

Philosophische Fakultät at the University of Tübingen

Master Thesis

**The Integration structure: Between the Integration Plan
and Voluntarism for refugees in a local Kommune in
South-West Germany**

Author

Claudia Cusi Moreno

Supervisors

Dr. Maximilian Priester-Lasch and Prof. Gabriele Alex

Matriculation Number: 5719484

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Study Program: MA Social and Cultural
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E-Mail: claudiacusimoreno@gmail.com

Abstract

“Integration” is a commonly heard term not only in politics of migration, but also in social gatherings and academic research in Europe. However, there is no clear consensus on what it exactly means, and how it is practiced. This ethnographical study focuses on two Integration practices in the South-Western city of Böblingen: the Integration Plan development and a local voluntary initiative for refugees called Café Refuge. Both are extended practices across the country and beyond, that attempt to facilitate the Integration of migrants in a local environment through different practices and both are local embedded practices interconnected with each other at the local political level.

Participant observation as well as other ethnographical methods have been carried out in both fields to analyse how is Integration practiced and constructed, i.e., how the actors within the field exploit their agency in each of the cases. In addition, this work explores how they are interrelated through socio-political mechanisms within the city or *Kommune*.

The thesis includes three sections beyond a State of the Art on Anthropology of Migration and Integration and the Methodology: a literature analysis of general national discourses on Integration meanings, including statements by the *Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge* (BAMF), *Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat* (BMI), and the National Integration Plan (NIP). They are later compared to ethnographically observed Integration practices within the development of an Integration Plan for the city of Böblingen and the situation analysis in Café Refuge. Finally, a network analysis between the interrelation between the two latter practices is conducted in order to explore Integration as a structural political effort in a local environment.

Throughout the first literature analysis on different national meanings of Integration, it has been found that there is a paradox between Integration as a mechanism for social cohesion for all members of society, while the measures applied are meant for the migrant population as a target group. The Integration discourse represents social inequalities and struggles while portraying an ideal imaginary of what society should be through the improvement of lives of a discursive figure of the “migrant” or “person with migration background”. Nonetheless, this represents a critical view on general social struggles that include many social groups and individuals.

The ethnographic examples have reflected this paradox further, in that Integration practices transcend traditional differentiation and problematization discourses among social groups and seek social cohesion for all members within the community. This may be identified as a transformation of practices over the last years since the first appearance of Integration Plans in 2007 and

Willkommenskultur's civil voluntary mobilisation for refugee support since around 2015. The two case studies have shown that Integration practices are very different from one another but represent much more than improvement in the migrant's life. The actors in the field, including refugees and migrants but also all involved individuals are part of Integration as a collective process of adapting to social diversity and plurality in current societies.

Integration is also at the centre of local political social debates. This is exemplified by the networks of actors and institutions within the local city of Böblingen. It has been found that there is a local political structure of Integration practices. They work seldom alone, but rather are embedded in a social network with other institutions with whom situations of both cooperation and conflict are given. This structure of actors and practices influences and is influenced by each of the practices, in which situations of change and transformation in the city administration and Café Refuge have caused and have been caused in relation to their interconnection to one another. In sum, social transformations are embedded both in internal as well as external interactions in each field.

Keywords: Integration, Anthropology of Migration, Integration Plan, voluntary initiative, refugees

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1. Introduction

Integration is a commonly heard term not only in politics of migration, but also in social gatherings and academic research in Europe. However, there is no clear consensus on what it exactly means, and how it is generally practiced. This Master Thesis is based on twelve-month long ethnographical research in the city of Böblingen in South-West Germany. This topic explores two organizations in this German south-western middle city with 50.000 inhabitants and their construction of the meaning of Integration in the city. Especial focus is put on local practices of the city administration in developing an Integration Plan (IP) and a civil society voluntary initiative called Café Refuge¹ engaged with refugee assistance in their process of adaptation in the local environment. In addition, the two fields: the city administration and Café Refuge, are explored as part of a larger interconnection of Integration practices towards migration in the local context. Individual and structural practices are mutually connected in that they influence one another and thus trigger change in the Integration understandings and practices in the city. Therefore, there is presented how these two practices influence each other and construct a collective Integration structure in the local context that transcends individuals or migrants and includes all members of society. Through the ethnographic examples within the city administration and Café Refuge, a civil voluntary initiative for refugees, the following questions are attempted to be discussed:

- How is Integration practiced and constructed in the city administration and in Café Refuge in Böblingen? Which actors are involved and how do they exploit their agency?
- How are the two practices brought under the concept of Integration and what does it reveal about its meaning in a localized context?

The approach I follow in this thesis includes a micro-perspective ethnographic approach in the analysis of actors' practices and their emic perspectives but also transcends to a multiple view of interrelations between actors in the different analyzed fields and the network-structure they form at the institutional city level. This helps understand a larger structure of connectivity that represents the way in which social cohesion is built in society and how institutions interact by finding nexus points over a shared interest.

Integration of migrants in society has no natural component but is a socio-political structure situated and differentiated from context to context. Even within German cities, governments and civil society organize and create different structures to ensure social stability. This work observes different actors from the city administration and civil society across the socio-political organizational structure of

¹ Acronym in order to anonymise the participants' identity in the field.

Integration. It provides a change in traditional research ethnographical perspectives in that it is not only migrant groups and individuals that are take part in the process of Integration. It is a larger structure or dispositive that involves many actors and their interactions within a particular context.

Anthropologists and other migration scholars in the context of migration have focused mainly on “the migrant” and its way in navigating a supposed homogeneous and stable society independent of its socially changing processes. “The migrant” is often portrayed as an outsider to local social dynamics rather as the evidence of local social diversity. Traditional approaches to Integration reaffirm this bilateral imaginary of homogeneous societies and external individuals integrating in them. Nonetheless, a change is taking place towards new practices and conceptions of social cohesion integrated in new conceptions of the term Integration and its local practices.

This Master Thesis starts presenting the current academic discussions in the field of Anthropology of Migration and Integration and in the context of Germany in the Theoretical and Regional Framework. Later it proceeds with the methods and field reflections that represent the basis for this work. Thirdly, there is a discourse and literature analysis of relevant Integration definitions according to national and local influential political and public discourses. Afterwards, the ethnographical analysis includes a situational analysis of the development of the IP and the observations in Café Refuge. Finally, a network analysis of the interrelationships between the actors of both fields demonstrates the connections and dynamics of influence between them.

2. Theoretical and Regional Framework

German Migration and Integration politics have “surprisingly picked up pace” since the last century turn (Mannitz & Schneider, year, p. 70, own translation) as also in the academic field, there have been increasing anthropological research projects and PhDs focused on migration in the country as well as conferences, professorships and chairs specialized in the topic (Vertovec, 2013; Nieswand & Drotbohm, 2014). This theoretical framework reviews some of the current debates on the issues of migration and integration in the German context in the anthropological discipline and in the German context.

2.1. Anthropology of Migration: From Structural-Functionalism to Critical Migration Research

Anthropologists have extensively engaged in defining, redefining, and deconstructing the terms “culture” and “ethnicity” in order to give meaning to social identities. Anthropological debates on *ethnicity* and *national identity* as forms of group identity based on common cultural traits appeared first in the 1960s. Ethnicity became a very popular category of analysis between the 1970s and 1980s, especially in the field of anthropology of migration (Vertovec, 2013). This trend caused a change in

the discipline as the perception of societies as multi-ethnic and diverse challenged the well-known structural-functionalist ideologies within the discipline that focused on homogeneous groups, systems and identities within a system (Eriksen, 2019). Parallely, with the appearance of the nation-state as a hegemonical unit of analysis, nationalism as a “political project” to unite the people belonging within determined borders became a central discourse to define the contested notion of “culture” (Sökefeld, 2007). Ethnicity, culture, and nationalism as social categories have received however many criticisms for their failure in recognising the heterogeneity of societies and social groups as well as reproducing power structures and differentiation and othering discourses.

Edmund Leach was pioneer on criticizing the “one-society/one-culture model”, which sustained the homogeneity of identity within a society, which was conceived as an isolated cultural group (Munasinghe, 2018; Darieva, 2007). Today, there are multiple authors that have joined in a current of thought within migration studies, often called critical migration research (*Kritische Migrationsforschung*), which abides by the critical view on a structure of migration based on unequal hierarchical power structures as well as the relation between the person and the structural power that determines one’s position (Mecheril et al., 2013, p.47-49). Within this framework, Wimmer and Schiller (2002) came up with the term “methodological nationalism” in which “migration” was studied by anthropologists under the assumption that “cultures” are “unitary and organically related to, and fixed within territories, thus reproducing the image of the social world divided into bounded, culturally specific units typical of nationalist thinking” (ibid., p. 305). In this sense, the nation-state is seen as a “homogeneous cultural container” (Hess, 2014, p. 215, own translation) and its nationals as cultural equals.

It has also been criticized that epistemic communities in social sciences have naturalized and homogenised the concepts of nation-state, ethnicity, and culture, especially in the context of migration. Cleton and Meier (2023, p.6-7) argue that there is a connection between epistemic theories of migration and the policy making in the field of migration, which becomes problematic because the categories of “migrants” or “refugees”, as well as core concepts in migration studies like “integration”, “sovereignty” and “country of origin” only follow the previously exposed idea of the “national containers”. Systematic research of migration as based on methodological nationalist premises has also reaffirmed bilateral othering discourses between “domestic” and “foreign” and thus there is an urgent need to change the perspective of focusing research “exclusively on migrants and their descendants” (Kogan & Kalter, 2020, p. 6-7), an extended practice that has also described been named as “migrantology” by Römhild (2021). This suggestion can be related to the previous debate as a move

away from seeing “cultures” and “nation-states” as homogeneous groups and starting to focus on the social heterogeneity of modern societies.

