many but understood differently by most" (Robinson, p. 7). We agree with his assertion that it is an "individualised, contested and contextualized" term (Robinson). The process itself occurs in several areas: integration in the labour market (Betts, Memisoglu), housing (Mahieu, van Caudenberg), access to education and health services. It includes the sphere of social connections and contacts with fellow citizens (Glorius, Kordel, Weidinger, Buerer, Schneider, Spenger). It also takes into account language, culture and the localness of everyday life (Ager, Strang; Fontanari, Ambrosini).

There is a third way to treat migration and integration. Apart from fighting for integration or against it, there is also life in one's own neighborhood. This leads to the conclusion that the integration process alone may not be sufficient. In our opinion, all positive models of integration of migrants are based on interaction and living in their neighborhoods. The local integration occurs on many levels (Hillmann, Lin Pang). In this chapter we will present micro-local solutions.

In line with Arroyo, Montesino, Johansson and Yahia (2021) we understand integration as a process of exchange. It is an interaction of people from different generations and ethnic backgrounds that takes place in a common space through everyday life by different kinds of interactions and ways of socialization.⁸ Its most important foundation is the multi-voice of the actors and the micro-scale relations. According to Italian researcher Ambrosini, the local dimension of integration resembles a battleground of different actors. In our opinion it should be analysed on the basis of interactions between actors involved in asylum management at the local level (Ambrosini).

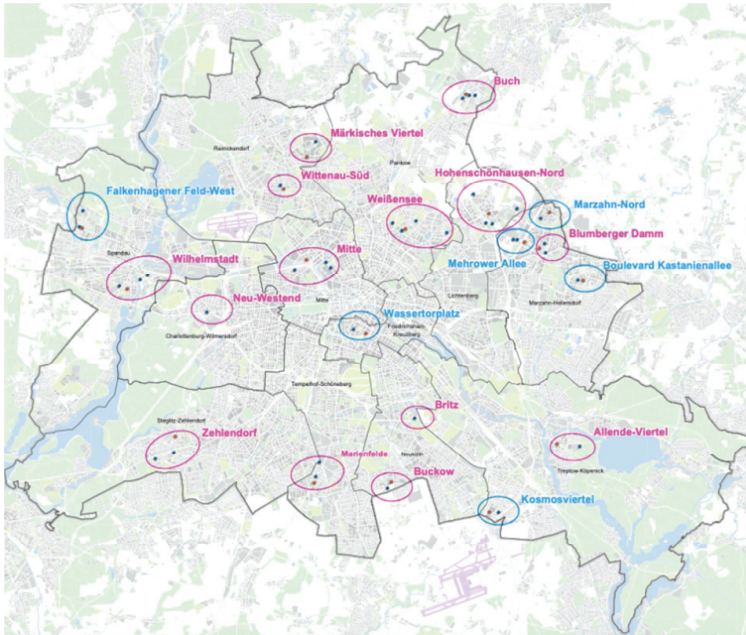
In Berlin, an important initiative is the Berlin Entwickelt Neue Nachbarschaften (BENN). This is a project initiated by the Berliner Senate and established in 2018. BENN is headed by the Senate Department of Urban Development and Housing. It assumes cooperation

⁷ In the field of migration (especially refugee accommodation), they formulate and implement their own law about housing, health, education, language, vocational training and labour market integration policies. They define the conditions of access to social services.

⁸ The researchers analysed a new type of shared housing. Older people, young residents and refugees share a common space for social integration (Arroyo, Montesino, Johansson, Yahia).

with local social organizations. The main objective of the project is to strengthen the future of local integration in the neighbourhood of large refugee centres (BENN). The idea is to solve problems not for refugees and residents, but together with them (BENN, *Berlin Entwickelt Neue Nachbarschaften*).

The programme includes twenty locations, in the following districts: Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf, Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, Lichtenberg, Marzahn-Hellersdorf, Mitte, Neukölln, Pankow, Reinickendorf, Spandau, Steglitz-Zehlendorf, Tempelhof-Schönberg, and Treptow-Köpenic (*Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung und Wohnen, BENN Stadort*).



