Linking Social Capital as a Resource for Co-production and Community Building[1]

In this chapter, I examine the relationship between volunteers, activists, and local governmental officials, focusing on the conditions under which collaboration between the local state and civil society flourished. As discussed in Chapter 4, state-civil society collaboration in Lauda and Loburg provided significant opportunities for civil society actors to engage in policy areas typically managed by local governments. These policy areas included housing, care, rights, employment opportunities, and the general integration of refugees. One notable example was the development of a district-wide integration strategy in Lauda from 2019 to 2021. Another is the establishment of the Civic Council on Migration in Loburg in 2016. These forms of co-production extend beyond impacting policy; they also create opportunities for regular interaction among civil society actors, fostering the formation of pro-refugee communities.

I examine the production of linking social capital to explore why state-civil society co-production was more favorable in Lauda and Loburg than in Altenau and Neheim. Linking social capital refers to the norms of respect and trust built through networks between people who interact across power divides in society, such as members of civil society engaging with government representatives (Szreter & Woolcock, 2004, p. 655). The central question I aim to answer in this chapter is how linking social capital was produced (and eroded) through interactions between local government officials and individuals engaged in civic action within local organizations and groups.

1 This chapter is based on the following article: van den Berg, C., Steinhilper, E., & Sommer, M. (2025). Against the Odds: On the Arduous Production of Linking Social Capital in Local Refugee Reception. *Administration & Society*, 57(3), 339–367. https://doi.org/10.1177/00953997251314509

I focus on the processes behind the production and decline of linking social capital in two local settings: Lauda and Altenau. In Lauda, I document how an initial atmosphere of mistrust and suspicion gradually transformed into a cooperative and trusting relationship over six years. In contrast, in Altenau, an initial period of mutual appreciation between refugee-support groups and the local government deteriorated over time, leading to frustration and resignation.

The heightened interaction between civil society and local governments during the 2015/16 refugee reception crisis provided fertile ground for the production of linking social capital. This was evident in my empirical case study and in Germany, where many mayors invited citizens to public events to recruit volunteers as local governments were stretched to their limits. However, the production of linking social capital is a complex process, and the inherent frictions of state-civil society interactions were ever-present. Both volunteers, activists, and local government officials described this context as inherently conflictual, characterized by interdependence, different roles, and conflicting logics of action (see Daphi, 2017). Against this backdrop, I evaluate the processes by which the pro-refugee mobilization of 2015/16 did and did not lead to the production of linking social capital in the four cases.

Focusing on refugee-support groups and community organizations instead of welfare organizations is theoretically and empirically motivated. First, power imbalances between smaller refugee-support groups and community organizations are significantly pronounced, making linking social capital particularly challenging. Second, German welfare organizations often occupy a unique hybrid position between the state and civil society. Their primary function is to provide various social services to society – responsibilities that are "outsourced" from the state (Evers, 2005).

Previous work on state-civil society interactions and the co-production of the common good has focused either on the perspective of civil society actors (Ostrander, 2013) or on that of local governmental actors (Eckhard et al., 2021). However, in isolation, neither perspective can fully capture the interactive dynamics of this relationship. Therefore, I draw on the semi-structured interviews from my research project and 16 interviews that my colleagues, Elias Steinhilper and Moritz Sommer, conducted with local government officials. These officials were city mayors, district managers, and civil servants at job centers and immigration agencies.

By adopting a dual perspective in this analysis, I can assess how linking social capital is produced and perceived from both sides in this vertical rela-

tionship. Given the structural asymmetries and different logics of action between the two spheres, I argue that the production of trusting relationships is not a given; instead, the production of linking social capital is a laborious, situational, and interactive process that is open-ended.

The chapter is organized into four sections. First, I outline the theoretical framework and discuss the literature on linking social capital. I then examine the interactions between refugee-support groups and local governments to identify processes that facilitate and hinder the production of linking social capital. A brief comparison with the dynamics in Loburg and Neheim follows this. Finally, I offer some concluding remarks.