The complexity and plurality of societies in migration studies is difficult to reflect. Migrants cannot be understood in attachment to one nation, ethnic group, or cultural unit, but to many. The migrant identity is in constant movement within a spectrum of categorization and social explanation. As Nail puts it:

Migratory figures function as mobile social positions and not fixed identities. One is not born a migrant but becomes one. (...) The “emigrant” is the name given to the migrant as the former member or citizen, and the “immigrant” as the would-be member or citizen. In both cases, a static place and membership are theorized first, and the migrant is the one who lacks both. Thus, more than any other political figure (citizen, foreigner, sovereign, etc.), the migrant is the one least defined by its being and place and more by its becoming and displacement: by its movement (Nail, 2015, p.3)

According to this reflection, “movement” and “nation-state” have not been constructed by discourse as compatible with one another. While the nation-state is a static social and territorial imaginary, social displacement becomes more difficult to conceive within this discursive social sedentarism. As a consequence, migration is often portrayed as a “problem”, “crisis” or “challenge” to a society perceived as stable and homogeneous.

In the 1990s new concepts such as transnationalism, “hybridity”, “creolization” and “cosmopolitanism” as well as debates on “post-migration”, and “superdiversity”, more prominent in the discipline of anthropology, have appeared as a challenge to the methodological nationalism hegemonical discourse. These terms attempt to rethink the former ethno-nationalistic theories on migration and provide a paradigm where humans do not belong to a certain container such as the nation-state, but the individual identity becomes the premise of social categories rather than the territorial and cultural understanding of a place. For example, traditional post-migration theories have focused on cross-cultural adaptation and development during experiences of displacement, in which not only “migrants acculturate to the characteristics of the host culture, while at the same time deculturate from their old ways” (Kinefuchi, 2010, p. 232) but also conceive the notions of “belonging” and “home” beyond time and space (ibid.). Post-migration thus challenges the former conceptualizations of migration under the assumption of the nation-state as the premise for identity, and categorization of migrants (see Wiest, 2020; Vertovec, 2013). Finally, these recent theories have become new conceptual frameworks for studying migration more aligned with anti-essentialist or constructivist views within the field of anthropology of migration (Vertovec, 2013).

2.2. Anthropology of Integration: from Assimilation to Integration

Integration is currently a commonly often used word in the German context of migration policy and research. However, “a generally accepted definition, theory or model of integration is lacking” (Alencar & Tsagkroni, 2019, p.184). In American sociology, the Chicago School developed at the early 1900s, was pioneer in migration, ethnic, and urban studies (Pedraza, 2006). These scholars developed the Assimilation theory developing in the arrival of migration to a host society, which is still present in today’s anthropological studies of migration. “Assimilation” has been defined as: “one-way process that would also be natural and evolutionary, process that as time passed would yield the inevitable outcome of the adaptation of minority ethnic groups to the mainstream culture” (ibid., p.420). Two of the many criticisms that the theory has received throughout scholarly reviews on the topic of migration include its ambiguous conceptualization in different contexts of migration, as well as the “two-group framework of analysis” (namely, mainstream culture and external ethnicities, where the mainstream culture is understood as rather homogeneous) (Alba & Nee, 1997, p.830).

While the assimilation theory is being revisited in the studies migration by many authors (see Kivisto, 2017), especially in the American context, in Europe, Integration has overtaken the public and epistemic discourse (Boccagni & Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2023). In Latin, *integer* is translated as an “unscathed whole” (Schinkel, 2018, p.2), which in relation to former discussions would mean “the homogeneous whole”. In the sociological and anthropological disciplines, the term “Integration” has been used by authors like Durkheim, Parsons and Habermas while referring to a social whole or “bounded system” (e.g., Integration by division of labour or Integration as social order) (ibid.; Favel, 2019, p.2-3). Today, Integration is a highly contested concept within the field of migration.

Current Integration practices and policies in the European context of migration have received criticisms in the same way as the assimilation theory for reproducing power hierarchies and ethnic categories that conceive society as unscathed and homogeneous and put migrants in an epistemic narrative based on methodological nationalistic discourse (Nieswand and Drotbohm, 2014, p. 5) which reproduces the “paradigm of cultural difference” (Sökefeld, 2004) in which the figures of the “local” and “the migrant” are enforced. Favel (2019, 2) writes:

The move from assimilation to integration (...) is a retrogressive and ingenuous one—it solves nothing. Most seriously operationalised integration measures are in fact assimilation measures. (...) The terms are interchangeable. Whether you call it “assimilation” or “integration”, the fundamental question—integration of whom into what? —is not resolved.

From an anthropological perspective, this latter question signifies the core nature of the discipline: what makes a society? And who is the “we”?

2.3. Integration of migrants in the German context: a historical and political analysis

Integration is far from being a new, ahistorical notion, but policies and practices must be understood in the context of political and social historical progress produced by social interactions and developments. As Sökefeld (2007) exposes, social concepts and categories are not universal but historical constructs; they are connected to the context of time and space in which they are used. Sökefeld applies Giddens’ theory of the double hermeneutic in the anthropological studies. In this way, social concepts in the discipline have the double understandings of emic (how the people within the context understand the term) and etic (the “outside” perspective, which should be independent of the emic one) (ibid., p.37). Under this framework, Integration in this work is placed between the emic understanding as actors in the field practice and perceive it, and the etic interpretative analysis of local discourses and practices revolving the Integration construct in the local environment in a particular historical time.

In the 1970s in West-Germany, as a reaction to increasing immigration, the national political discourse developed into a claim that neither the country was an “immigration country” (Sökefeld, 2017, p.74) nor the increase in immigration would exist without problems (Borkert & Bosswick, 2007, p.5). Paradoxically, West-Germany entered between the 1950s and 1980s into a coordinated political and economic project to invite migrant workers from south-European countries and Turkey to fulfil the lack of workforce in the post-war national economy, commonly known under “*Gastarbeiter*” (guest workers) (Sökefeld, 2017, p.73-74). These latter, were originally expected to arrive, work, and leave again. Nonetheless, many of these labour migrants obtained residency, stayed in the country and brought their families or built new ones there (ibid.).

A second peak of public discussion on immigration in Germany came in the 1980s with the topic of asylum rights and solidarity with refugees (Borkert & Bosswick, 2007). Especially in the 1990s large numbers of refugees arrived as a consequence of the Balkan wars and the collapse of Yugoslavia (Sökefeld, 2017, p.74). On January 1st, 2005, the New Immigration and Foreigner’s Law came into force, where several new provisions included in regard to Integration. These included that “new immigrants” could be entitled to take Integration Courses and receive welfare payment by the state if they fulfilled certain Integration expectations (Borkert & Bosswick, 2007, p. 9).

In addition, the new *Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge* (BAMF), which already encompassed many former institutions related to migration management, also published a large number of concrete

tasks for managing Migration and Integration (Torlak et al., 2005, p. 25). Since the large political debates and discussions in the 1970s on Integration of migrants, especially with the arrival of refugees, who were received unlike the guest workers with an expectation to arrive, stay, and “integrate” constant implementations and regressive policies have been appearing and disappearing, made and unmade, and migrants have been accepted and deported.

Migration policy making is difficult because of paradoxes between cultural, social, and economic discourses (Forbes-Mewett et al., 2022). Multiculturalism is an imaginary subjected to paradoxical discourses. There has lately been a trend to “marketize” diversity, or *Vielfalt* in the German context, as well as portray it as a value added or positive image through fests, festivals, and cultural activities (ibid.). However, the politics tend to sustain economic and social rationalist strategies under which multiculturalism becomes a source for social control and unequal policies (ibid.).

In closer regard to the topic of asylum seekers and refugees, which has been since the 1990s a central concern in the national political agenda in Germany, lots of policies, initiatives, strategies, and institutions have been created and developed within the field of Integration. Not only has the topic of migration in Germany become larger and more popular in the last decades, but especially forced migration has been one of the most “emotional and intensive discussed topics” at the academic, political, and social levels since the summer of 2015 with a large arrival-wave of refugees in Germany (Christ, 2019, p. 384). In this regard, Integration discussions relate largely to refugees, who are subjected to versatile and ambivalent discourses within the public discourse, ranging from victimisation discourses to their portrayal as cause for social, economic, and political instabilities (Borneman & Ghassem-Fachandi, 2017).

2.4. Integration in the *Kommune*²: local specificities for national effort

Multiple actors, institutions, and processes of social interaction play a role in creating structures aimed at migrant integration in a society. More concretely, each municipality (*Kommune*) sets its own unique path to practicing and defining their Integration mechanisms and fields of actions (Gesemann, 2016, p. 284). Common organisation principles by *Kommunen* in the issue of Integration policy include the development of Integration Plans (IPs) (also called Integration Concepts) and action programs along with their reporting and monitoring (evaluation of actions), intercultural opening of the local administration (*Kommune*); and networking with local players (ibid., p. 295). The development of IPs

² According to the Brandenburgische Landeszentrale für politische Bildung (BLPB) *Kommunen* (“municipalities” could be a translation) are “regional authorities. They can be divided into municipalities and associations of municipalities” (BLPB, n.d., own translation)

has been in the last years especially common among larger cities, and funded by multiple funding sources such as European, national, and regional programs (ibid., p. 296).

Traditionally the state did not participate in migrant Integration processes in Germany, which was highly criticized by scholars as a negligence towards social solidarity and cohesion (Hübschmann, 2015, p.6). Since 2005 though, the welfare state initiated the so-called Integration Politics (*Integrationspolitik*). It started with the New Integration and Foreigner's Law in 2005, Integration and Language Courses for many migrants, in some cases as a duty in order to maintain their residence permits in Germany, and other Integration programs including linguistic and vocational trainings, employment support or cultural adjustment programs (ibid.). Today, Integration at the local context includes the cooperation of local, federal, and state authorities as well as non-state or "semi-state" social, religious, economic, and civil society actors (Hafner, 2019, p.104-105).

2.5. Integration through voluntary engagement and their role within the structure

Since the beginning of the so-called "Refugee Crisis" in Europe and Germany, volunteers, and civil society engagement has played a leading role. 2012 was the starting year, where more and more asylum seekers arrived in Germany until its peak in 2015 (Hinger, 2016). This led to a mass welcome culture (*Willkommenskultur*) which required coordination between the state, civil society, the public sphere, and refugees themselves (Funk, 2016). The civil society in Germany has responded quickly and innovatively to the arrival of large waves of refugees, which otherwise "without the diverse commitment of the citizens of Germany, the state would have collapsed" (Klie, 2017, p.97).

