

# HOW CAN THEORIES OF INSTITUTIONAL DESIGN AND EVERYDAY INNOVATION REVEAL AGENCY FOR CHANGE IN REFUGEE COMMUNITIES?

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## **Abstract**

To what extent can the everyday innovations of refugees address the governance and resource gaps created by formal, legal institutions of the state? In their daily lives, refugees face unique institutional conditions that create environmental distortions, compromise livelihood resources, and potentially diminish long-term socioeconomic well-being. Theories in refugee literature debate the capacity refugees have to respond to these conditions. Some scholars contend that refugees have little power to overcome the state biopolitical structures that force depravity and eliminate rights. Others argue that refugees possess the agency to alter environmental, communal, and institutional aspects of everyday life to improve elements of their own well-being. The purpose of this paper is to contextualize my own research within the landscape of this ongoing debate and propose how new institutional analysis may be used as a tool to evaluate refugees' agency for change. I explain how I will apply this analysis using a case study of everyday refugee life in two refugee accommodation centers in Cologne, Germany. This paper contributes to the theoretical debate about refugee agency by discussing how institutional analysis may help to understand how refugees overcome the various constraints that govern their existence through novel manipulations and everyday innovations of multiple aspects of their living spaces.

## **The Care And Empowerment Of Refugees Is An Ongoing International Challenge**

Refugees—referring to people fleeing their native lands and crossing international borders due to conflict or persecution (UNHCR, 2017)—create complex social, political and economic challenges that states must address to meet the needs of their own populations, as well as refugees themselves. Throughout the latter half of the 20th century, state-led responses to refugee crises, supported by international humanitarian organizations, have saved countless lives and provided survival resources in situations of disaster and displacement. At the same time, they have also led to bureaucratic and technological inefficiencies, welfare system dependencies, and policy unsustainability that have threatened refugees' autonomy and limited their capacity to improve their own situations over time (Betts et al., 2012; Jacobsen, 2005; Werker, 2007). As the number of refugees across the world has risen to almost 23 million in 2017 (UNHCR, 2017), average yearly costs for international refugee care have soared into the billions of dollars (OECD, 2017). With over 28,000 people per day fleeing their homes due to conflict or persecution (UNHCR, 2017), the parameters for more sustainable, long-term solutions to refugee care and integration have rightfully become a contested topic of international discussions.

### **A Unique Institutional Existence Frames Refugees' Daily Lives And Experiences**

Institutions refer to the “rules of the game...that shape human interaction” (North, 1990, p. 4). More specifically, they can be thought of as the legal (codified in law) and nonlegal (codified outside the law and/or via social practices) “systems of established and embedded social rules that structure social interactions” to constrain or enable certain behaviors (Hodgson, 2006, p. 13). The institutional context as it pertains to the socioeconomic and political conditions of refugees is critical to examine because refugees conduct life within “an institutionally distinctive position” unique among migrants. (Betts et al., 2016, p. 9). Unlike refugees, legal economic migrants choose their destination more freely and exist fully within the protections of its legal institutional context. Illegal migrants may exist almost entirely outside it, which may offer them greater flexibility to find work in certain communities (Loescher et al., 2003) and reinvent the parameters of their lives (Papadopoulos and Tsianos, 2007).

In contrast, the involuntarily and crisis-driven nature of refugee migration creates multiple levels of policy governance, formed by the intersections of state and international regulation; formal and informal markets; and national and transnational economies (Betts et al., 2016). Because refugees are subject to these intersections and interplays, institutional factors at multiple legal and nonlegal levels more acutely control the specific resource restrictions and benefits refugees receive from various channels (Werker, 2007; Betts et al., 2016). More so than legal or illegal economic migrants, who exist more clearly either entirely within or outside legal institutional structures, refugees face life paradoxically, but simultaneously, both “outside recourse to law, but not outside its application and imposition” (Zylinska, 2004, p. 530). Even though they are not afforded the same protections or benefits as insiders or citizens, they are nonetheless subject to the state’s authority and restrictions in all elements of their existence.