Map 1. Distribution of large reception centres and BENN initiatives in Berlin (www.stadtentwicklung...)

With the example of the BENN programme in Buch, Pankow district – we present a cross-section of initiatives that appear in a similar character in all districts covered by this programme.

INITIATIVES IN BUCH

Buch is known for its health care facilities, some of the best research centers and medical schools. It also includes the areas of two former government hospitals that have been designated for new purposes (BENN, *Handlungskonzept BENN in Buch*). At the turn of 2014/2015 a centre for refugees was established there. Initially, there were voices of criticism from the right-wing NPD party. They referred to the safety of the local population and concerns among the inhabitants. Skepticism towards newcomers was still noticeable in this district.

In 2017 the support of the far right AFD increased in Germany and in the Buch district it reached 30%. Supporters of this party started the campaign Schutzzonen in Buch to protect the district from newcomers (BENN, *Handlungskonzept BENN in Buch*, p. 3).

The low level of experience of Buch residents in direct contact with migrants translated into the problem of social isolation. It was a challenge in the face of two more reception centres for people with refugee experience. Over the course of time, the mood began to calm down, which was partly due to the success of the BENN program (BENN, *Handlungskonzept BENN in Buch*, p. 5).

Family Guides is an initiative in which people with refugee or migration experience support newcomers, especially the families with children and unaccompanied minors. They provide advice on education, safety and educational practices (BENN in Buch. *Regelmäßige*). Another expression of micro-local integration is the model initiative of Café Frauen, a meeting place with coffee and a common table for women, among others those in the headquarters of the AWO-Refugium collective reception centre in Buch (OECD, *AWO Refugium für besonders schutzbedürftige Flüchtlinge*). The exchange of thoughts with women with similar experiences allows interaction and natural integration. In addition, BENN Buch offers assistance in legal and procedural steps, in applying for asylum, insurance or work and housing. This is supported by the YAAR E.V. projects (mainly helping Afghans) and TRIXIEWIZ, where Farsi speaking migrants support the integration of newcomers by providing assistance with formal and informal issues (BENN in Buch. *Regelmäßige*).

Nevertheless, in a BENN survey, 9 out of 10 refugees admitted that they have no contact with the district's residents. The same was shown by the questionnaires addressed to the German neighbours. The survey showed that $\frac{1}{4}$ of the respondents do not take advantage of the offers, mainly because they are not informed about them. They encounter a barrier in communication, not having an insight into the neighborhood's offer (BENN, *Handlungskonzept BENN in Buch*).

Below we present a selection of what we consider to be attractive initiatives offered in many districts of Berlin under the BENN program.

Table 2. BENN projects and initiatives in Berlin (as of January 2020)

Project	Description	District
Integration at a shared table		
<i>Kochem im Wedding</i>	collective cooking and learning for minors	Mitte (Mitte)
<i>Kochtöpfe Berlins</i>	collective cooking	Mitte (Mitte)
<i>Kochbuch Interkulturell</i>	cookbook based on collective weekly cooking	Marienfelde (Tempelhof-Schönberg)
<i>Kochen mit dem Migrationssozialdienst</i>	collective cooking	Blumberger Damm (Marzahn-Hellersdorf)
<i>50 Plates of Reis: Kochabend mit Nachbar*innen</i>	collective cooking	Hohenschönhausen-Nord (Lichtenberg)
<i>Sprachcafe</i>	language learning by coffee; language tandems	Marienfelde (Tempelhof-Schönberg)
<i>Frauenfrühstück</i>	meetings for women; common breakfasts; exchange of experiences	Wilhelmstadt (Spandau)

Table 2 – cont.