Theoretical Framework: Linking Social Capital

To examine state-civil society interactions during the refugee reception crisis in Germany, I build on theoretical reflections on linking social capital and participatory citizen engagement more broadly. On this basis, I propose a dynamic and interactive approach highlighting the opportunities for linking social capital production and the processes that contribute to overcoming such obstacles. In general terms, Putnam et al. (1994, p. 167) defined social capital as "the features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions". Theoretically, the concept echoes relational sociology, which argues that connections between individuals and groups entail "mutual obligations and sustain rules of conduct, fostering norms of reciprocity (Szreter, 2002, p. 574). The concept has energized the field of civil society research and development studies. Still, it has also received two particularly articulate critiques concerning its normative bias in ignoring the negative effects of social capital (Portes, 1998, 2014) and its society-centeredness and silence on the role of the state (Levi, 1996; McAdam et al., 1996; Szreter, 2002). The former has led Putnam (2000, p. 22ff.) in his later work to distinguish between "bonding" social capital, which refers to connections between actors with similar characteristics, and "bridging" social capital, which operates between heterogeneous groups of actors, the latter being more likely to have beneficial effects for democracy and good governance.

In response to the second criticism regarding the focus on civil society, Szreter and Woolcock (2004, p. 655) have proposed the concept of linking social capital as a third variant of social capital, defined "as norms of respect and

networks of trusting relationships between people who are interacting across explicit, formal or institutionalized power or authority gradients in society". Following this perspective, scholars have considered the state's role in facilitating or hindering the production of social capital.

Regarding the empirical analysis of social capital, most of the literature has examined the stock of social capital by comparing quantitative measures across space (Stolle, 2009). It has paid less attention to "how and why (under what circumstances) social capital increases or decreases" (Szreter, 2002, p. 573). Few scholars have addressed the dynamic nature of social capital, drawing on qualitative research to identify mechanisms that contribute to the production of linking social capital (Titeca & Vervisch, 2008). Furthermore, most empirical studies have focused on bridging and bonding social capital, but linking social capital has rarely been studied empirically (Titeca & Vervisch, 2008; Woolcock, 2001).

Against this background, my analysis contributes to understanding *the dynamic production of linking social capital and its ambiguous nature*. Like other types of social capital, linking social capital is not necessarily beneficial. To unfold its positive effects, it is not the networks between individuals and groups per se that matter but their quality (Levi, 1996). Putnam (2004, p. 669) has accordingly distinguished between responsive linking and unresponsive or exploitative linking social capital. In a similar vein, Szreter (2002, p. 579) has argued that linking social capital

> "takes on a democratic and empowering character where those involved are endeavoring to achieve a mutually agreed beneficial goal (or set of goals) on the basis of mutual respect, trust, and equality of status, despite the manifest inequalities in their respective positions".

These reflections on state-civil society interactions across power gradients resonate with a broad literature on participatory citizen engagement. Such forms of "co-production" by local governments and civil society have become *envogue* because they are expected to foster democracy and the production of public goods simultaneously (Alford, 2014; Nabatchi et al., 2017) recent years, there has been a growing trend toward citizens taking a more active role in addressing public issues through self-organization (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Edelenbos et al., 2018; Healey, 2015; Igalla et al., 2019). Often, these efforts respond to the perceived inadequacy of local governmental agen-

cies in addressing public concerns such as land use, school governance, or the reception and inclusion of migrants (Teasdale, 2012).

Research in this area has primarily followed two different paths. On the one hand, local government and public policy scholars have tended to adopt a top-down perspective, focusing on the effectiveness and feasibility of government (Adams, 2004; McComas et al., 2010). On the other hand, civil society scholars have flipped the coin, critically examining how citizens perceive their involvement and whether it implies citizen empowerment (Doerr, 2018; Lee, 2015; Polletta, 2016). While both approaches offer valuable insights, scholars have curiously refrained from engaging with the literature on linking social capital. Moreover, this research has accentuated either the state's or civil society's perspective.

Against this backdrop, I seek to complement and further integrate these bodies of scholarship. Understanding the production of linking social capital as a laborious, dynamic, and open-ended task requires a perspective that considers both state and civil society perspectives and the dynamics through which such relationships are made or broken.