This paradox is thus what underlies the assertion that refugees “occupy a distinctive institutional context, stemming from a “particular legal status and position vis-à-vis the state” (Betts et al., 2016, p. 46). “Having been placed at the intersection of different governing bodies, refugees suffer from a simultaneous absence and surfeit of statehood” (Betts et al., 2016, p. 50), which in turn leads to the policy, status, and identity distortions that drive the behavioral constraints unique to them (Werker, 2007). These distortions significantly influence their abilities to pursue livelihood strategies for a better socioeconomic future in the long term, but also to utilize means of creative, survival-related problem solving in the short term (Betts et al., 2015; Jacobsen, 2006).

Practically, these distortions manifest themselves similarly across international cases of refugee care. From a legal perspective, refugees face institutional obstructions with regard to permanent residency rights, freedom of movement, property rights, labor market access, and state-supported security protection (Jacobsen, 2002). The legal policies relating to the physical location, administration, and outfitting of refugee housing encampments also foster a landscape of information, rights, and resource inadequacies (Turner, 2016; Minca, 2015; Werker, 2007; Darling, 2009). From a nonlegal perspective, further obstructions are simultaneously created by factors such as the policies of humanitarian and aid groups (Salvatici, 2012; Oka, 2014), acceptable practices established by surrounding communities (Kaiser, 2006), and the sociocultural codes of conduct invented by refugee groups themselves (McDowell and Haan, 1997; Holzer, 2013; Kibreab, 2004).

This institutional complexity acts as the theoretical and logistical base for the long-term uncertainty and destitution that characterize many refugee situations (Darling, 2009). With regard to their effects on socioeconomic well-being, the interactions of these legal and nonlegal institutional constraints limit access to the monetary (i.e., cash, income,

credit) and non-monetary (i.e., physical space, natural resources, information, personal skills, health, social connectivity) resources needed to fulfill the basic means for living (Werker, 2007; Jacobsen, 2002). In an ongoing manner, this lack of resources can lead to vicious poverty cycles in refugee communities, few integration prospects in host countries, and financial burdens on social welfare schemes.

### **What is the Refugee Capacity to act Against Institutional Challenges? Theories Predict Conflicting Responses**

If refugees face unique institutional challenges related to resource access and governance, the fundamental question underlying their condition thus becomes, what can refugees do in response to these specific frameworks that define their existence? In discussing possible answers, theories differ with regard to whether they focus more on the limitations of “top-down” impositions or the flexibility of “bottom-up” adaptations.

Theories that answer from a “top-down” perspective emphasize the fundamentally exclusionary nature of the condition of refugeehood imposed by the state. Hannah Arendt’s post-World War II work on totalitarianism argues that the ongoing, state-imposed creation of “rightless and stateless persons” leads to the formation of state-led “laboratories for altering human nature” and the transformation of political possibilities to promote exclusion (Owens, 2009, p. 575). From the state’s perspective, ever increasing volumes of displaced people necessitate a “complex system of civic stratifications and migration management systems” (Ek, 2006, p. 370), which ultimately superimpose concepts of statelessness and other inhumane citizenship classifications onto refugees. Given the state’s power to determine these matters of physical and organizational inclusion or exclusion—and in many cases, life or death—Arendt maintains that rights are not inalienable, but rather merely “the result of human organization” (Arendt, 1958, p. 301). Refugees have little to no individual recourse against these rightless structures because the state has prescribed them no rights to have recourse. For Arendt, criminality is thus the most viable way refugees might challenge any aspect of their condition because the only manner to gain access to formal protections of the law is to be recognized as offenders against it (Arendt, 1958).