Voluntary work in Germany has long been discussed and studied. Olk (2002) presents the concept of "modernisation of voluntarism" (*Modernisierung des Engagements*). The debate appeared in the second half of the 1980s and claimed a change in the structure of voluntarism. The author describes on the one hand, that those "old" voluntary practices: "were integrated into outdated social milieus and legitimized by core societal values; were highly organized into well-established forms of cooperation and division of labour; and were often subject to instructions and supervision of professional employees" (ibid., p. 27, own translation). On the other hand, the "new" voluntary work: "is more based on experience, motivated by concrete disadvantages and suffering (...), develops in manageable local contexts of life, and is expressed in largely self-determined, autonomous and less formalized forms of organization" (ibid., p. 27, own translation). This change also brought a change in terminology to describe the multiple and diverse forms of engagement. In German terms, there was a move from classic *Ehrenamt* (volunteering) to *Bürgerschaftliches Engagement* (social engagement) (ibid. p. 9). However, this "new" volunteering tends to be falsely seen as apolitical, according to Fleischmann and

Steinhilper (2017). These latter scholars present the concept of the “dispositive³ of helping”, in the context of Germany, consisting of humanitarian refugee solidarity through voluntary actions carried by local residents of host communities, conceived as detached from political or even religious motivations, rather justified through moral issues, such as empathy for humanity. However, the authors, along with others also deny the existence of an “apolitical” voluntary commitment for refugee actions.

The political influence on voluntary engagement in terms of causality is well explained by Sophie Hinger (2016). The author argues that the mass arrival of asylum-seekers itself has not triggered these civil voluntary initiatives, but rather the framing of state and media actors as a humanitarian “crisis” has caused the national civil mobilisation. The refugee “crisis” in Europe, Germany in this case, was formulated as an obligation for humanitarian relief or human solidarity for civil society to engage in the refugee effort. The role played by civil voluntary initiatives replaced the lack governmental actions and provided a much more efficient solution to the needs for newly arrived refugees. Alternatively, the volunteers also influence the political domain in that they “interact regularly with neighbours, local administrations and politicians, welfare associations, and the media” (Fleischmann & Steinhilper, 2017, p.23). In these lines, authors such as Sandri (2018) and Cantat and Fleischmidt (2019) have identified that volunteers that engage in voluntary civil projects for refugees, whereas initially driven by non-political reasons related to feelings of compassion and hospitality, ended up reflecting on political issues as well.

At the local (*Kommune*) level today, even if voluntary initiatives are more or less institutionalised due to the change on voluntarism over time, there is still generally some type of exchange and cooperation with the city administration (Hamann et al., 2016, p. 18). In this regard, this cooperation has not escaped new criticisms either. Mozetič (2022) analyses how do Integration Programs⁴ shape the perspective of highly educated refugees themselves as well as how society thinks of them in terms of their education and job opportunities. The author argues that main practices and narratives among these initiatives for Integration that “help” refugees integrate consider them as a fixed mass rather than individuals with own experiences and resources to exploit their agency. In addition, in some cases the labelling and categorization as “refugee” as well as the ideas of Integration that these “motors of help” are providing may hinder the finding and following of their own path (ibid.).

³ Based on the theory of “dispositive” Foucault (1978)

⁴ According to the European Migration Network (EMN) they are defined as: “set of measures put in place by the State and/or civil society organisations to support the integration of legally residing migrants/third-country nationals into the host society” (European Commission, n.d.)

The debate on voluntary initiatives for refugees is highly contested. However, there have been some scholars that have theorized the end of voluntarism, at least in the form that it exists today. One threat to voluntarism has been the institutionalisation of social work and professional employees that overtake the traditional role of volunteers. As Henkelmann (2017, p. 136) explains in the concrete example of the Caritas organisation, there has been a “professionalisation of the (Integration) structure”, which has negatively affected the relationship between volunteers and professionals in terms of feelings of displacement and overstepping. Finally, a study by Schumacher (2018) explains conflict between volunteers and professionals through the roles of the actors themselves. As it is argued, while professional social workers have clear roles and work responsibilities in following legal and bureaucratic structures in granting refugees their support, volunteers act in a much more personal way and attempt to do “the best” for refugees. To conclude, cooperation is often difficult because of the methodological differences in which the same purposes are achieved. In addition, political struggles and interest conflicts between volunteers and professionals also represent a challenge for cooperation.

2.6. Integration as a structure or dispositive

The concept of “social structure” in anthropology gained relevance with the structural functionalist theories (Cohen, 1969, p. 216). Radcliffe-Brown (1940) argued that all social phenomena are a result of social structures that bind human beings together, and therefore structures are the prime object of study. He further argues that within these structures, kinship relations, differentiation of classes and social roles should be identified. A social structure is built through inter-group and interpersonal interactions as well as arrangement of people in terms of classes, categories, castes etc. In clearer terms, a structure is “a complex system considered from the point of view of the whole rather than of any single part” or “anything composed of part arranged together in some ways; an organization” (Swartz, 1969, p.53). Two aspects will be of central focus over the following paper: social interactions and social positions within the structure, be it, the position of X in relation to Y.

A theoretical approach in social sciences that helps analyse the complex term of “structure” is the “dispositive” theory by Foucault. It is defined as “a decidedly heterogeneous ensemble of discourses, institutions, architectural arrangements, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral or philanthropic dogmas, in short: what is said as well as the unsaid” (Foucault 1978, p. 120, cited in Nieswand & Drotbohm, 2014, p. 4-5, own translation). Agamben has redefined the original term of “dispositive” as: “a heterogeneous set that includes virtually everything, discursive or not: speeches, institutions, buildings, laws, police measures, philosophical propositions (...). The network that is stretched between these elements”; with a “specific strategic function, which

is always inscribed in a power relationship; and resulting “from the intersection of relations of power and knowledge” (Rionda, 2011, p. 250). Agamben (2009) further defines the concept as: “literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviours, opinions, or discourses of living beings” (Agamben, 2009, p. 13, cited in Frost, 2019, p. 162). Finally, Alp-Marent et al. (2020, p.120) identify further from Foucault’s definition of dispositive the characteristic of its response to an “urgency” or requirement in a social context and in the case of Integration as a response to the large arrival of migrants.

The dispositive of Integration (*Integrationsdispositiv*) has been mentioned by several scholars in the context of integration of migrants in Germany (see for instance, Karabulut, 2020; Byrak and Alkın, 2018; Karakayali and Tsianos, 2007). However, no clear definition has been established. Nonetheless the concept is helpful to describe mechanisms that influence the lives of migrants in the context of Böblingen. Uncountable symbolic and factual dynamics influence the whole construct of how Integration is defined, understood, and practiced in a particular context. Nonetheless, thinking of Integration as a dispositive allows for Integration to be a broad social process. In this work, the analysis of this dispositive limits to two institutions and their civil and professional actors as well as their specific interaction. However, if Integration were to be considered a dispositive, many other physical and abstract elements beyond the analysis provided in this thesis would construct how we perceive the term and its meaning.

3. Methodology, Fields of Research and Ethical Considerations

Ethnographical research has been done in two different fields, which encompass multiple actors and perspectives on the practices and meanings of their Integration practices. Each of these fields has been analysed as a case study of political institutional practices, that provides different meanings and practice to the ambiguous concept of Integration. During twelve months (April 2022 – March 2023) I have done participant observation mainly within the city administration of Böblingen, and in a voluntary civil society initiative for refugees (Café Refuge). In the city administration, I was first as an intern and later as employee assisting in the development of the IP of the city. In Café Refuge, I was on more participant with dynamic roles and positions.

The main methods used for this research include participant observation in the two fields mentioned and semi-structured interviews with different actors at the institutional and civil society levels. In addition, situational analyses in the two case studies of Café Refuge and the city administration have been conducted. Furthermore, a network analysis explores the connections between the actors in both

fields. Finally, a discourse and literature analysis among Integration Plans of different cities has been conducted.

Beyond the research methods implemented, there have been other positionalities and tasks during the research period that have either enriched this research on some occasions or limited it in others.

3.1. Field of Research: The city administration of Böblingen

The city administration is one of the two main fields where I carried out ethnographical research during twelve months (April 2022 – March 2023). Especially in the department of the *Integrationsbeauftragte* (IB) which translates into “appointee for integration”. The IB’s main work objective is the strategic management of the Integration work in the municipality and the coordination of institutions or alignment of interfaces. The target groups of this work are actors in the administration (e.g., mayor), institutional actors inside and outside the administration, regular services, committees, full-time and voluntary actors in local Integration work (Hamann, 2019). Through my observations, the social networking function (i.e., establishing professional contact and partnerships) across and within institutions fills not only the everyday tasks of the *IB*, but also is essential to the realisation of projects such as the conceptualisation of an Integration Plan. In particular, institutions at the political (e.g., municipal council - *Gemeinderat*), political-structural (e.g., city administration actors), legal (e.g., aliens department), and civil society spheres (e.g., volunteer associations/actors) have been central to the development of the project.

This field represents a case study of Integration practices at the institutional political level. Regular participant observation, informal and semi-structured interviews, and situational analyses have been used to analyse the everyday work in the administration as well as the development of an IP for the city. In addition, within the process of development of the IP, we conducted a survey under which colleagues of the city administration, experts and cooperation partners and overall inhabitants of the city took part and shared their own conception of what Integration work and an IP for the city should provide.

3.2. Field of research: Café Refuge

The second central field of research was Café Refuge. This is a weekly initiative organised by a group of volunteers established under the catholic church of the city aimed at refugees and devoted to their support over the process of Integration in the city. They have been active since 2014, with a pause of the over two years due to the Covid-19 pandemics. Café Refuge represents one example of civil volunteers that support refugees in many different European cities and villages. Pro Asyl (2021) has identified over 800 local volunteer initiatives for refugees in all Germany. They result from engaged

civil society groups, who regularly offer a gathering or private meetings, where refugees that arrive new in an urban environment can attend with the goal of obtaining support. Barreto et al (2022) provide some examples of the activities offered in these initiatives, that can also be seen in the Café: “organization of leisure activities, language lessons, counselling on everyday issues, helping with government visits, and support with job applications”.