For empirical and theoretical reasons, I focus on informal volunteering rather than the more professionalized and formalized segments of civil society, such as welfare associations with established interaction routines with the state. In recent decades, scholars have observed a growing "organizational dissatisfaction" (Nedelmann, 1987, p. 196) among citizens, resulting in a declining ability of political parties, trade unions, and traditional civil society organizations to bind their members who increasingly opt for more volatile, informal, issue-specific, and networked forms of civic action. Due to their more flexible nature as spontaneous networks, informal groups have taken on crucial roles in various crises (Lahusen & Grasso, 2018), including the reception of refugees during the refugee reception crisis of 2015 (Boersma et al., 2019; della Porta, 2018). These groups typically take a bottom-up approach, focusing on local issues and relying on the collective mobilization of residents who volunteer to address community needs (Igalla et al., 2019).

When these informal volunteers and state officials interact, the power asymmetries between the two camps may be particularly accentuated. While local government officials may normatively value citizen participation, different logics of action and organization create structural tensions. The fixed and often slow routines of bureaucracies do not fit easily with the action-oriented impetus of spontaneous volunteers. For example, in a study of participatory processes in Spain, Fernández-Martínez et al. (2020) found that the relation-

ship between local governments and civil society can also deteriorate due to such interactions. Inflated expectations and lack of policy impact were among the moments they identified leading to frustration in local participatory processes.

From a theoretical perspective, sustained interactions "based on mutual respect, trust, and equality of status, despite the manifest inequalities in their respective positions" (Szreter, 2002, p. 579) are anything but self-evident. For linking social capital to be built and sustained, these difficulties must be overcome via repeated interactions in which both sides acknowledge their differences and are willing to address them.

Empirical Analysis

In the following, I examine the making and breaking of linking social capital in local settings. Adopting an interactive perspective, I study interactions between local governmental agencies and the main refugee-support groups that emerged in 2015 to support refugees.

The first case study is located in Lauda. As mentioned in chapters 3 and 4, Lauda is a medium-sized city in a prosperous, rural area in Southern Germany. The city and surrounding district's political culture and government have long-standing conservative majorities. The city's ethnic diversity is limited compared to other areas in Germany, and there is a lack of experience in hosting large groups of migrants. Against this background, the public infrastructure for professional integration services was limited when the first refugees arrived in 2015. The refugee-support group *Solidarity for Refugees* was founded then. One of the group's founders, pastor Stephan, recruited many volunteers and activists from his congregation. The response to their efforts was "tremendous", with more than 180 volunteers and activists joining the newly formed group in 2015. With the local government soon overwhelmed by the numerous arrivals of refugees, the group stepped in to fill the gap. Volunteers and activists became deeply involved in various refugee support activities, gaining in-depth knowledge of the latest asylum laws and managing many aspects of refugee reception, such as providing German language classes, childcare and assisting with local governmental agencies. From the beginning, the group operated in an informal, self-organized, and independent manner outside of established and professional structures such as welfare organizations.

The second case study is located in Altenau. As discussed in chapters 3 and 4, Altenau is a medium-sized city in a moderately prosperous region of northern Germany. While the region has a conservative tradition, the city was governed by a Social Democratic majority until the conservatives regained the mayor's office shortly after 2015. In contrast to the first case study, this city is home to a large migrant population, and the topic of migration was already evident. These experiences are reflected in established governmental processes and a range of existing public services in the field of local integration policies before 2015. As in Lauda, the city saw the establishment of a refugee-support group in 2015. The incumbent social democratic mayor made the first call for volunteers. She wanted to inform citizens and find volunteers willing to accompany refugees during their first months in a centralized refugee shelter. The volunteers initially expected the local government to coordinate this new civic action. Still, when the local government failed to take a leadership role, they decided to move forward as a group of about 100 volunteers and create a self-organized group called *Welcome Refugees*. They set up a café where refugees and locals could meet, provided language classes, and offered support with bureaucratic processes. In the first phase, in 2015 and 2016, most of these activities took place in a designated room in a centralized refugee shelter.

Thus, in Lauda and Altenau, the limited capacity of local governmental agencies provided a new opportunity for volunteers to create a new, self-organized field of civic action. In the immediate "crisis" period, these spontaneous refugee-support groups could create new engagement structures much faster than any more professional civil society organizations. Moreover, volunteers quickly acquired knowledge about their needs through their intensive involvement and direct contact with refugees. They familiarized themselves with the legal and governmental context, thus narrowing the usual knowledge gap with professionals working for local governmental agencies and welfare organizations. The new volunteers quickly concluded that their commitment was needed and that the reception of refugees could only be managed if the local governmental agencies accepted them as essential partners in providing refugee support. Below, I show how this relationship evolved after 2015. For analytical purposes, I divide the interaction into three phases.