In the 1970s, Michel Foucault further conceptualized this relationship between the destruction of human rights and state power as biopolitics. Literally understood as the state’s “power over life” (Zembylas, 2010, p. 35), biopolitics refers to how the state’s regulatory instruments of institutional policy are used to “foster life or disallow it to the point of death” (Foucault, 1978, p. 138). It arises from the state’s presumed need to defend its society and act preventatively to protect the well-being of the population it determines to be its own, justifying excluding (or killing) those outsiders identified as “the other” (Zembylas, 2010, p. 35). From a biopolitical perspective, refugees, despite the involuntary nature of forced migration, may be seen as a parasitic threat against the resources and rights of a state’s own (Zylinska, 2004). Thus, refugees are always at the mercy of a state’s “highly conditional hospitality,” which tightly controls access to material and immaterial resources to prevent such a potential parasite from becoming too comfortable in its host (Darling 2009, p. 656). This means that refugees are consistently bared “from the life of the legitimate community,” as well as from physical resources, stripping away the most primary conditions that constitute “access to the category of ‘the human’” (Zylinska 2004, p. 526). In this manner, refugees find themselves in unescapable conditions of physical and mental destitution, against which the only recourse may be an overreliance on charity and (as Arendt would predict) the necessity of criminal activity (Lewis, 2007).

Since the late 1990s, Giorgio Agamben’s (1998) extension of Arendt’s and Foucault’s theories deeper into the refugee context have dominated ongoing theoretical discussions of refugees’ capacity for change. His concepts of the “sacred man” (*homo sacer*), “state of exception”, and “bare life” come from the notion that refugees’ rights

exist only insofar as the state institutions that define them. The refugee as a *homo sacer* recalls the unique position of the refugee as “an other,” an involuntary outsider deemed unnecessary to protect and whose existence is removed from the realm of recognized political rights. The state of exception refers to the daily life of refugees that occurs in “exemplary zone[s] of indistinction where individuals can be subject to various forms of violence without legal consequence on territory that is outside the normal juridical order” (Owens, 2009, p. 572). Refugees become reduced to living a primal life in camps and communities, where “only the bare minimum is permitted,” and “every gesture is conditioned by the power of the sovereign and each gesture acts to reproduce that power” (Darling, 2009, p. 656). Agamben’s theory of life in the state of exception takes the most extreme “top-down” view to answer the question about capacity to act. Because the state itself has cast refugees as animals with no recourse to engage in the political side of their humanity, they cannot overcome the state system that produces and subjugates them. In this way, capacity to drive external change is eliminated. A pure application of Agamben’s theories points to only the direst possible outcomes for refugees. Since they possess only their animalistic body devoid of rights, possible change would end at the physical body, leaving the reclamation of power solely in the bodily realm with actions such as hunger striking, lip sewing, or even suicide (Owens, 2009).

From the opposite perspective, “bottom-up” theories challenge taking Agamben’s claims in totality and consider whether even extreme individual actions might still carry some element of sociopolitical disruption, control, or retaking. Because they are, in effect, a form of “rebellion against the desperate oblivion imposed by state power” (Owens, 2009, p. 577), they might be considered a “graphic disruption of the social contract” (Owens, 2009 citing Pugilese, 2002, para. 18). In this way, “bottom-up” theories in the refugee context focus less on the rote exclusions imposed by the state and more on how personal responses can demonstrate different degrees of power over such exclusions. These theories derive mainly from examining the agency refugees have to navigate, construct, and overcome individual conditions of their everyday experiences. Whether or not institutional structures exist because of individuals or despite them, they nonetheless transcend the individual to some extent (King, 2010) by motivating the “capacity, for social actors to reflect on their position, devise strategies and take action to achieve their desires” (Bakewell, 2010, p. 1694 citing Sewell, 1992). Agency can be reduced to a basic human capability to “process social experience and to devise ways of coping with life, even under the most extreme forms of coercion” (Long, 2001, p. 16). “Within the limits of information, uncertainty, and other constraints,” individuals possess knowledge and capability they can use beneath the shaping forces of institutional structures to “intervene in the flow” of conditions around them (Long, 2001, p. 16).

At the most primary level for refugees, some agency for change comes in the form of the individual migration decision itself, even when it comes forcibly. Because the nature of any migration decision encompasses “the making and remaking of one’s own life on the scenery of the [current] world,” refugees too can challenge the constraints they face by engaging in continually evolving processes of new becoming (Papadopoulos and Tsianos, 2007, p. 225). In other words, they can “reconstitute themselves in the course of participating in, and changing, the conditions of their material existence” (Papadopoulos and Tsianos, 2007, p. 223). These “bottom-up” capabilities of transformation can go even further under the right conditions, when the agency and capacity of particular individuals (who might be considered everyday innovators) leads to “transform[ing] constraints into opportunities for themselves and others” (Betts et al., 2016, p. 9). The process by which this occurs has been linked to innovation theory (Betts et al., 2016; Betts et al., 2012; Betts et al., 2015), which posits that individuals can systematically create new opportunities in response to the conditions of their environments, driving positive socioeconomic change in their lives and communities (Schumpeter, 1983).