Research methods in Café Refuge have included mostly participant observation and semi-structured as well as informal interviews. In addition, situational analyses are also part of the methodology and are included in the upcoming ethnography.

3.3. Anthropologist’s self-reflection and ethical considerations in the field

3.3.1. In the city administration

My positionality as an ethnographer or anthropologist researcher in the city administration has been shaped by several factors, especially the intersectionality of personal characteristics as young aged, gendered as woman, and with Spanish background while working in a German city administration. This assumption is based probably on a biased perspective coming from a foreign country with an “outsider view”. Nonetheless, this should be understood here in terms of the German language used as lingua franca, the mother-tongue (or one of them) of the biggest majority of employees being German, and almost if not all higher positions (management) being occupied by non-racialized German men and woman. Even though lots of diversity and changes towards a multicultural openness of the city administration is being implemented, the IB’s work still seeks much more steps in this direction for the future. As it has been observed, the issues of Migration and diversity are still far from being at the top of the political agenda for the city as well as within the inner politics of the city administration.

In terms of young age and foreign mother-tongue I entered the field with limited experience and knowledge about the activities and dynamics of a city administration. It took a process of months until I gained relevant language and structural knowledge in order to access all the information I needed for my research. As a consequence, it was challenging to identify and address complex issues in the city administration as well as gaining trust and credibility by colleagues to explain and discuss their perspectives with me.

Finally, the research was also hugely influenced by my position within the administration department and my specific focus to centre this study on critically analysing the debate on Integration and especially with the focus on refugees. The readings, and close contact with refugees and volunteers in Café Refuge influenced my work in the city administration in that I was able to bring own experiences and provide a perspective “from below” or from refugees in this case, which attempted to give them a

voice in the procedure of developing an IP for the city they were living in. Here, my agency was actively practiced, but was not the only way in which my researcher position intersected and intervened in my work in the development of an IP. Thanks to the collaboration and support of the IB as my supervisor, I was allowed and even encouraged to bring the “ethnological perspective” into my own work as employee of the administration. Despite the traditional and well-known organised and structuralised work-manners in the administration in Böblingen, working in the IB’s department provided the opportunity to actively “produce work/structures” for the administration while reflecting and analysing my own work. For instance, often the *Erster Bürgermeister* and the head of the office for social affairs (*Amt für Soziales*) also encouraged my participation in presentations and sharing of my own thoughts and knowledge on the topic of Integration and refugees. This example is relevant because hierarchies in the city administration are very carefully established and the recognition by the superiors in one’s work participation is one way to demonstrate the real involvement and significance of one’s work. Moreover, this is interesting due to the active realisation that my analysis of the city administration becomes not only real in my own writings but has potential to be listened by those in relevant positions of policymaking. Therefore, in this indirect way in which my thoughts are transmitted “upwards”, it is crucial to reflect on one’s own role in the field. The field in this case is not only observed from the “outside” perspective of the anthropologist, but the “observer” is simultaneously being “self-observed” as an actor and producer of the field.

3.3.2. *In Café Refuge*

So many identity ascriptions ranging from “alien” Master-student/researcher to “guest” of Café and also assistant to the volunteers with bureaucratic tasks regarding refugee paperwork were at play during my participation in Café Refuge. As in the previous analysis, personal and contextual characteristics play a determinant role in my positionality as anthropologist doing research in Café Refuge. My role and the perception of my presence there seems not to be fixed. How I am addressed by participants in Café alternates rapidly. Sometimes I seem to be an ally to both refugees and volunteers, while in other cases I am a “stranger” and rarely I appear to be taken seriously as an anthropologist. Not much interest was placed in asking what my reflections were and nor was I expected to contribute to their work as a researcher. At some point, I was just part of the dynamics of the Café and became one more attendant, without being much observed.

Not speaking German as a first language allows me to discuss in much detail the language struggles that refugees face as well as cultural adaptation to the local environment. Normally in conversations with refugees in Café, they view me as a “foreigner” in Germany as well. They ask me about my home country, about my adaptation to Germany, and constantly allude to the “we” form when discussing

Integration topics or cultural German traditions and values. In addition, I have been shown their trust by being invited over to their places or being often given traditional food by them to take home. Nonetheless, in an occasion during a discussion with a refugee, he clearly acknowledged the fact that I had the “European privilege”, and I was “almost German” because I had a job in the “administration” and spoke the language well. This was a distancing mechanism.

My young age also played a decisive role during research. Refugee participants have multiple times introduced me to their children (who sometimes are of my age) and have no problem in asking me direct questions, probably because of age hierarchies. For volunteers, my young age is a “green flag” towards “teaching me” and explaining me how to understand the situation and work with refugees. Finally, being a woman is a determinant fact for my accessibility to informants during research. Most of my participants have been until the moment woman, which has probably indirectly influenced my accessibility to participants.

In conclusion, according to this intersectional combination of these personal and contextual characteristics, I see myself in-between the different groups within Café Refuge. I have a connection with refugees as non-German, a connection with volunteers as interested in refugee issues and worker of the city administration. In addition, I often “play the role” of a young energetic and curious woman, who wants to learn from their stories in order to obtain information for my research.

3.4. My theoretical and analytical approach

This Master Thesis focuses on the observations and experiences at the middle ground between all participants including the city administration, the volunteers of Café Refuge and the refugees that have been attending the initiative for several years. This intersection provides a unique complex view on how social interactions and perspectives of different actors meet within a common local structure. Integration is approached in this thesis as a dispositive, in which discourses, practices and institutional networks are produced and reproduced within a complex bundle of elements that make up our conceptions of the term Integration. It provides a framework of interconnection between fields and actors that participate actively in the construction and reconstruction of a much bigger structure. Each of the practices brings individuality to the collective dispositive that is highly interconnected.

The perspective I adopt is a critical analysis of power structures in discourses and practices that are of relevance when entering the field of Integration within a society. I do not pretend to explain the whole mechanisms that are entailed in such a process of social cohesion, since it will be ungraspable. Integration is here not looked only at as the process of arrival and settlement experienced by individuals, but rather as a political project applied to the phenomenon of migration but extended to

other actors and initiatives. Migration and people's movements around the world is a fact; Integration is a constructed strategy of discourses and practices that responds to the phenomenon of migration but transcends it due to the situatedness of its processes within local institutions and their actors.

This thesis provides an interpretative analysis based on ethnographical observations at the local city administration and at a civil society initiative for refugees as different case studies of Integration practices in Böblingen.

4. The political project of Integration: Political discourses and Integration Plans

Integration is a structure within the context formed by discourses, actors, strategies, institutions, and networks, reproduced and legitimized by practice in a local context. In Foucault's terms, it is dispositive. It transcends the individual level and becomes a general aligned and interconnected effort by different elements such as discourses and practices. In order to study this dispositive, or part of it to be more precise, different elements situated in the national and local contexts are to be analysed. Through a discursive and literature analysis, the following section attempts to provide an initial introduction to the local Integration by two very influential organisations within the migration structures in Germany: The *Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge* (BAMF) and the *Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat* (BMI) as well as the so-called Integration Plans as political and social tools for management of migration in specific contexts.

4.1. Discourse and interpretative literature analysis of Integration: definitions by BAMF, BMI, and national and local Integration Plans

Integration has no established definition but becomes an extended concept when regarding migration as a socio-political phenomenon. Many perspectives can be taken to approach an explanation. Here are two definitions provided by recognized governmental organs established at the national context. BAMF and BMI are recognized official organisations operating at the national level on issues of migration, refugees, and integration. They present in their websites a definition of Integration. These two examples are taken as non-representative discourses but publicly recognised benchmarks in the German Integration field.

The BAMF defines Integration as a process: *to include in society all people who live permanently and legally in our country. Integration affects us all - long-established as well as immigrants* (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, n.d., own translation).

This quote demonstrates three important points. First, it establishes that Integration brings us all together. Nonetheless, it reproduced an established relation between "Integration" and "Migration"

(see Mecheril & Thomas-Olalde, 2011) reproduced by repetition and possibly belonging to a discursive dispositive that binds the two concepts together. Thus, “Integration of migrants” tends to be expressed together in discursive patterns and Integration is often attached to Migration issues. The paradox here becomes that Integration is often seen as a process *of* and *for* migrants, rather than social cohesion for all. Third, it describes Integration as a process of bringing one group together with another, here the “long-established” and “immigrants”.

A second interesting attempt to define or approach Integration is to be found in the homepage of the BMI:

The aim of integration is to strengthen cohesion in society as a whole. It is not only the people who come to us who benefit from integration that is as quick and sustainable as possible, but all of us. The integration of immigrants should enable equal opportunities and actual participation in all areas, especially in social, economic, and cultural life. The state supports this with comprehensive integration offers (Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat, n.d., own translation).

This conceptualisation of migration establishes that Integration is a benefit for all with a certain persuasion character; it tries to convince of it. Integration is projected as a positive social project that brings agency and participation of all. Integration is however still reproduced as a process that “migrants” go through. Furthermore, the latter sentence claims that it is the migrant that has to integrate and the government that assists over the process. The question becomes that if Integration is *of* all and *for* all, why are migrants at the centre of the process?

A further paragraph on the BMI website describes what migrants need to do in order to integrate:

The prerequisite for this is that the people who come to us learn the German language and acquire basic knowledge of our history and our diverse democracy. This is particularly about the importance of the free democratic basic order in Germany, the party system, the federal structure, the welfare state, equality, tolerance, and religious freedom. The Constitution forms the basis for people living together in Germany (Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat, n.d., own translation)

Here the latter point is clarified. It is a process of adaptation and assimilation that migrants undergo. Looking back at criticisms on assimilation and integration policy and discourse seen earlier in the literature review, there is here one to highlight. This paragraph lists what “the German culture” if it were to be defined as a homogeneous imaginary would mean. It also gives the supposedly key “tricks” for integrative success by the migrant population. However, the question on the Integration discourse that Favell (2019, p. 2) proposes: “integration of whom into what?” is still not resolved here. There is

still a discourse based on a bilateral categorization of members of society: “we” and “people who come to us” or “immigrants”. Integration becomes from the perspective of the BAMF and BMI an objective to integrate one group into another. It disregards the plurality of these bilateral division of groups and contradicts their definitions of Integration of all members of society.