Table 9 summarizes three phases of interaction in the two local settings and highlights the making or breaking linking social capital connections between 2015/16 and 2021/2022. In Lauda, I document a dynamic between refugee-support groups and local governments in which initial mistrust and suspicion gradually transformed into a cooperative and trusting relationship

over six years. Conversely, the second case study in Altenau describes a scenario in which a period of mutual appreciation between the refugee-support group and the local government was followed by deterioration over time, eventually leading to frustration and resignation. The evolution of interactions, including critical events, is described in detail.

Table 9: Phases of interaction and linking social capital development

	Phase 1	**Phase 2**	**Phase 3**
Lauda (Case Study I)	**Suspicion and frustration**	**Mediation**	**Mutual appreciation**
	Local government officials and volunteers exhibited initial suspicion, driven by differing logics of action; both parties felt distant and disconnected.	Conflicts were actively addressed through mediation and open communication; actors chose to voice concerns instead of withdrawing; Both parties recognized shared interdependence, leading to increased informal meetings.	Local government officials and volunteers successfully developed a collaborative working relationship; Both sides felt valued and appreciated, resulting in enhanced cooperation and the development of a new integration strategy.
Altenau (Case Study II)	**Mutual appreciation**	**Resentment**	**Frustration and resignation**
	Local government officials and volunteers recognized refugee reception as a shared responsibility, fostering a climate of mutual appreciation; Consensual cooperation and regular exchange meetings were established.	Divergent logics of action caused growing discontent among stakeholders; Volunteers felt excluded, while local government officials found working with volunteers challenging.	Local government officials perceived volunteers as disruptive elements, which hindered the decision-making process; Volunteers felt marginalized and left out of important discussions.

Lauda: Producing Linking Social Capital Against the Odds

Phase 1: Suspicion and Frustration

The relationship between the refugee support group, *Solidarity for Refugees*, and local government officials had a difficult start, as the volunteers showed a deep distrust of the local government. In the eyes of the volunteers, the local government rarely used its leeway to interpret asylum laws in favor of refugees. Disputes arose over the restrictive issuance of work permits, deportations, and Internet access in refugee shelters. Luisa, one of the first volunteers and co-founder of *Solidarity for Refugees,* recalled the problems with the issuance of work permits:

> "For a while, we had serious problems with the work permits because we couldn't understand how the local government made its decisions about who would get a work permit and who wouldn't".

Some refugees received work permits, while others had to wait years for a work permit and sometimes never received one.

Despite these tensions, the group quickly became an integral part of the local refugee reception process, as it promptly immersed itself in the issue and developed significant expertise in supporting refugees. They soon learned about the legal situation and understood how much legal leeway there was regarding the immigration status of refugees. This starkly contrasted with the local government, which had no relevant experience in receiving migrants or refugees and was slower to respond when the number of refugees increased sharply around 2015.

The visibility and influence of the group were enhanced by its ability to coordinate other refugee-support groups in the district, pooling expertise and gaining a knowledge advantage over the local government, which was struggling due to the lack of staff and expertise in this area. As this increasingly assertive actor entered the scene, disputes over funding and responsibilities arose. While the volunteers wanted to receive public financing yet remain autonomous, the district's government officials wanted more coordination. According to one influential official, "opposing fronts clashed" in this initial phase, underscoring that irritation on both sides dominated the interaction.

Maria, one of the volunteers of the refugee-support group, confirmed the initial perception of opposition between the volunteers on the one side and the local government on the other side:

> "[The local government] has other interests than us volunteers. […] We are on the side of the refugees and have other goals in mind than the local government with all its regulations. […] And there have been disputes about this recently".

While volunteers felt deterred in their enthusiasm for helping stifled by the governmental and, in their view, outdated rules, local government officials were often uncertain and challenged by the emergence of this well-organized refugee-support group. Overall, deep mistrust and seemingly irreconcilable logics of action were an unlikely starting point for the production of linking social capital.

Phase II: Mediation

Things changed in the following phase. Despite the initial tensions, representatives from both sides continued to perceive the local reception of refugees as a *matter of mutual concern*. In the words of Luisa, one of the founders of *Solidarity with Refugees*: "it was not always easy, and of course we [and the local government] had different interests, but it was still clear from the beginning that we could only do it together". This admission did not end the interaction; instead, both sides engaged in open negotiations about their different interests and viewpoints. In the terminology of Hirschman's classic work (Hirschman, 2004), the actors opted for "voice" rather than "exit" and opened channels for discussion.