Regardless of whether or not they are living within emergency, protracted, or decentralized contexts, emerging empirical evidence driven by “bottom-up” theories is revealing the ways that refugees can “engage in creative problem-solving, adapting products and processes to address challenges” and specifically move through an innovation process that includes identifying a problem, defining a solution, testing the solution, and modifying it for scale (Betts et al., 2016, p. 3). The very presence of state-imposed institutional voids in refugee communities may be what necessitates the “bottom-up” practices of innovation in everyday living that attempt to address them (La Chaux and Haugh, 2014). These types of innovation span environmental, organizational, and institutional aspects of everyday life to include examples such as the generation of community moral codes of conduct (Hanafi and Long, 2010), the formation of informal property rights systems (Hajj, 2014), the reclaiming of buildings as new living spaces (Puggioni, 2005), the functional reorganization of physical camp spaces into functioning “camp cities” (Agier, 2002, p. 322), and the creation of new social networks to circulate goods and the drive movement of people (Ciabbarri, 2008).

These types of individual activities can reveal evidence for dynamic systems of “new socialization” (Ciabbarri, 2008, p. 79) and increased well-being emerging in places that “top-down” theories would label erroneously as inherently bare and devoid of any capacity for life remaking. Nonetheless, “bottom-up” ingenuity cannot and does not address all shortcomings. The condition of refugeehood across the world still brings with it disenfranchisement from rights and deprivation of resources, “condemning millions of people to wasting their lives” in living conditions that possess the “rare folly of being both inhumane and expensive” to maintain (Betts and Collier, 2017, p. 1). It is clear that these imbalances framing the lives of refugees exist, but conflicts in theory suggest that the answer to the question of what can refugees do in response is rich and complex, demanding analysis and understanding of the factors in a given situation that pull refugees’ agency for change more in one direction or the other.

### **Can Institutional Analysis Offer A Way To Understand Agency For Innovations In Everyday Living?**

If “top-down” and “bottom-up” approaches theorize refugees’ capacity for change differently, what tools are available to examine the situational factors driving this capacity? New institutional analysis is an approach that can “identify the key variables” in the structures of individual situations that influence “how rules, the nature of the events involved, and community [affect] these situations over time” (Ostrom, 2005, p. 9). Such analysis is predicated on the premise of New Institutionalism that the same imperfections and distortions that result from particular contexts also have the possibility to “create opportunities for some people to innovate, adapt and engage in forms of arbitrage” across many types of conditions and environments (Betts et al., 2016, p. 9). Ostrom's (2005) Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) framework (Figure 1) is one of the most widely used diagnostic tools that can be used “to investigate any broad subject where humans repeatedly interact within rules and norms that guide their choice of strategies and behaviors” (Hess and Ostrom, 2005, p. 41).