4.2. Integration Plans as governmental Integration practices

How is the so-called discourse of Integration materialised and implemented in the different local contexts through the governmental administrations? Are these previous ambiguities in the discourses resolved?

Integration Plans are a common political practice towards achieving integrative measures in a local context. These are political strategic documents that develop a plan with milestones, projects, and objectives for what is to be considered a better Integration for the particular area and society in question. In addition, the governmental actors that write the IP attempt to implement these practices in cooperation with local actors. These political practices of IPs are nowadays to be found all across local cities and municipalities (*Kommunen*), counties (*Landkreise*), federal states (*Länder*) and at the since the national governmental publication in 2007 of the *Nationaler Integrationsplan* (NIP) (National Integration Plan), as the initiator of this institutional practice that later has extended.

The following sections contain discursive and literature analysis based on the NIP and the county (*Landkreis*) of Böblingen’s IP. Within this latter county the city of Böblingen can be found. Nonetheless, the administration of the county (*Landratsamt*) and the administration of the city (*Stadtverwaltung*) are different political institutions, with different IPs as well.

4.2.1. The National Integration Plan (NIP)

The NIP (2007) establishes three important emic understandings of the “problems” and “solutions” for the issue of Integration in Germany. The “problems” of Integration of migrants are to be found in pages 12 to 14 and include among others: “parts of the immigrant population speak insufficient German, they cut in education and training and are more often unemployed” (Bundesministerium, 2007, p.12, own translation); often fewer considered areas such as healthcare preventions, sex education, care for the elderly, gender equality, domestic violence, including specific forms of violence such as genital mutilation and forced marriage, affecting women and girls with a “migration background”, often in particular way (Bundesministerium, 2007, p.14, own translation).

Some measures for a better Integration proposed in the NIP are: ensuring good education, professional training, and increasing job opportunities, improving the living conditions of women and girls and achieving equality, supporting local integration, integration through sport, strengthening integration

through civic engagement and equal participation (Bundesregierung, 2007, own translation). These advisory measures are addressed to all levels of government as well as civil society and migrant organisations in order to tackle the current “problematic” situation.

4.2.2. *The county (Landkreis) of Böblingen’s Integration Plan*

When comparing the NIP with the IP for the county of Böblingen (*Landkreis Böblingen*) published in 2014, a similar format and topics appear. This county, with the same name as its main city, encompasses several municipalities within the administrative district and is managed by a different public institution (*Landratsamt*) than the city one (*Stadtverwaltung*). Thus, it is a different document than the IP of the city, which will be analysed later on.

The objectives and functionalities of the IP of the county of Böblingen are to “determine where changes could lead to improvement, so that everyone involved has the same opportunity to participate [in society]” (Landratsamt Böblingen, 2014, p.6, own translation).

The measures proposed by the county (*Landkreis*) are included in the areas: Housing, language, education and work, health, religion, living and free time, growing up and are recommendations to be implemented by other local organisations in the cities and municipalities. Overall, the target group of the Plan are migrants and their families, as previously seen in the discourses of BMI and NIP.

There are common patterns between the last two Integration Plans that may provide an example on the emic perspective of Integration by governmental agents. First, the already mentioned similar topics including language, education, and job acquisition as central areas of Integration practices. Second, the need to coordinate with other local institutions in order to implement and practice Integration. Third, the need to provide solutions to struggles faced by migrants in order to achieve Integration.

The first premise of the Integration Plans analysed is the topic selection and central problem-identification among migrants or “people with migration background”. Measures are proposed in both cases in the areas of language, education, and job acquisition. One of the expectations since the beginning of the 2000s among politicians and economic actors was that migrants would help with the “the shortage of skilled workers, the increase in profitability in some sectors as a result of migrant workers, and an expected labour shortage caused by demographic recession became important political concerns” (Karakayali, 2019, p. 222). Thus, big emphasis throughout the Integration discourse is put upon the financial independence by finding a job, and the move away from the clientelism as a form of living. In addition, education and language and education are ways to achieve a job position and thus become financially independent.

There is however an issue in regarding the target of “people with migration background” as a homogeneous group in such measures. Sökefeld (2021) discusses this term under a critical perspective and stresses the problematic of its usage. The official definition expresses that people with “migration background”: “immigrant and non-immigrant foreigners; immigrant and non-immigrant naturalized persons; (late) re-settlers [(Spät-) Aussiedler]; and descendants of the three aforementioned groups who were born with German nationality” (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2005, p.4, cited in Sökefeld, 2021, p. 198-199, own translation). This definition is often used in statistical and political contexts as it tends to be also used as a “politically correct” term to describe migrants (Sökefeld, 2021). The target group of “people with migration background” is a too-broad category of analysis that lacks to explain the reality of the people and groups that fall into it. Thus, the formulation of problems and solutions become large generalizations and imprecise plans for implementation. In addition, the measures are often taken based on assumption and non-ethnographical analysis of the social struggles of certain individuals and groups, in this case the migrants. The generalization of the “people with migration background” as the target covers a much larger structural issue of diversity and plurality within a society. In this sense, the category is based on its only generalised differentiation nature and explaining little about smaller groups and individuals that fall into the target group of Integration, i.e., migrants.

The second parallelism between the Integration Plans analysed is the institutional character of measures and the establishment of networks between these institutions. Integration Plans are produced and written by governmental institutions in a particular context and provide offers to their target groups that are to be implemented through other institutional agents within the context in question. A clear example is a measure proposed in a different IP, that of the city of Tübingen⁵:

It will be a round table that brings together the relevant actors in this area: the city administration, the Trade and Trade Association (Handels- und Gewerbeverein - HGV), the industrial and Chamber of Commerce (Industrie- und Handelskammer - IHK), the Agentur für Arbeit, the Jobcenter and other educational institutions. They develop common goals like Information transfer, intercultural opening and qualification of companies, job sponsorships, etc. (Universitätstadt Tübingen, 2010, p. 16, own translation)

In this measure, it becomes clear how organizations unite and cooperate in order to improve the “participation” chances of migrants or persons with “migration background” and thus ensure success in their Integration process. While Integration Plans are formulated by the governmental institution of

⁵ Another a city in South-West German around 30 Km apart from the city of Böblingen. Chosen for the clarity of the measure that justifies my point.

a territory (e.g., the city administration), the cooperation partners are institutional agents who are supposed to implement the proposed measures for the Integration of migrants, as identified target groups of Integration by the IPs. In this regard, cooperation and networking become essential to ensure the development of certain projects of Integration. This is an interesting realization in that the real target of the Integration Plan itself are other organizations that serve as mediums or intermediaries between the management of measures to improve the lives of migrants. The target are not individuals with migration experience, rather institutional agents with a larger impact in society. This cooperation will later be discussed more specifically.

Finally, the third factor reproduced in the Integration Plans analysed is the concept of “measures” and “solutions” for Integration of “people with migration background”. Integration Plans reflect some of the criticisms faced by the Integration discourse at large as it is based on a “shortfall-integration” or a “problematization of migration” construct. In this way, “the integration discourse has meanwhile become an almost completely culturalist deficit-discourse of migrants as clientele and designed and treated as an object of orientation and integration measures” (Hess, 2014, p. 211). The migrant ceases to be a complete being, but something that needs to be “integrated” and changed to become complete. The paradox is however, that the target group or actors of Integration Plans are institutions and political actors rather than migrants or “people with migration background”, who are the ones tackled by integration measures.

The “migrant” is a symbolic figure. Migrants, people with migration background, refugees, etc. are not only legal but social categories. They embody certain discourses and social positions within the discourse on Integration. To exemplify the versatility of the social category of migrants, let us use the already described category of “person with migration background”. This is a category that includes all categories of legally defined migrants but also some national citizens with parents or grandparents that were migrants. This means that despite the fact that legally they are German, they are still socially categorised differently as the Germans “with no migration background”. In Yildiz terms (2013, p. 60), “even the so-called second and third generation [of migrants], who were born and grew up in Germany a long time ago, are still accused of being foreign, lacking in integration or being resistant to integration”. Following these lines, the category of the “migrant” transcends legal and bureaucratic borders and are subjected to paradigms of difference and fall as targets of Integration practices and discourses. Therefore, the “migrant” is reproduced as an ambivalent figure characterized by its “otherness” as well as by its commonality with a larger group of migrants. The migrant ceases to be a person but an imaginary of improvement for society. The process of Integration should thus enable an ideal unified society.

Integration Plans are meant to be an improvement of society in that they serve as an identification of the problems and an attempt to suggest possibilities and solutions for social issues. They focus on measures to resolve the problematics of migrants and “people with migration background”. However, the ideal society they aim for, lacks historical pioneers.

5. The Integration Plan of Böblingen: a transformative approach

I spent over a year as a researcher and assistant developer of the Integration Plan together with the *Integrationsbeauftragte* of the city of Böblingen. I base the following analysis on my ethnographic observations within this process. This Integration Plan is being currently written until the end of 2023 to be approved by the *Gemeinderat*⁶ at the end of this year 2023. Two anthropologists, the *Integrationsbeauftragte* and I have been working on the project. As a result, Integration as a concept and practice has been critically and anthropologically reflected. The Integration Plan of the city (*Kommune*) of Böblingen moves away from the concept of Integration focused on “migrants” and generalised problems. Instead, Integration is conceived under the premise that both migrants and non-migrants share problems and can profit from measures proposed in this political strategic document.