Similarly, the district governor recalled that the initial tension of clashing opposing fronts was gradually reduced by "slowly coming closer" and "trying to accept the other's way of thinking". The combination of conflict and a shared understanding of interdependence led both sides to work things out, build trust, and reconcile conflicting viewpoints and organizational logics. Informal meetings between local government officials and volunteers proliferated, preparing the ground for deeper interaction.

Phase III: Cooperation

Regular exchange forums soon supplemented the first informal meetings, institutionalized in the form of specialized expert roundtables on various topics related to refugee housing. These fora regularly brought together actors from local civil society, business, local politics, and local government to exchange ideas and develop common approaches. Later, these expert roundtables provided the framework for discussing and formulating a new integration strat-

egy for the district in close cooperation between the group, other civil society actors, and the public sector. At the same time, they emphasized that the process of negotiating the integration strategy and reaching a final agreement was not entirely problem-free. One of the local government officials mentioned that interactions between the group and the local government were initially very contentious. He found it all the more surprising that volunteers and officials began working on a new integration strategy for the district:

> "The funny thing is that people who used to be our biggest opponents were actually involved in creating this integration strategy. […] The groups are not on our side now, but they are working with us to see how we can bring the best together. And in the integration strategy, we have not only the views of the district government, but also of all the supporters [i.e. civil society organizations, groups]".

According to Ellen, a volunteer and staff member of the volunteer-network *Asylum with Us*, the group and the local government began to meet more often in weekly exchange meetings between group members and local governmental agencies. Both sides felt that the challenges of hosting refugees could only be solved together:

> "And it wasn't always easy and of course we had different interests, the district office and us, but it was still clear from the beginning that we could only do it together. And that's why the district office was happy for our support, and we were happy for their support".

Both sides recognized the productivity of these forms of integrating the expertise of different actors and negotiating differences. As a result, the interaction continued even after housing the refugees had lost its immediate urgency.

The fact that interaction continued did not mean that there was no conflict. On the contrary, the different interests remained. Pastor Stephan, one of the founders of *Solidarity for Refugees*, recalled that deciding on a new integration strategy required hard compromises, and some attempts to reach an agreement failed:

> "But we can at least say that it has a broad basis. And again, sometimes we had arguments where we said, 'we see this very differently, this absolutely has to go in' [for example allowing Muslim women wearing a headscarf to

> work in a public institution], but the district office said, 'No, that's too hot for us, we are leaving that out'".

Despite such failures, the actors involved did not opt for "exit" but made efforts to maintain the interaction against all odds. These three phases of interaction illustrate how unfavorable initial conditions were successfully overcome, resulting in enhancement, however fragile, of the mutual understanding, trust, and formalized cooperation that characterize responsive forms of linking social capital. Conflicts acted as a catalyst for rapprochement because of the actors' willingness to address them. Looking back on the evolution of the relationship, some local government representatives came to appreciate the challenging tone of the new refugee-support group, which was initially met with irritation, admitting that "it's good to have a bit of external pressure" to reflect on institutional roles and routines, while highlighting the efforts of the volunteers to see the bigger picture and engage in debates from different points of view.

Altenau: A failed Opportunity to Produce Linking Social Capital

Phase I: Mutual Appreciation

In contrast to the conflictual start in Lauda, the relationship between the refugee-support group *Refugees Welcome* and the local government in Altenau was initially characterized by mutual appreciation and respect. The local government officials and the volunteers in the group believed that the reception of refugees was a common challenge that could only be met through close cooperation between civil society and the state. While the volunteers saw the local government as having a duty to care for and integrate refugees, they also saw refugee support as a project too large to be solved by local governments alone.

The consensual start is illustrated by the following email excerpt in which Helen and Bianca, two volunteers, thank the staff of the local government for an information event in 2015:

> "It was nice to see how friendly and relaxed [...] and how calmly and unpretentiously you [governmental officers] handled the incredibly heavy workload last night [...]. I thought that was really great! And I think that also encourages all the volunteers to see when they experience that not every employee does their job by the book but is as committed as you obviously are".