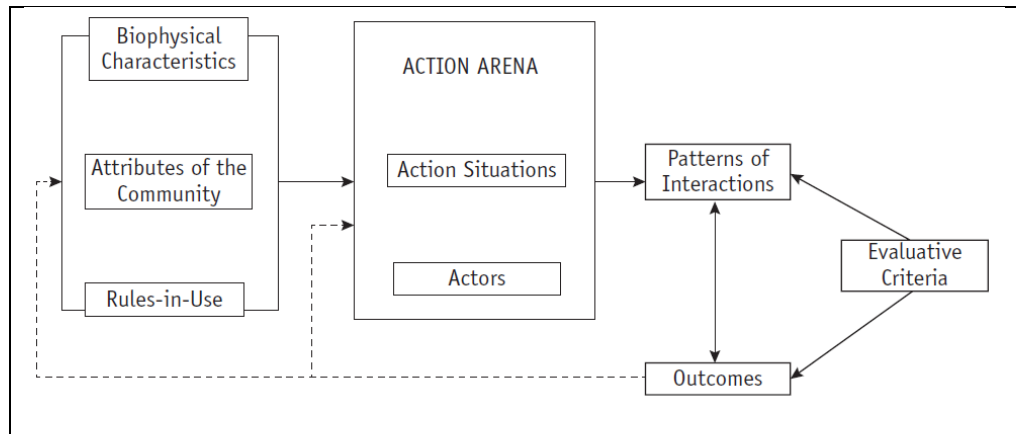


Figure 1. Institutional Analysis and Development framework (Ostrom and Hess, 2005, p. 15)

Given the question at hand regarding the capacity of refugees to respond to the unique institutional conditions of refugeehood, analyzing life in camps is particularly suited to the use of the IAD framework. Its purpose is to investigate how communities of people come together to make decisions and rules to achieve a desired outcome (Hess and Ostrom, 2005, p. 41). It also helps to understand “commoning,” the social processes of how actors manage, manipulate and negotiate resources in their communities to fulfill their needs (Dellenbaugh et al., 2015, p. 13-14). Refugee camps can be thought of as communities, despite being created by force. They present as an involuntary community, as a type of total institution (Domanski, 1997), in which “a large number of like-situated individuals cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life” (Goffman, 1961, p. xiii). Because the IAD framework begins with the exogenous environment, seeking to understand what patterns of interactions can be created under what conditions unique to a situation (Ostrom, 2005, p. 13), it is well suited to uncovering what arenas for action can exist in even the most restrictive communities.

In fact, this type of analysis is consistent with exploring the contextual meanings and power reorganizations that are present in activities of everyday living and can demonstrate agency for change. Everyday ways of living and operating are not “merely the obscure background of social activity,” but rather, explicit “systems of operational combination” that reveal action characteristics of individuals (Certeau, 1984, p. xi). Everyday tendencies towards efficiency, curiosity, and experimentation have formed the basis of knowledge inquiries and improved ways of doing throughout human evolution (North, 1994). Individual reactions against perceived inefficiencies and constraints in everyday life can thus be considered as “ways operating from the counterpart...[that] constitute the innumerable practices by means of which users reappropriate the space organized by techniques of sociocultural production” (Certeau, 1984, p. xiv). More broadly, how these activities form processes of commoning can be seen as evidence for communities creating “alternative economic and political models beyond market and state,” as well for methods of “participatory self-governance against state tutelage” (Dellenbaugh et al., 2015, p. 9). This approach makes it possible to consider to what extent refugees’ everyday activities in response to “top-down” constraints can be seen as either overcoming or being overcome by conditions of bare life.

The fact that evolving everyday actions of being, doing, and organizing can be seen as direct responses to the institutional frameworks in which they occur is consistent with Rogers' (2003) definition of innovation that simply denotes “an idea, practice or object that is perceived as new by an individual” (p. 12). In some cases, these

improvements and innovations are procedural adaptations of behavior (Tidd and Bessant, 2005), to include the manipulation, negotiation, and change of institutions themselves (Pejovich, 1999; Kingston and Caballero, 2009). In other cases, they involve technological change (Tidd and Bessant, 2005). When people are faced with choices for their well-being that are subject to constraints, they trend towards behaviors that utilize and manipulate institutional conditions “as to alter the pay-offs to induce cooperative [and beneficial] solutions” (North, 1995, p. 22). In other words, the activities of refugees need not be objectively new, technological or advanced to represent an everyday innovation that can show evidence for change agency. Rather, they can simply be the “miniscule” procedures that “[sap] the strength of these institutions and surreptitiously [reorganize] the functioning of power” (Certeau, 1984, p. xiv).

Similar approaches in new institutional analysis have already been used to investigate how communities of other disenfranchised populations—for example, those in prisons (Skarbek, 2016), illegal homeless tent cities (Lutz, 2015), and slums (Gibson, 2015; Ruddick, 2015)—manipulate their everyday environments in response to the constraints and failures from above that drive an inadequate fulfillment of governance and resource needs. To varying degrees, actors in these communities have succeeded in building processes, activities and structures for themselves that have filled “top-down” gaps. The same analytical approaches can provide similar insight on the extent to which refugees can do the same in their camp communities.