The concept of Integration within the city has been conceived as something that brings “us all” together, and it is not migrants who suffer from marginalization and “disintegration” but many different social groups within a plural and diverse social context. In this regard, diversity and social cohesion go beyond the ethno-national categorizations and encompass uncountable other social categories of identity. Diversity is a spectrum that ranges from the individual to the group and everything in-between. Thus, Integration of a society becomes such a complex idea under which there is not one group to integrate to another, but a diverse puzzle of groups and individuals that co-exist within a plural and flexible social context.

The Integration Plan in the city of Böblingen seeks to include as many city residents as possible, by diversifying and amplifying the recommendations and measures. Böblingen is an example of how some Integration Plans are changing and moving away from ethnic, racial, and national differentiation of people towards a plural understanding of society. Other examples of recent IPs that follow the same ideology are the cities of Ulm or Hannover, both published last year 2022. This can represent a change in discourse and meaning of Integration as traditionally attached to improving the “migrant situation”.

In Böblingen, there was internal support given to provide a new and changing perspective to the Integration Plan by the administration heads. There are however several things that remained according

⁶ It could be translated as the local council of the municipality, in which the citizen community is democratically represented.

to the previous models while other things took a different approach as mentioned. The topics selected for the IP in the city include sociality, language, education, and a Service Point to which all people in need of support can resort, especially with structural and bureaucratic struggles and the various opportunities offered by the city. Interestingly, it has been found within the previous surveys that there is a need beyond the target group of migrants for social support and improvement possibilities for each of these topics. For example, under the bureaucratic system of public resources, responsibilities and contact persons, migrant and non-migrant respondents shared negative experiences and sought support from the city. Nonetheless, while refugees and migrants, for example, are led to certain assistant initiatives and specialized points (voluntary initiatives, AWO, Caritas, etc.), other groups that may face similar difficulties were left out of the “help”-infrastructure. This refers to a large structure of institutions funded and supported by different public, religious or semi-public institutions that hold and devote funds to these initiatives for migrants and especially refugees. In this way, other actors and groups that may need support for Integration or to improve their life-situation such as homeless people, elderly, people with disabilities, etc. are left out in the political agenda of Integration. Therefore, the city IP is conceived as a way to include migrants and non-migrants and as a way to position the ethno-national category as secondary or complementary and non-representative of an individual or group.

Nonetheless, there are parts of the Integration Plan maintained according to the status quo. The IP of Böblingen follows other IPs by focusing on cooperation especially with institutions within the city administration as well as organisations across the city that have long been partners with. Cooperation is crucial to establish measures and anchor them within the existing system of networks and organisational offers as well as to influence and get legitimation for the practices proposed. However, IPs at large tend to establish networks with already known and established organisations and tend to turn to those organisations and institutions with high influence and tradition in the city.

It has been demonstrated during research that long-established political understandings of Integration, execute pressure on the policymaking (e.g., the conceptualisation of an Integration Plan) and tend to reproduce the understandings and measures to address the issue in regard and representation of migration “problems”. Two examples from my research demonstrate this fact: In a first instance, when we launched a survey for the conceptualisation of the Integration Plan, those that mostly participated were active in the “migration” area of work or engagement, probably because they felt personally or professionally appealed by the topic and found their insides relevant. Most of the ones that were asked to participate and not worked or engaged with migrants, still related their answers to migration topics or decided not to answer at all under the statement that “integration has nothing to do with them”. This example relates to the dispositive that establishes an almost automatic connection between

“Integration” and “Migration”. Along with this example, other connections have been automatic responses by some participants within the field, as they mentioned the “problems” of language and work acquisition as key for migrants to become Integrated, which resonates with the analysed Integration plans, statistics on the issue, massive mediatic content and political discourses. Therefore, Integration as collective issue that affects all or as a process to improve the “problems” of us all, was seldom brought up during participant observation.

A second example that hardens the redefinition of the Integration concept relates to the materialisation of Integration in terms of institutional funding and structural arrangements. An Integration Plan is supported by public funds and expected to cooperate within a system of established organisations that deal with topics of migration and integration of migrants. Before starting to conceive the Plan, the position of the city administration within this structure in a particular context is already set. In this sense the connections and cooperations established for implementation of IP’s measures are more or less done according to the specialization of the organisations and public sectors that one is going to work in but also determined by the access possibilities to these cooperation partners. When deciding to cooperate or position the issue of Integration detached or not focused on migration, the funding of some holders is lost and the structural recognition fades.

This demonstrates how the concepts and discourses on Integration and migration are integrated and materialized in the socio-political discourses, practices, and infrastructure. It is a dispositive that categorizes the migrant and positions this individual in a certain network of initiatives. Integration Plans have focused on migrants as a specific problematized group. Nonetheless, many of the mundane struggles once situated and living in a city, for instance, are shared by all. Finding a house, finding a job, learning communication skills, and granting education for one’s children are extended social processes in many societies, that all members face and possibly struggle at some point. The difference in the case of migrants is the specific institutionalised and discursive dispositives that surround their everyday lives.

Practice and Structure are embedded together and influence one another. Integration Plans follow a pattern, a shared structure and discourse in some respects. However, there is an observable transformation of the discourse on Integration that leads to redefine its practices and functions. As seen earlier, Integration in Germany has existed under constant redefinition since its appearance in the political discourse in the 1970s. From the *Gastarbeiter*, to the 1990s refugees, and now to new waves of migration that have been and will still be at the centre of political practices and discourses.

6. Integration in Café Refuge: a voluntary civil local practice

Café Refuge is a weekly initiative organised by a group of volunteers aimed at helping refugees during their Integration process in the city. This is another case study of an Integration institutional practice in the city of Böblingen based on ethnographic research carried out over a year of being a participant and researcher in the Café.

The following section analyses how the Café Refuge constructs the concept of Integration through specific examples of practices that take place in this situation. It is also analysed how this practice influences the general structure of Integration institutions in the city of Böblingen and how it is influenced by this latter. As a consequence, change and transformation become part of the practices of Integration developed by Café Refuge.

6.1. What and Who is Café Refuge?

In Café Refuge the most common activities of assistance revolve around bureaucratic procedures, such as filling out forms or arranging appointments of any kind with help regarding language or formality issues. In other occasions, these encounters may serve for entering in contact with other city residents or socializing with other participants of the Café. There are around seven to ten volunteers, with a majority of women. They are all German-born citizens and seem over 60 years old with most of them being currently retired. For refugees, the number of participants is not fixed, but it oscillates usually between ten and thirty refugee attendees. There has been over the year of attendance a big difference between the beginning and later months in which the participants doubled and even tripled the first attendants.

I distinguish three main groups of refugee participants: (1) refugees with legal status that have lived for several years in the city of Böblingen or in Germany; those that have (2) arrived over the past year and are not Ukrainian; and (3) Ukrainian refugees, who came within the period since the outbreak of the war in early 2022. The last two groups are differentiated under the premise that the structures in which they operate outside Café, as well as within are very different. In contrast to the volunteer group, refugee actors encompass a large range of age variety, from children to older refugees until the age of fifty-five. The refugee participants are distributed in tables of 4 to 7 people and engage in table conversations. The volunteers tend to be much more mobile in order to assist refugees or bring food and beverages to the tables.

6.2. Integration through interpersonal and emotional relations

Volunteers help refugees by providing interpersonal weekly assistance. How the “process of providing assistance” works on a regular basis is as follows: either the refugees write about their concern(s)

before the general meeting to one of the volunteers or waits until the meeting takes place and spontaneously approaches them with a request. In case that the volunteer is busy at the time, they wait for them, in a similar way one would wait for a doctor's appointment, sitting at one of the tables. Later the volunteer discusses with the refugee in question, their concern and try to solve it or make a further appointment together if the process needs time. Volunteers move around the room and tables "helping" refugees. Over time the interactions repeat, in which the roles of refugees and volunteers reproduce. While volunteers move around and go to the refugees, these latter sit while waiting for a volunteer to come. In the meantime, or in the case that some refugees in that specific day do not have a meeting planned or a concern to discuss, there are also other types of interactions among refugees. There are a few participants that have the Café as a weekly activity of socialization. Nonetheless, even them once in a while still use the help of volunteers with spontaneous concerns.

There is not only one directionality of interaction between volunteer and refugee dynamics. Instead, volunteers also seek fulfilling their role in the Café. As an example, over a Café meeting, one volunteer came with an offer for a flat to one of the refugees and his family without really having been requested. Or on another occasion, a volunteer brought clothes, children's books in German, and food for all refugees and their children. In this regard, there are also other actions that demonstrate how volunteers attempt to approach refugees with "helping" strategies. For instance, two volunteers have expressed in an interview their wish to be allowed (by the city administration) to enter the social housing of refugees in order to best "aid" them. Through this analysis it becomes clear that not only refugees have an interest of maintaining the "assistance" dynamics but also volunteers want to secure their role and position. In this regard, many studies on the topic have illustrated how volunteers seek and obtain different types of social and political profits for their "solidary" work with refugees (see for instance, Moschner, 2002; Findening, 2014, Karakayali, 2019; Fleishmann & Steinhilper, 2017; Cantat & Fleishmann, 2019; Sandri, 2018). Later, this political action of voluntarism in the context of Integration structures in the city will be further developed.

There is an emotional factor that leads to loyalty between the interaction in that a volunteer and refugee. They share a relatively exclusive "bond of assistance" that also relates to an emotional bond. During my observations in the Café when refugees had a concern, they tended to ask repeatedly to the same volunteer or arrange a meeting previously with them. These relations go back to the beginnings of the Café, according to the participants' stories. Often participants have remembered over interviews the struggles faced upon arrival especially with the language, accommodation, and family-related support. Most of these refugees have met the volunteers upon arrival to the city and volunteers have assisted them during the initial process of arrival. Thus, trust was built years ago and maintained over time.

One particular relationship within the Café stood out. In an interview with a refugee from Gambia, we discussed the relations with one of the volunteers. He said that this particular volunteer was his “Papa” because he had taught and helped him since his arrival to the city. This particular volunteer had been responsible for a group of several young men and women from Gambia and had accompanied them through the process of doing a professional training as well as obtaining a job. Now, they do not attend the Café anymore, but still maintain close contact with the volunteer outside. This example demonstrates the attempt or consequence of voluntary initiatives to establish a close and personal relationship between volunteer and the refugee. It is also a portrayal of accepting them as “family” and creating a particular paternalistic relation between them.