Project	Description	District
Support for young people and families		
Girls Club	workshops; courses for young girls aged 12–16 years	Mitte (Mitte)
<i>Weihnachten in Tempohome</i>	common holidays in the reception centres; acculturation meeting	Wassertorplatz (Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg)
<i>Orte für Kinder</i>	day care centre and workshops for children	Mehrower Allee (Marzahn-Hellersdorf)
Tisch der Kulturen	intercultural meetings for children and young people	Britz (Neukölln)
<i>DIY für Kids</i>	art workshops and courses for children	Wilhelmstadt (Spandau)
<i>Jugend für den Frieden</i>	community centre and intercultural meetings	Hohenschönhausen-Nord (Lichtenberg)
Common space and environment		
<i>Neighbourhood Garden Work</i>	working towards a common green space	Hohenschönhausen-Nord (Lichtenberg)
<i>Pflanzaktion im Tempohome</i>	working towards a common green space	Wassertorplatz (Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg)
<i>Garten der Begegnung zusammen waschen</i>	working towards a common green space	Mehrower Allee (Marzahn-Hellersdorf)
BENN-Spazierengaenge	shared walks to places of historical and cultural importance for the district; learning about local history	Marienfelde (Tempelhof-Schönberg)
<i>Komm und Sieh</i>	assistance in finding housing	many districts
Workshops, arts, crafts, sports		
<i>Mittwochs-sprachtreh</i>	language courses (German neighbours teach refugees and vice versa)	many districts
<i>Interkultureller Kalender</i>	jointly created calendar with holidays and important dates for all religions; multicultural stories	Wassertorplatz (Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg)
<i>Macramme Kurs</i>	oriental craftsmanship course	Marzahn Hellersdorf
<i>Mitternachtsfußball Fair Play Grenzen</i>	sport	Mehrower Allee (Marzahn-Hellersdorf)
KIK – Kultur – Integration – Kompetenz & Impuls e.V.	workshops, courses, intercultural meetings, consulting	many districts
<i>Interkulturelle Pflanzen – willkommen Einwanderer?</i>	workshops, courses for cultural mediator	Wittenau-Süd (Reinickendorf)
<i>Naehstube</i>	tailoring courses	Wilhelmstadt (Spandau)

Project	Description	District
Advice and assistance		
<i>Britzer Flüchtlingsinitiative</i>	advice and support (e.g. in administrative or procedural matters)	Britz (Neukölln)
<i>Interreligiösen Forums</i>	exchange of experience and support	Britz (Neukölln)
<i>Nachbarschaftsforum</i>	neighbourhood forum – joint planning of activities and changes in the neighbourhood	many districts

Source: own elaboration by the authors.

STADTTEILMÜTTER

The initiative that complements the BENN project is the Stadtteilmütter. Its beginnings in Berlin date back to 2004, in the Neukoeln district. However, it was developed significantly after 2015, and in 2019 changes were made to their its functioning. The so-called ‘neighbourhood mothers’ (Germ. *Stadtteilmütter*) play an important role in local integration processes. In most cases they are women with refugee experience who bring the necessary competences in integration through their multilingualism and experience. Their distinctive feature is the red scarf (Jedicke).

The main objectives of the project are: support in raising children and shaping their new future, showing possible paths of education and development. ‘Neighbourhood mothers’ are a bridge and support connecting various environments in the social space. They allow for the exchange of experiences and the promotion of activities dedicated to beneficiaries of international protection in Germany.⁹

The specificity of this initiative allows women to reach out to marginalised and vulnerable families and environments, often isolated from the community. It has been noted on many occasions that the integration processes of families most effectively start with women and children. They, however, as the observations show, stay mainly in their homes. Therefore, an attempt was made to exchange experiences and provide women and children, with help in a direct way. The very local and personal approach strengthens the potential of Stadtteilmütter (Pöller).

The researcher Liv-Berit Koch (2017) in her analysis of district mothers stresses the limitations of this initiative. She considers the lack of an institutionalised and organizational model of the project as a weakness and, consequently points its structural limitations. The biggest disadvantage, however, is the lack of adequate financing and provision of staff facilities for women in the function of Stadtteilmütter (Koch).

In 2020, the Berlin Senate decided to employ women subject to insurance premiums. This will improve their work and working conditions. For many of these women this is their first full employment. Today, Stadtteilmütter operate in all districts of Berlin. The program been also promoted in other regions of Germany (Der Regierende Bürgermeister Senatskanzlei, *Familienbildung mit besonderer Wirkkraft...*).