### **An Example Of Everyday Refugee Living In The German Case Can Serve As Evidence For Or Against This Theoretical Capacity For Change**

Qualitative case studies that research the everyday life of refugees are valuable in that they “reveal much about how forced migrants live, the problems they encounter, their coping or survival strategies, and the shaping of their identities and attitudes” (Jacobsen and Landau, 2003, p. 190). From a theoretical perspective, the nature of new evidence from the German case offers an opportunity to explore refugee lives in a context that differs from the predominant study space. Many theories about how refugees cope with institutional challenges have been examined in the context of developing countries. Further, they have been studied mostly in large, permanent refugee settlements that function as semi-autonomous cities. Far less insight is available for conditions such as those in Germany, where refugees live in smaller, temporary accommodation centers in externally resource-rich environments. Because similar models of refugee care are predominant across Europe, it is critical to validate the external validity of findings in developing contexts to see to what extent their insights may be applied to a new context of growing applicability in Germany and Europe.

Almost 2 million refugees have arrived in Germany since 2014 (EuroStat, 2016). The influx, the largest of displaced people since World War II (Edwards and Dobbs, June 2014), has led to the concept of a “refugee crisis” (*Flüchtlingskrise*), as the national government and humanitarian organizations have struggled to quickly execute effective policies for both the short-term emergency care and long-term integration of refugees. In Germany, the federal government delegates many policy responsibilities concerning asylum application processing, benefits distribution, and accommodation to state and municipal governments. This has led to management variations, as well as material and immaterial resource inconsistencies, in localized contexts. These variations have frequently created uncomfortable, unsanitary, or unsafe conditions in government-run facilities, where larger numbers of refugees have lived for longer periods of time than originally ever planned (AIDA, 2017).



The recency of population inflows, along with access difficulties for researchers, have meant that empirical data regarding the everyday living experiences of refugees is still fairly limited. New survey research (Brücker et al., 2016a; Brücker et al., 2016b), however, offers a starting point to conceptualize the resource and governance needs of refugees in the German context (Table 1) and considers the motivations they might have to pursue means to close these gaps. According to this survey research, primary motivations underlying what is valued and sought tend to relate to key themes, such as: 1) supplementing limited monetary funds in order to procure physical resources that the government is not providing; 2) gaining the autonomy and pride that comes with stable work; 3) better navigating different legal aspects relating to refugee status; 4) sustaining strong ties with family; 5) maintaining personal space and privacy; and 6) engaging in culturally familiar, daily life practices (such as eating, keeping religious practices and maintaining preferred gender roles).

RESOURCE TYPE	WHAT IS SOUGHT	
NATURAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Privacy, personal space</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shelter safety</li> </ul>
Natural resources, conditions of physical space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Larger living areas</li> <li>• Quiet</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Neighborhood safety</li> </ul>
PHYSICAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better provisions, facilities</li> <li>• Food, cooking supplies</li> <li>• Homey objects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internet</li> <li>• Cell phone data</li> <li>• Clothing</li> </ul>
Tools, equipment, infrastructure		
HUMAN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved hygiene</li> <li>• Language classes</li> <li>• Translators</li> <li>• Job preparation services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better physical and mental health</li> <li>• Information about legal procedures</li> </ul>
Personal health, skills, abilities		



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SOCIAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family, network connections</li> <li>• Avoidance of conflict</li> <li>• Maintenance of cultural practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leisure activities</li> <li>• Feelings of welcome</li> <li>• Childcare, schooling</li> </ul>
Networks, practices, connections with others		

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FINANCIAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional money</li> <li>• Ability to earn</li> <li>• Stable job</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Means to recoup financial losses</li> <li>• Financial counseling</li> </ul>
Money, income, credit		

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Table 1. Evidence of governance and resource gaps in the German refugee context (consolidated from Brücker *et al.*, 2016a; Brücker *et al.*, 2016b)

This emerging evidence is revealing that state-led policy responses have failed to varying degrees at providing refugees completely adequate resource and governance structures. If the aforementioned theories predict that refugees may have the capacity to manipulate their living spaces, innovate through their everyday life practices, and serve as actors shaping (at least, informal) institutional factors of their existence, can an example of everyday refugee living in the German case serve as evidence for or against this theoretical capacity?