While these types of close relations have been argued by refugees to be highly effective in providing help through trust and affect, on some occasion can lead to paternalistic and victimisation behaviours. On one of my first visits to the Café Refuge, I remember sitting next to a refugee woman and talking to her. One volunteer woman approached us and after a quick “hello” she directed herself to the woman from Iraq and asked about her children. Then, the volunteer turned to me and explained me where the “refugee woman” came from, the difficulties they had over their journey until reaching German borders, and all what her daughters wanted to study, on which she further commented that “woman should study”. I was surprised by the way she talked about the refugee woman in front of her as well as the managing of her personal information. The volunteer also stressed those parts that she found most surprising. Here the volunteer was putting the refugee as a “victim” that has been “saved” by Germany. Furthermore, the volunteer was disrespecting the privacy of her story in an infantilising way and putting her in a lower status. A second example comes from an interview I had with two of the volunteers. They stressed the “necessary” function of the voluntary initiatives for refugees. They claimed that without volunteers, some refugees could not “integrate” because of language and cultural struggles. They further explained, that in some cases, refugees did not attend appointments without the “escort” or attendance of a volunteer to these meetings because of self-insecurity.

These examples lead to reflect on the dialectic and implicit self-perception of the role as “volunteer” in the refugee “assistance” activities as part of the Integration practical application. Even after years of living in the city and learning the language, which many already handle, the relations and roles within the Café seem to be maintained. Roles of volunteers as “helpers” and refugees as “askers” for help are situated in a place and maintained over time. Refugees seem to use and value the help and advice of volunteers for making sometimes personal decisions. There is one story that helps exemplify this. One refugee participant in the Café had an unrecognised job qualification to be a teacher back in his country of origin and claimed to miss the teaching profession. He would have liked to enter a social

work or teaching, as he expressed over an interview. Nonetheless, he had not been very lucky on that area. He finished his B2⁷ level of German around April and was decided to obtain a job. The volunteer who usually helps him, said they would try to obtain a job, maybe part-time, in a company, where he could help other refugees and work as a social worker. The months went by, and the volunteer did not come with news on the topic, and nor did the volunteer ask. After around seven months, the volunteer came and discussed with him, that maybe better if he would find another sector to work, because it had been difficult to find something on social work. The options were among unqualified job positions, and he chose the security guard employment offer to apply for. The volunteer wrote the email for him, and they waited for an invitation to a job interview. After a few more job applications, the refugee attended two interviews without success.

Several interpretations appear within this success. Structural and language barriers play an important role within the story. Nonetheless, the volunteer's intervention and efforts of helping the refugee are also determinant in the decision and options the refugee participant had in his job search. Moreover, the trust and responsibility laid by the refugee to the volunteer in such an important task of finding a job for him demonstrated a unique kind of relation.

I cannot tell what the real motivation behind the decisions of the actors was in making such decisions. Was the refugee really looking for a job? Was the trust level so high? Did the refugee take advantage or disadvantage of this help? How much do structural barriers and personal circumstances play a role? In any case there is a real effect of the actions that volunteers make and the decisions of refugees in trusting or distrusting their judgement. Volunteers are not professionals. They help out of their personal motivation and in some cases still do not have full capability of making certain decisions. However, according to the observations trust and personal relation is more powerful than professional capacities in influencing the refugee assistance.

6.3. How Café Refuge transforms the Dispositive: Change and Cooperation

Social Integration practices, as seen also earlier in the example of the Integration Plan of Böblingen, are not fixed, but made and transformed by actors. In Café Refuge, the presence of “new” refugees from Ukraine triggered an interesting success. After the pause of the Café for over two years because of Covid-19 caused a separation between refugees and volunteers, and between refugees and the Café as part of their weekly routine. The volunteers re-started the Café shortly before I started to attend. During the first months they mobilized their networks and platforms in order to bring back “old”

⁷ The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) establishes that a speaker with the B2 level “is not yet an experienced speaker, but a B2 user is able to understand and be understood in most situations” (ETS Global, 2020).

refugees that use to attend regularly. However, in the year I spent there, it was generally claimed that many people never came back. Nonetheless, there was a large presence of newly arrived Ukrainian refugees. This granted the opportunity of volunteers to reinvent their responsibilities, and start creating flyers and texts in Ukrainian, as well as specializing in bureaucratic procedures that concerned them exclusively among the larger group of refugees attending.

With the arrival of a large number of Ukrainian refugees with very specific demands on documentation and procedures distinct to those of non-Ukrainian refugees (at the time of arrival) volunteers asked to the city administration for support to manage such an overload of work. Social workers from the city went weekly for two months and gave support to Ukrainian refugees with paperwork and formalities in the Café. In addition, the city administration mobilized and financed translators that also helped with the situation. Because of a new situation, the volunteers had to connect with other organisations with expertise in the issue. This network of organisations is what I have been calling, a structure of Integration organizations in the local city.

The focus on Ukrainian refugees lasted a few months. Suddenly, Café Refuge stopped centralising their efforts in Ukrainian refugees. The reason was the lack of loyalty and the parallel organisations and private networks that Ukrainian refugees living in Böblingen were using in order to obtain assistance for Integration in the city. This reveals an interesting non-written expectation of volunteers of loyalty and certain degree of dependency by their attendants. Differently than refugees in the Café that arrived around 2015, Ukrainians built their own structures, with a lot of help from solidarity movements including religious and social initiatives and found other types of support from the city administration, private and organisational networks that moved them away from Café Refuge. Here, other institutions overtook the role of volunteers in Café Refuge and that influenced the practices in this latter. If the Ukrainian refugees have had decided to stay, and not operate outside with other institutions within the network of Integration in Böblingen, the practices of Integration in the Café would have been different as they are now. This is an example of how the structure of institutions has affected the practices of Café Refuge.

Alternatively, the practices of actors and situations in Café Refuge also affect the structure and position of the Café in the city. Café Refuge is a place where actors exploit their agency in reinventing its functionalities. Beyond having counselling sessions aimed at solving concerns, volunteers also fulfil other tasks as informal interactions and discussions with refugees, preparing and serving food and beverages (Coffee, tea...) for refugees, or playing and supervising the children (of the refugees) attending the meeting. As for refugees, they also use the Café as a place for interaction, entertainment

(for them and their children) as well as an “escape” from “staying at home” or the family life, in some cases.

While in some cases, the participants come with a concern and leave as soon as it has been “solved” or at least “assessed”, there are regular attendees, that usually have been present for over five years since their arrival in the city. When I asked two regular refugees on their reasons to attend, one was that they feel “thankful” for the Café and the volunteers. Thus, they liked to attend as a form of tradition and support to the initiative. They sometimes brought “concerns” to discuss with volunteers, but mostly sat there and talked to other attendees, or brought a friend with them. Café Refuge becomes in this sense, a social place for interaction and sociality, a new social dynamic within the Integration concept.

In contrast, there are many refugees that have quit the Café over the years. In the case of refugee participant, I met through a volunteer outside the Café, he felt he did not “need” it anymore. According to one volunteer, many stopped coming because “they are already integrated with a job and stability; they do not need help anymore”. For him, Café Refuge stayed as a place to receive assistance in the arrival process, rather than a social situation with other functions. This also reveals a personal different perception depending on who is asked.

Nonetheless, the observations made in Café Refuge show that it is much more than an assistance place for refugees. The portrayal of Café Refuge to the general public is focused on the assistance activities from volunteers to refugees. Nonetheless, participant observation has demonstrated that Integration is much more than solving problems. It is a social process of interaction among different individuals that takes many forms. However, it is still, as initially planned, still today very limited to refugee presence rather than open for other people.

7. Integration: A Structure of political Interrelations

This section brings together the two former analyses of the Integration Plans and Café Refuge into an exploration of the political and social connections between the actors of the different fields within the context of the city. Integration practices as seen in the case studies of Café Refuge and the IP of Böblingen are situated dynamics but in constant interaction and change by both internal and external factors. This interconnection of practices and actors is what has been called “structure” of Integration.

How are they interconnected and what does it reveal about the Integration political and institutional structure of the city? Actors and institutions at the local context also influence one another in a social context, and even need one another in establishing their position and activities within the city. Social capital, to cite Bourdieu, in the form of networks is key to construct and transform local Integration.

7.1. Political Cooperation and conflicts between the city administration and Café Refuge

In previous literature and ethnographic analyses, there has been presented cooperation and conflict practices between the city administration and voluntary civil society initiatives. Independently of the degree of institutionalization of the voluntary initiative, there is usually cooperation with the larger local socio-political structures (see Hamman et al., 2016). In the subdiscipline of political anthropology, “political behaviour” has been described as:

Public competition over goals involving the struggle for power by groups” (...). “Individuals involved in political activity seek to legitimize their actions, and thus to achieve their goals. (...) The political process is a constant interplay of many factors by individuals seeking compliance. These factors - legitimacy, persuasion, influence, direct and indirect types of support - are all marshalled to mobilize political capital, which creates, at the least, agreement with formulations of policy”
(Tuden, 1969, 338).

This definition enforces the need for political actors to cooperate and ally in order to legitimize their actions and achieve power positions and capital accumulation. In addition, it implies the fluid and diverse type of interrelation and cooperation that exists in a bi- or multilateral relation, where not only direct, but also indirect and abstract types of cooperations serve as resource mobilisation motors. In regard to our following discussion, Integration policies, practices and discourses are highly influenced and transformed by external factors such as networks, power struggle, recognition, and compliance among institutions.

Volunteers in Café Refuge and actors of the city administration in Böblingen, within and beyond the Integration department, are in regular exchange and cooperation in order to complement each other’s work. Both profit from the mobilisation of resources and cooperation networks with one another. While the city administration gives financial support as well as prestige, legitimation, and recognition to the volunteers and the initiative of Café Refuge, the city administration receives voices, opinions, feelings of volunteers who work with the specific target group. This is important information in order to reflect the content of the work in the community and, if necessary, to change the local structures.