⁹ Der Regierende Bürgermeister Senatskanzlei, *Familienbildung mit besonderer Wirkkraft – Senat beschließt Landesprogramm zur Sicherung von Stadtteilmüttern*, <http://www.berlin.de/rbmskzl/aktuelles/pressemitteilungen/2019/pressemitteilung.817016.php> [11.03.2020].

INTEGRATIONSLOSTEM

Other projects covering all Berlin districts are the so-called Integrationslostem, i.e. ‘integration pilots’. Their work concentrates on the initial stage after the arrival of refugees in Berlin. They support the independence of people with refugee experience, enable networking and self-development. Integration pilots actively participate in administrative procedures, offering, among other things, assistance in filling in applications. They provide support in finding jobs and language courses (OASE).¹⁰ In addition, Integrationslostem guarantees assistance in cases of domestic violence or incidents of racism and discrimination. They also organize information meetings in centres for refugees and asylum seekers. Each district and centre gives an individual character to the integration pilots’ initiative (Berliner Senat, *Angekommen in Berlin*).

BERLIN MONDIALE – INTEGRATION THROUGH SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

The Berlin Mondiale is a project that initiates and conducts intergenerational, interdisciplinary socio-spatial cooperation. It brings together people with migration and refugee experiences. It is based on several pillars: self-organisation and refugee initiatives (including migrants self-organisations, MSOs) as well as community projects and urban networking and development. Another pillar is the long-term nature of the activities and the rejection of temporality in integration projects. Since its creation in 2014 and its substantial expansion after the so-called integration crisis, over sixty initiatives have been created (Berlin Mondiale).¹¹ We present several initiatives which in our opinion strongly develop social space.

The project and application “Arriving in Berlin” was developed in cooperation with HKW (Germ. *Haus der Kulturen der Welt*) by Afghan urban planner Hamidullah Ehrari, Syrian trader Alhadi Aldebs, Afghan translator Mohammad Yari and Iranian biotechnologist Farhad Ramazanali at the turn of 2015/2016 (HKW).¹² The application uses maps, providing navigation for new arrivals with refugee experience.

It indicates, among other things, where **one** can find a doctor who speaks **one’s** language or a place for German language courses. Visualisation and city maps make it easier to find oneself in a new space. The application is updated on an ongoing basis. It is available on a smartphone[s] and works in several languages (Berlin Mondiale).¹³

The creators of the application indicate that the chosen maps can be “created together” and “combined together”. As they write, “we will not know where we are going if we do not know from where we are” (Arriving in Berlin).¹⁴ Berlin Mondiale combines this project with digital mapping workshops for women with a refugee experience. Active participation of refugees in both projects allows Berlin to be seen from their own perspective. After the workshop, the results of the work are transferred to the application database “Arriving in Berlin” (Berlin Mondiale).

¹⁰ <https://www.berlin.de/ba-pankow/politik-und-verwaltung/beauftragte/integration/themen/integrationslotsinnen-in-pankow-695170.php>; http://www.oase-berlin.org/wp-content/uploads/lotsenflyer_POL_2018.pdf [22.03.2020].

¹¹ <http://berlin-mondiale.de/konzept-kriterien/konzept-englisch> [05.04.2020].

¹² www.hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/2015/berlin_mondiale_hkw/refugees_map/arriving_in_berlin.php [18.02. 2020].

¹³ <http://berlin-mondiale.de/konzept-kriterien/konzept-englisch> [05.04.2020].

¹⁴ <https://arriving-in-berlin.de/project> [01.03.2020].

Since 2016 high activity of refugees from Afghanistan or Iran has been observed in Berlin. One of the interesting initiatives is Newsgroup Afghanistan which associates projects of people arriving from this country” (Berlin Mondiale). “Willkommen in Exiliston” is a project where Afghan youth in Berlin interviews politicians (e.g. the CDU or representatives of the Ministry of the Interior), asylum lawyers and social activists. A symbiotic initiative is “Yalda Nacht” where young people play the role of German experts with whom the above-mentioned interviews were conducted. These projects are important in the context of integration. They allow to understand the perspective of decision makers whose decisions influence condition of newcomers.