Helen and Bianca underscored the mutual appreciation and trust they experienced from the local government, particularly the mayor.

With this trust came a certain latitude for the group, allowing the volunteers to organize and consolidate themselves. First, the local government officials at the refugee shelter gave the volunteers leeway and allowed for a great deal of agency and self-organization. Second, the mayor gave the group space when the local government distributed most refugees to the different neighborhoods. Since one of the neighborhoods housed a vast number of refugee families and since the proportion of migrants in this part of the city had previously been low, the mayor asked the group to use one of the buildings as an information point. The idea was to provide a shared space for volunteers, refugees, and residents to mediate and prevent potential conflicts between these groups.

The volunteers appreciated the local government's support, and, in turn, the mayor showed his interest in their activities, including attending one of the group's parties. Helen recalled that the mayor even participated in their barbecue: "The mayor stood at the barbecue and actively helped, and that was an important experience for us because in the beginning we experienced a lot of rejection and hostility from the neighborhood […]". In contrast to the initial constellation in Lauda, this first interaction phase was characterized by the mutual perception that the local government and the volunteers were pulling in the same direction. Thus, at the outset, the conditions seemed favorable for producing linking social capital. Volunteers and public authorities shared this impression, and regular information meetings were set up to exchange ideas. Actors on both sides were happy to see the other taking on responsibility and understood the reception of refugees as a common task.

Phase II: Resentment

However, this harmony did not last. By the end of 2016, there was growing discontent among the volunteers. As the focus shifted away from initial emergency relief to education, employment, and housing issues, the group *Refugees Welcome* became increasingly vocal about refugees' difficult conditions. While the local government and the refugee-support group initially appeared to be on the same team, the different areas of responsibility and logics of action between the state and civil society became more apparent in the second phase. In particular, the shift in focus from emergency reception to integration issues fueled conflicts. While local government officials and the volunteers at the refugee-support group agreed on the importance of providing emergency

relief and humanitarian aid, they began to disagree on the long-term integration strategies. When Helen and Bianca raised their concerns about how many refugees were being treated regarding a lack of social resources and care, they did not feel heard by the local government. The volunteers openly expressed their discontent. In a public letter from the group to the local government, the volunteers claimed: "There is a lack of integration courses! There is a lack of kindergarten places! There is a lack of support for schools! There is a lack of language mediators in offices and authorities!".

Throughout 2017 and 2018, the volunteers pointed out problems and made demands in numerous letters to the local and regional governments. In addition, they repeatedly emphasized that the local government did not address the volunteers' demands and needs during the city's information and exchange meetings. Bianca, one of the long-time volunteers in the group, felt that the local government's exchange meetings were designed to convey official information rather than provide a space for peer-to-peer discussion:

> "[…] I don't want to be unfair to the city, but there were also invitations from the central reception point for the volunteers to meet, but the main topic was the passing on of information by the social workers. In the end, we always had the opportunity to share information, but not in a way that brought our experiences to the fore. It was more about being informed about something, and people from other areas were always invited, like the Order of Malta or Caritas [central welfare organizations], who then reported, which was interesting of course, but it wasn't really possible for us to present our problems and challenges.".

The central concern of the volunteers was that they felt they needed to be heard. While established welfare organizations were invited to share their experiences in information meetings with the city, the group was only supposed to listen. This new situation did not correspond to the group's self-image, which increasingly perceived itself as a group of experts who had been immersed in refugee support and advocacy and, therefore, deserved to be taken seriously. As a result of numerous disputes between the volunteers and the city officials, the fronts hardened. The common public concern of refugee reception turned into an escalating conflict that destroyed the trusting relationship of the first interaction phase.

Phase III: Escalation and Resignation

Eventually, the conflict escalated to the point a controversial decision by the local government ended the interaction. Two years after the mayor offered the building, which had since served as the group's information point, the local government canceled the agreement for temporary use. The closure was a significant setback for the group. The volunteers had planned out their projects for several years and had established strong relationships internally and with the residents of the surrounding neighborhood. As a result, many *Refugees Welcome* volunteers resigned and gave up their involvement in the group.