There were two events during fieldwork in which direct personal contact between the administration and the volunteers was observed. First, there was an encounter between the volunteers and different actors from the city administration, as well as the *Landkreis* and other individuals from political organisations engaged in refugee work at the beginning of the year 2023. The volunteers had organised this event as a meeting, where each organisation could share their achievements of the past year and their plans for the next one in their respective areas of work. They all shared a common topic:

Integration work. From the city administration, the *Integrationsbeauftragte* as well as the social workers that work daily with refugees attended the event.

The volunteers were in a different role than the “volunteer” as presented earlier with the Café description, but as members of an institution meeting with other institutions and talking about structures, projects, and strategies at the structural municipal level. With that, they positioned themselves at the institutional level and operated at the hierarchy of the administration as co-organisation. In other words, the volunteers were no longer independent actors as in Café, as had been so far observed, but presented themselves in front of the city administration as a structuralized and institutionalised body. In addition, they asked questions on their work and asked for resources to the other members of the meetings. This event became interesting to understand the influence and recognition of volunteers within the political structure. In addition, this event was a symbolic act of recognition and legitimation in which the city administration among other governmental organs attended the event of the refugees and explained their strategic planning on the issues of Integration.

A second example of cooperation between the city administration and the volunteers has been already explained. The city administration’s social workers (i.e., *Integrationsmanagement*) responsible for refugee social work helped in Café Refuge with the arrival of a large number of Ukrainian refugees with very specific demands on documentation and procedures distinct to those of non-Ukrainian refugees (at the time of arrival). Thanks to this help, volunteers could more efficiently undergo their tasks within the Café, that included but were not limited to Ukrainian refugee support.

It is because of the professional and political ties between the two institutions that the mobilization of different forms of capital such as political recognition, economic funding, ideas, interests, status, and prestige exist. Furthermore, this cooperation triggers changes in the structures. There is a long tradition between the volunteers in Café Refuge to cooperate with the Böblingen administration, which demonstrate a certain loyalty and conservatism of cooperative relations within the city. I argue that this political relations influence and are key in the context of Böblingen to the establishment of an Integration structure in which not only migrants or refugees navigate, but other multiple individuals and institutional actors. These connections also help understand better the reason of being of these institutions that get involved in creating and transforming the rules and playgrounds, in which Integration dispositives are constructed.

Political interactions involve not only cooperation and compliance but also conflict situations and power tensions. For instance, in the previous example in which different institutions met and presented their strategies for the past year of 2022 and following year 2023, tension between all the agents at the

table became clear. Although the goals of many present parties align, the methods, structures, and recognised responsibilities of work differ. Especially with the case of volunteers, they approached and reaffirmed their work position as “helpers” and even “friends” of refugees over the meeting, while asking for more privileges, such as entering the social houses of refugees in order to have better possibilities of helping them.

The social workers of the city administration, even though they also assist refugees in an interpersonal and concern-based way, they maintain a distance with them. For instance, they talk about refugees as their “clients”, they establish office hours, and never direct to them on first name terms (“*duzen*”). Volunteers maintain a much closer emotional and personal relation with refugees, which has allow. However, social workers from the administration are allowed to access and counsel refugees at their social houses (where they live) that belong to the city, while volunteers are not allowed in since a couple of years ago.

What makes the connection between these two institutions stronger, as well as other Integration practices in the city, is that refugees who attend Café Refuge are often parallelly supported by the city administration’s social workers as well as other multiple organisations within the city working in migrants’ problems relieve. This creates a multi-sided structure, which brings up tensions and competitiveness between institutional agents. Despite the fact that organisations cooperate, they differentiate from one another.

Both in situation of cooperation and conflict, the volunteers and the city administration are recognised political actors involved in the Integration practices in the city. Networks and social capital are a large part of the establishing process, as resources are mobilised within a small context of high institutionalisation and traditional power influences. Finally, this interconnection also triggers change and transformation in the Integration practices at the local context.

7.2. The multilateral Networks of Integration: “die üblichen Verdächtigen“

So far, there was an analysis of a bilateral relation between the city administration and the volunteers of the Café. Each of these actors is further connected with other institutions and political associations involved in Integration activities for migrants or refugees. This creates a relatively large institutional network in the city, in which most actors that are involved in socio-political Integration practices are connected to one another through weak ties⁸ situated in the relatively small but highly institutionally

⁸ According to Mark Granovetter, the strength of a tie (or social relationship) is defined by the “combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie” (Granovetter, 1973, p. 1361). The author argues that weak ties are most important to build up social cohesion in society as well as to mobilize resources (Granovetter, 1973, p.1373)

concentrated context of Böblingen. Refugees not only get assistance by the volunteers of Café Refuge and from the city administration. There are many other organisations such well-known Caritas or Jobcenter that support refugees voluntarily and professionally with social and economic resources. They work closely with refugees and the city administration along with many other cooperation partners on Integration practices. As a consequence of these operative networks, an interesting phenomenon has been observed during fieldwork. What has been during observations at meetings organised both by the city administration and the volunteers revolving the issues of Integration is that there are often the same institutional representatives invited and they know one another. They are the “usual suspects” or in German the “*üblichen Verdächtigen*” which create an “elite” structure on their own and discuss Integration politics.

Going back to the example of the meeting organized by the volunteers at the beginning of the year 2023, there were different organisations represented: the city administration, the volunteers, the county administration (*Landratsamt*) as well as other institutional representatives from smaller organisations working to some extent in the field of refugee Integration. Over the period of one year as I did my research, these actors have appeared on several conferences and meetings, have been interview partners during the conception of the city IP, or at least in conversations over the everyday work. Cooperation partners, and meetings are political and strategical decisions, that position their practices within the network of city politics. I was lucky to be working within the city administration, which allowed me to enter the network and reach a relatively extended view of the interrelationships between the actors. Nonetheless, this analysis has limitations on the expand and intensity of professional and personal interrelationships.

Böblingen as the context of research is a particular example of one south-western German middle city of around 50.000 inhabitants. In comparison to other bigger cities in which there may be a more dynamic process of creation of institutions as well as multiple parallel networks operating in different city areas and with different purposes, Böblingen appears to be relatively long-lasting and traditionally established in terms of actors and institutions involved in policy making and cooperation. Therefore, the “*üblichen Verdächtigen*” tend to have a long history of connections and weak ties with actors from other influential organisations and with the city administration. In some cases, even these institutional political actors are involved in more than one organisation or initiative that not necessarily deals

specifically with migration⁹, under which the Integration practices become more interconnected to one another and extend to further social issues that bring all city inhabitants together.

8. Conclusions: Integration as an ambiguous changing socio-political concept

Throughout the Master thesis, there has been analysed the often-heard concept of Integration of migrants as in the case of Böblingen institutional political practices. This approach has focused on how two local practices give and transform the concept of Integration through their practices. General discourses on Integration have been mostly centred on migration and the figure of the “migrant” under the goal of improving their social situations. Nonetheless, research and focus on other actors within the local practices of Integration and alternative approaches to the study of Integration practices and structure are lacking. As a consequence, Integration has been portrayed as a problem and issue of migrants, rather than at the centre of socio-political debates. What can be seen throughout this paper is the fact that Integration is far from being a migrant issue, but a collective one, that appears in multiple forms and dynamics, and involves large numbers of political and social interactions.

There has also been presented that there is a change in traditional conception of Integration as focused on migrant issues in both case studies analysed. Integration Plans have traditionally been measures for improvement of migrants’ issues by structural institutional agents within a particular context. However, there has been a trend identified under which migrants’ issues are extended to a general improvement for all members of society within newer Integration Plans, such as the one in Böblingen. Thus, Integration not only obtains a new meaning, but moves towards the centre of political issues within societies that become more diverse and plural. Integration in this sense transcends the idea of migrants adapting and settling in a homogenous structure but presents a social cohesion between and within heterogenous peoples.

Café Refuge represents a voluntary initiative often related to its function of assisting and helping refugees during their Integration in the local context. However, ethnographic research in this field has revealed that the social interactions take place beyond assisting refugees and include emotional, social, and personal factors. In addition, these social dynamics trigger changes and transformations of the situated meanings of Integration in Café Refuge.

A third section of the larger analysis of Integration dynamics in the city of Böblingen includes a network analysis between the two institutions: the city administration and Café Refuge. It has been found that there is a local political structure of Integration practices. They work seldom alone, but

⁹ For data protection reasons, the individual organisations, initiatives, and administration departments in the city are not named specifically.

rather are embedded in a social network with other institutions with whom situations of both cooperation and conflict are given. This structure of actors and practices influences and is influenced by each of the practices. There have been ethnographical examples given in which situations of change and transformation in the city administration and Café Refuge have caused and have been caused in relation to their interconnection to one another. In sum, social transformations are embedded both in internal as well as external interactions in each field.

Finally, with the theoretical influence by Foucault, the “dispositive” explains the large interconnections and structures formed in the local city of Böblingen in regard to Integration as a construction and transformation of social dynamics. This ethnographical research demonstrates that Integration is constructed by practice, and there are multiple of them. Integration it is not experienced only by migrants and refugees but made by all social actors and their practices and networks.

This study on Integration in Böblingen has demonstrated that society as a homogenous group of individuals is an imaginary. Integration takes many forms and meanings within a context, but there is a common denominator: social cohesion. Integration practices serve as much more than improvement of migrants’ lives. Instead, they also trigger political interactions, sociality between plural and diverse members of a community, and debates and transformations of what society is and should be. Society is not independent of social changes. Migration as a social phenomenon transforms society and its structures, rather than the other way around. Society does not make their members, but society is precisely the making and remaking of social practices by their actors.

Integration practices in local societies will develop. Migration brings change and transformation in local communities, but the central issue transcends migrant practices and deals with changing social realities. Integration as a political and institutional bundle of practices serves as a conceptual approach to analyze social realities and transformations, that should be further explored. Aside the limitations of this research, ethnographical methods are especially useful in their intensive approach to interpersonal interactions in seeing these transformations and looking at diversity of society in local contexts and social groups.

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