Young people with refugee experiences have also created the *Was Geht?* magazine, which aim is to encourage others to participate in social life (Berlin Mondiale). They want to unite people and inform about the most interesting initiatives, passing on stories of newcomers.

All these initiatives come together, allowing beneficiaries of international protection to decide on a new space for them and create it together with German citizens.

EDUCATION FOR INTEGRATION

The Welcome Centre (Germ. *Willkommenszentrum*) operates as a central advisory unit in Berlin. It offers all newcomers advice on a wide range of services and legal issues concerning immigration and integration. It serves as an interface between the immigration office, branches of the Federal Employment Agency and district agencies.¹⁵

In 2015 the Senate of Berlin identified refugees as a strategic target group. It offers advice on the insurance system, residence permits, taxes and employment (OECD, *Working Together...*, pp. 121–122). It provides information on educational opportunities, implementation of compulsory schooling by minors or vocational education.¹⁶

Refugees and asylum seekers can attend universities. They are entitled to do so even if their educational references in third countries do not meet the official admission criteria. Beneficiaries of international protection may attend universities as free or full-time students.¹⁷ In response to the rapid increase in the influx of refugees in the recent years, the offer of these courses has been increased (OECD, *Working Together...*, p. 183). Berlin is characterised by high civic participation and the combination of business and activism in many urban areas. One of the examples are coding schools for people with a refugee background.

CODING SCHOOLS – A NEW QUALITY OF SOCIAL INNOVATION

The years 2015/ and 2016 were crucial due to the rapidly rising number of asylum applications in Germany. Thus, they were marked by innovation and social experimentation in the field of integration. One of them was the establishment of the coding schools for

¹⁵ These services are available to all migrants regardless of their legal status (including irregular migrants).

¹⁶ Immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees can also obtain information on how to improve their educational or language skills (e.g. to take a German language course, complete their studies at the University) at the MoBiBe (Berlin Mobile Education Counselling Service). Specially trained consultants also provide information in newcomers’ languages: Arabic, Farsi, Kurdish or Russian. See more: MoBiBe Berlin.

¹⁷ See more: The Governing Mayor of Berlin Higher Education and Research.

beneficiaries of international protection. According to Ben Mason, these schools were also a reaction to the ageing German society, they also provided an opportunity for the development of the IT sector. In his opinion, “Working in the technology sector is a way to overcome the traditional language of national discrimination and qualification barriers” (Mason). According to Betterplace Lab, majority of the IT initiatives for refugees in Germany are concentrated in Berlin. We present two Berlin coding schools, dedicated to people with refugee experiences.

The Devugees School was created by Berlin’s technology specialists, including programmers and HR experts. It started operating in 2016. Unlike most activities of this type, Devugees operated as a social enterprise for profit. It considered positive social impact as its main objective. Thus, it had a fully functional business model. The school offered two types of courses. The first was an introductory 4-week course, with workshops and expert meetings. The second one lasted 12 months, of which 9 months were intensive training combined with a 3-months internship (Mason).

ReDI School of Digital Integration is another Berlin-based coding school that adapts to different levels of the participants. Initially, it operated exclusively in Berlin, later expanding to Munich and even Copenhagen (Digital Social Innovation). It is financed through grants from private companies (e.g. Facebook). Courses usually last three months. A key element of ReDI is linking schools to the private sector. This is to be ensured not only by financial support, but also by opportunities for internships and employment (Mason).