The closure resulted from two key developments—first, a change of mayor. While the previous mayor had been open to refugee reception and volunteer projects, his successor was hardly interested in this type of civic action. Volunteers and local government officials lamented this loss of interest in the interviews. Second, the support structures within the local government had become more formalized and professionalized. Over time, the local government officials saw volunteers not as a source of support but as "annoying troublemakers". Their autonomy was no longer seen as an asset but as a threat to the city's claim to holistic management. The local government reacted with notable discomfort:

> "Some of the volunteers were a bit invasive. They were just doing things. They interfered. They wrote letters. They published e-mails that had been exchanged between them and us within the local government. They took positions that we did not take".

While in Lauda, volunteers used their knowledge advantage over the local government to become indispensable actors in the local reception of refugees, in Altenau, the growing professionalization of refugee reception left no room for volunteers. As a result, the importance and visibility of the group declined.

From the volunteers' point of view, the closure of their central meeting point was an inexplicable intrusion into their self-organized activities. The volunteers were hardly involved in the local government's decision and had little opportunity to advocate for the preservation of the building. From then on, the lack of a central and open meeting place forced the group to meet in private homes, which made it difficult to stick together, share experiences, and sustain the joint commitment. Helen highlighted her frustration:

> "What we were promised, in 2016, the city gave us the building rent-free for five years, and then they just said quite early, no, the buildings have to be returned to the city, you have to get out of here.

Volunteers expected local government officials to treat them as equals. However, after their initial support, volunteers later felt that their engagement was no longer needed but seen as a cumbersome obstacle in the official refugee assistance system. After the conflict escalated, neither local government officials nor the volunteers were willing to return to a common understanding. While mutual respect was a favorable starting point for the production of linking social capital, the interaction dynamics were subsequently dominated by a perceived lack of appreciation. Even a key figure in the local government admitted: "I don't think the volunteers feel that their commitment is sufficiently appreciated. I felt that way. I have had many conversations about this".

The three phases combined show how favorable conditions of trust between volunteers and local government officials can give way to bitterness and an escalation of hostilities. What began as a similar perception of the refugee reception crisis as a common challenge that could only be solved through cooperation between the state and civil society ended in deep frustration on the part of the volunteers. Starting in 2017, volunteers in the refugee-support group in Altenau became increasingly critical of the local government's long-term integration strategy. When they voiced their criticism, they felt that they were not heard. From the perspective of local government officials, they were not professional enough and were seen as "troublemakers".

Civil society – state dynamics in Neheim and Loburg

For the previous paired comparison, I selected two of the four cases from my research to show how linking social capital is produced and how it deteriorates in interactions between members of civil society and local government. However, I observed similar dynamics in Neheim and, to a lesser extent, in Loburg. Thus, in the following, I will briefly discuss how, in Neheim, the relationship between volunteers, activists, and employees of civil society organizations and groups and local government officials began trustingly and ended in an escalation and cessation of communication. In contrast, the relationship between civil society and the state in Loburg remained positive and trusting despite repeated conflicts.

As discussed in Chapter 4, the relationship between volunteers and activists from refugee-support groups and community organizations in Neheim on the one hand and local government officials on the other was challenging. The relationship went through three phases similar to those in Altenau, with positive, trusting (favorable conditions) during the pro-refugee mobilization in 2015/16, but then a phase of resentment and finally a phase of resignation. Since the 1980s, employees of Neheim's *Multicultural House*, an institution financed by three major welfare organizations, employees and volunteers of religious congregations, activists of the *Refugee Council*, and local government officials worked together within the framework of the so-called Asylum Working Group. At the regular meetings of the Asylum Working Group, they exchanged information on new political issues and upcoming legal changes. They shared responsibilities for supporting refugees at the Employment and Immigration Office and other public institutions. Despite these favorable starting conditions, the collaborative and trusting relationship changed at the end of 2016 when the newly elected mayor dissolved the Working Group. The structure that had existed until then eroded, and the various members of the Working Group did not meet in this constellation in the years that followed. As a result, there was immense frustration among the activists of the *Refugee Council* and also among the staff of the *Multicultural House*. As discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, the mayor who canceled the Working Group's meetings cited data protection as the reason they could no longer meet since the Working Group members often discussed the situation and plight of individual refugees and their families.

The activists and civil society workers emphasized in the interviews that they did not believe the new mayor. For them, it was clear that

> "under the guise of data protection, he ensured that the groups could no longer discuss individual cases in the working group. Then, the immigration authorities, usually present at our meetings, withdrew. As a result, I could not discuss legal developments" (Matthias, Refugee Council).