The purpose of this research is thus to understand and describe how (and to what extent) everyday innovations of refugees can address the governance and resource gaps created by formal, legal institutions of the state. I will present a qualitative case study from Germany's "refugee crisis" beginning in 2014. I will draw data from legal and policy document analysis, daily life observations, and interviews with residents and employees in two designated government accommodation centers (one run by the German Red Cross, the other by the Evangelical charity Diakonie) in one municipal district of Cologne, North Rhein Westphalia. Due to its high population and GDP, North Rhein Westphalia houses the highest number of refugees of any German state (BAMF, 2016). The city of Cologne has the most refugees in the state (about 6% of the state's total) (Stadt Köln, 2015).

The IAD framework will guide the components of data analysis and better clarify the previously discussed relationships between environment, actors, and action arenas for change. First, a content analysis of legal documents from federal, state, and municipal levels will contextualize the formal, legal institutional space in which the daily life of refugees takes place. A similar analysis of policy documents of the Red Cross and Diakonie will assess the degree to which these civil society organizations act as an extension of the state and contribute to the biophysical characteristics of refugee living spaces. Interviews with center employees will clarify the extent to which formal institutions of refugee care actually create resource and governance gaps. Experts can also describe the situations and patterns prompting refugees' adaptations or lack thereof. Finally, interviews with refugee residents will provide direct perspectives on the changes that can or cannot be driven "from the bottom up." What

restrictions do they perceive in their lives, and where do they perceive these restrictions come from? What are they doing in response to these restrictions and why? How are rules in use invented as a tool to overcome or conform to institutional shortcomings? Because refugees are not a homogenous group, obtaining their direct perspectives will also help to better understand how certain typological attributes drive actors, action situations, patterns of interactions, and outcomes in this regard. These characteristics include, but are not limited to, a refugee's specific legal status, country of origin, gender, time in country, family status, education, professional background, and religion.

### **Research That Adds To The Theoretical Discussions Can Impact Policies That Benefit Both States And Refugees**

Evolving approaches to humanitarian assistance are beginning to more closely examine how concepts of institutions, agency, and innovation interact within the refugee context. Discourses are beginning to shift from viewing refugees as victims who must be saved by the state to agents who can drive positive outcomes in their own futures (Easton-Calabria, 2015). Recent situations in which refugees have been offered more autonomy in their daily lives have tended to improve nutrition, preserve more individual household assets, and develop more resident-driven, community services, (UNHCR, 2006). These outcomes have also led to greater resiliency in refugee communities by creating means to build sustainable livelihoods that reduce dependency on the state and increase overall socioeconomic well-being (UNHCR, 2006).

Nonetheless, this agent-driven approach to refugee care and integration is still novel and evolving. More research, to include my own, is needed to confirm the extent to which refugees can be agents for change in their own communities and under what conditions this can optimally occur. As refugee communities continue to grow, acute policy failures that have direct impacts on these communities are becoming more apparent. In order to move beyond such failures, practical institutional questions—for example, the degree to which policies are enforced and followed, actually provide what they claim, and promote positive outcomes—require actionable answers. Research answering such questions can thus help identify the best combination of institutional factors that support both the needs of states, as well as refugees. A better understanding of how to construct an optimal institutional environment can come from knowledge about the innovations refugees drive themselves to address resources and governance shortcomings they perceive.

Policy makers ought to exercise caution in deriving comprehensive policy changes exclusively from individual case studies. Collectively, however, they can expand the scope of existing research that aims to elucidate the vast socioeconomic potential of the creativity and individuality present in everyday refugee life. Such research can help policy makers to better assess the limits and opportunities of current institutional frameworks. Most importantly, it can inform more relevant interventions that not only better the conditions of refugees, but also take the greatest advantage of their capacities and talents to drive change in their new host communities.

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