ReDI also offers the ReDI School’s Digital Women Program, a training project dedicated to women with migration and refugee experiences. During the courses, free childcare and laptops are guaranteed, there is also a possibility to develop skills at home. At the initial stage of training (Intro-level), classes can be translated into Arabic, Farsi or Tigrinya language (Semitic language spoken in Eritrea, Northern Ethiopia mainly in the Tigray Region). A.C.E 3xReDI Kids program for children, created in cooperation with PxP, is also part of ReDi. Its aim is to accelerate social development and acculturation. It helps children to develop skills necessary in the 21st century. The program is open to children from Germany as well as those with a migration or refugee background. For the latter, a separate project Kids Coding Caravan was created. It is financed by Deutsche Bahn Stiftung. It is to guarantee equal opportunities for digital education for all. This helps the micro-local integration of people from an early age (ReDI School of Digital Integration).

the Presentation of the nature of the projects described above and the very essence of the coding schools, we distinguished strengths, but also possible challenges in the field of the integration. The advantages include the flexibility of technological professions, both in terms of language and mobility. Degrees are less important than skills and job opportunities in the IT sector. Coding languages are universal. Because of close cooperation with the commercial IT sector, coding schools allow to understand not only the technology industry itself, but also the specificity [main features/peculiarities] of German labour market. This can translate into greater freedom and self-confidence at first employment. It also contributes to the development of soft skills. Most of the above-mentioned schools offer language support. Continuous contact with a foreign language is a strongly integrating element. Moreover, the IT sector is constantly developing and inextricably linked to other sectors of the economy. This in turn means that having such competences can be useful in many other sectors (Mason).

Such innovations also have their weaknesses. It is stressed that, coding schools would help only a small number of refugees to find work. Focus on one group could reinforce existing social inequalities among migrants. Another argument is that training will only be useful for newcomers with appropriate education and high qualifications (Mason, p. 20). We disagree with these statements. Most of the solutions described above (the best example is ReDI School) offer help at the initial stages of courses. Importantly, the effects of even small scale success in the IT industry are far-reaching.

In managing migration at local level, the main problem is the issue of the available opportunities for the host society to meet new arrivals of asylum seekers. The preparation of the majority of society and the immigrant minority is a prerequisite for effective integration. The openness of Berlin and previous experiences in managing diversity and minorities in society (e.g. Turkish) proved very useful after 2015. We presented innovative social practices and solutions such as BENN or *Berlin Mondiale* to stress importance of relations in the neighbourhood. In our opinion, they are the key to both urban integration and national policies. We selected projects in which citizens of Berlin and people with a refugee experience contribute to the creation of their space.

The migration crisis has unleashed a network of innovation and strengthened citizens' initiatives. Above all, it showed how important cooperation between business, NGOs and government is. The founders of the Migration Hub note that activists[,] employees, and NGOs often live in the moment and are impulsively engaged in activities. The work of governments, on the other hand, often shows the temporary nature of solutions. The business sector brings the necessary perseverance and consistency to these activities. In our opinion, the best solution is to combine these sectors effectively. Schwarz believes that ultimately refugees themselves will be important contributors to long-term solutions (Guttmann).

We think that there is a strong correlation between the strong influx of asylum seekers in Germany and the introduction of innovative solutions in Berlin. At the same time, there are still many challenges on two levels. In the management of socio-spatial integration, proper organisation of information, reaching out to beneficiaries of international protection themselves, remains the most important challenge. In our opinion, the way Berlin's common space is organised can help newcomers. Civic participation and strong involvement of society in its surroundings can be an example of the development of values in people with a refugee experience. The main challenge is still to organise long-term solutions.

On the educational level, the city faces problems of access to vocational education and apprenticeships. There is also a low participation of women, especially in technical education (OECD, *Working Together...*, p. 179). We believe that coding schools are excellent way to fill these gaps in educational programmes for beneficiaries of international protection. It is also difficult to prognose how many participants will have a real chance to become programmers. Nevertheless, the successes of determined people can be an inspiration for others with refugee experiences. Above all, they provide them with the opportunity to integrate and acquire skills valuable on the labour market. This is confirmed by surveys conducted by Mason among specialists, volunteers and participants themselves (OECD, *Working Together...*, p. 23). "Technology can connect people to build new connections for old problems". This is the guiding idea of the ReDI school (Digital Social Innovation, ReDI School of Digital Integration...). Treatment of problems as an opportunity is a common feature of start-ups and the business environment (Bearne).

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