Without the presence of the local government, said another activist from the *Refugee Council*, there was no point because, as a result, Neheim's Immigration Office and Employment Office did not attend the meetings either. Despite years of cooperation, certainly not without conflict, but in regular communication, the Asylum Working Group in Neheim collapsed. With its dissolution, the

collaboration and trust the Working Group members had built over the years collapsed.

Loburg's situation differed from the previous three cases because the civil society-state relationship remained relatively constant between 2015/16 and 2020/21. As highlighted in Chapter 4, the different volunteers, activists, and employees of community organizations already had positive experiences working with the local government, particularly with the mayor, before the pro-refugee mobilization of 2015/16. This relationship was undoubtedly tested several times during and after the mobilization. As in the other three cities, there were clashes between civil society, especially between relatively grassroots groups, and governmental officials. At the same time, the emergence of the Civic Council of Migration in Loburg created a regular forum for exchange. Many conflicts were resolved in this forum so that, as in Lauda, the conflicts did not lead to a complete breakdown in communication.

On the contrary, a closer and more personal relationship developed between the members, who felt they belonged to civil society, and the officials. However, the relationship between civil society and the state in Loburg did not go through three phases as in the other three cities. In other words, the relationship was positive, including through the mayor's participation in an action alliance before 2015, and has remained positive.

Conclusion

My analysis of interaction sequences between refugee-support groups and local government officials in Lauda and Altenau during and after the pro-refugee mobilization of 2015/16 provides insights into the laborious and contentious dynamics of linking social capital production. This type of social capital is crucial because it creates co-production opportunities, which fosters community building within civil society.

As I demonstrated earlier, local governments wield immense authority over the lives of refugees. Therefore, co-production, such as collaborative efforts on integration strategies or the establishment of migration councils where civil society actors and governmental officials work together, is vital for sustained interaction within civil society. However, this co-production relies heavily on linking social capital, a form of vertical trust essential for successful collaboration.

The production of linking of social capital requires a continuous effort on the part of all parties. Distinct routines and power asymmetries between volunteers and local government officials created structural tensions that served as breaking points for the production of linking social capital. Even favorable initial conditions, such as in Altenau, do not guarantee the emergence of lasting responsive relationships. Viewing a challenge such as the public reception of refugees as a "matter[..] of mutual concern" (Polletta, 2016, p. 237) constitutes a necessary but insufficient condition for the emergence of linking social capital. Linking social capital is a fragile and dynamic process rather than a resource that can be taken for granted.

Overall, initial harmony between the two sides is a poor predictor for lasting linking social capital. Instead, scholars should pay attention to how the actors involved deal with the tensions inherent in the interaction between the different spheres of local government and informal civil society, regardless of whether the co-production of refugee reception is normatively heralded.

Self-confidence and the courage to confront may be essential to encourage public officials to experiment with new forms of responsive, peer-to-peer encounters. The case of Lauda illustrates how mediation and more institutionalized exchanges eventually led to mutual understanding and close cooperation after severe conflict in the initial interaction phase. Frictions were proactively integrated into multi-actor forums to continue interacting against apparent odds and moments of (mutual) frustration. In contrast, in the second case study, Altenau, the relationship between the refugee-support group and the local authorities deteriorated after promising initial cooperation and mutual understanding. Both sides need to recognize this difference and be willing to engage with each other to work things out. Local government officials may shy away from such a process because it challenges established routines. Such rejection, however, further alienates volunteers. Volunteers intuitively sense whether their efforts are taken seriously, or in social capital terms, whether vertical ties are "responsive" or more instrumental or even "exploitative" in nature (Putnam, 2004, p. 669). The experience of not being taken seriously is a significant driver of discouragement, in which volunteers choose to drop out, resulting in a rapid breakdown of ties.

These findings on the interconnectedness of linking social capital production require systematic testing based on a more significant number of cases. Nevertheless, this unique analytical approach to examining the dynamics of linking social capital production offers an essential complement to broader scholarship on social capital and state-civil society relations. Rather than tak-

ing the beneficial consequences of citizen-state interaction for granted, scholarship should pay more attention to the conditions under which trusting relationships can be forged in the face of asymmetrical power relations and distinct logics of action.