

Data and Methods

In this chapter, I briefly discuss the research design employed to answer whether and how the pro-refugee mobilization of 2015/16 led to the emergence and survival of new pro-refugee communities. The study adopts a comparative case analysis approach, examining four cases (medium-sized cities) selected based on the same phenomenon; each case experienced an enormous mobilization during the refugee reception crisis in 2015/16.

Overview

I operationalized the impact of the pro-refugee mobilization on the (potential) emergence and survival of pro-refugee communities by examining the networks and interaction dynamics among civil society organizations and groups. As discussed in Chapter 2, they are communities in a specific locality composed of individuals, organizations, and groups, as well as alliances, coalitions, and similar entities, that are engaged in civic action. These communities seek to address specific local problems that they have identified. Rather than working independently or in isolation, they interact, creating networks among the various actors and entities involved.

I measured the development and survival of pro-refugee communities as new and strengthened networks among the organizations and groups actively involved in the pro-refugee mobilization of 2015/16 in their respective city. Thus, in my research design, I focused on those organizations and groups actively involved in the pro-refugee mobilization. I wanted to understand whether and to what extent these organizations and groups developed new, and more extensive networks and new and more extensive forms of interaction. I chose four medium-sized German cities as case studies, each

characterized by its distinct local civic landscape, all having undergone the pro-refugee mobilization of 2015/16.

Based on the results regarding community emergence and survival, I explored the reasons for the main findings: What factors and conditions drove the emergence of pro-refugee communities in the positive cases, and what were the barriers? Using Scharpf's (2018, p. 26) "backward-looking hypotheses" approach, I started with the dependent variable, the results of my first research question. This approach allowed me to consider the phenomenon's complexity and analyze different factors and conditions that influenced the emergence and survival of pro-refugee communities in two of the four cases.

To delve into the drivers and barriers to the emergence of pro-refugee communities, I have adopted an embedded case study approach (see Yin, 2018). This approach hones in on distinct cases within a larger context – individual cities, each with its own unique local civic landscape. The common thread among these cases was their shared experience of pro-refugee mobilization, which constituted the larger phenomenon that I studied.

This embedded case study design facilitated the analysis and comparison of factors and conditions, including the local political environment, the structural components of each civic landscape, and the key players involved. These three factors resulted from my systematic data analysis, which was based on an inductive and deductive approach. By adopting the embedded case study approach, I explored to what extent these factors could be used to explain the emergence or lack of emergence of local civic action communities in the four cases. I will further justify these factors in the following empirical chapters. By focusing on the effects of pro-refugee mobilization on emergent pro-refugee communities, I aim to lay the groundwork for understanding the broader impacts of the mobilization period.

Since the research question is explorative, I chose qualitative methods to answer the question. The research question is particularly explorative as the effects of the pro-refugee mobilization and even other mobilization periods have yet to be explored on the local level, particularly regarding community building. As scholars such as Gerring (2009) and Yin (2018) have shown, such explorative studies are best done through in-depth qualitative case research. Qualitative research allowed me to explore the phenomenon of the pro-refugee mobilization and its lasting impacts in-depth and gain insights into the underlying factors that influenced it.

My research aims to uncover the effects of the mobilization and specifically illuminate the networking and interaction dynamics between organiza-

tions and groups. To achieve this, a more comprehensive understanding was necessary. Furthermore, such in-depth information is challenging to acquire solely through surveys and social media analyses alone. While survey methods may have provided data on institutionalized meetings and protests, they would have fallen short in capturing the evolution of these activities. In terms of quantitative network approaches, such methods would have been inadequate to gather network data, as many of the connections between organizations and groups are informal and not publicly available.

Given my focus on the 10 to 20 organizations and groups that were mobilized in 2015/16, it was more feasible to interview them. Through qualitative semi-structured interviews, I combined my data collection to conduct a systematic qualitative content and pattern analysis, an ego-centered network analysis and to a smaller extent a review of documents.

In the following sections, I introduce the systematic case selection by discussing the rationale behind the case comparison and the procedure. Subsequently, I shed light on the systematic case selection and description, the data collection efforts, the data analysis, including interview and ego-network analysis, and ethical considerations. Finally, I show how I systematically analyzed the interview data using a combination of an inductive and deductive approach.

Systematic Case Selection and Case Description

As I have previously outlined, the empirical foundation of this book is a comparative case design. In the following, I will give a more precise outline of how the case selection was conducted. I will describe each case based on significant relevant characteristics. As I noted earlier, my book is based on a larger joint research project called “The Activated Civil Society”. As a result, I conducted the case selection with my colleagues from the German Centre for Integration and Migration Research and the Institute for Migration Research and Intercultural Studies at Osnabrück University—the entire process after the case selection, was conducted by myself, including data collection and analysis.

Design of case selection

Since the book explores the effects of the pro-refugee mobilization on local civil society, we selected the four cases based on the presence of a pro-refugee mobi-

lization in 2015/16. Due to the open-ended nature of this first research question and a lack of previous studies on the lasting effects of mobilization periods, the cases do not differ along specific variables to hold certain developments constant. The rationale behind the case selection was to identify four cities representing average German cities. As cities in Germany are diverse, we chose cities representative of specific structural features in the regions (Northern, Eastern, Southern, and Western Germany).

By selecting one city from each region of Germany, we aimed to capture the diversity of German cities while maintaining one common thread – the pro-refugee mobilization in 2015/16. The case selection strategy optimized the external validity of our findings. Our case selection included cities representative of different regions and with typical demographic and economic characteristics. It ensured that the results could provide valuable insights for evaluating other cities with similar characteristics.

We also decided to focus on medium-sized cities (20,000 – 99,999 inhabitants). In case study research, there tends to be a disproportionate focus on larger cities. However, this focus is inconsistent with the routes of refugees, who are distributed relatively evenly across Germany and reach small and medium sized cities. The majority of people in Germany also live in small and medium-sized cities (5,000 – 99,999 inhabitants) (Deutscher Städtetag, 2022). Given the routes of refugees and the reality of the majority of people in Germany, it is essential to observe the impact of migration on civil society beyond the large urban centers. Furthermore, the smaller population size of medium-sized cities allowed us to interview all, if not most, of the key actors involved in refugee support and advocacy in each city.

Process of case selection

The systematic case selection was based on qualitative contextual analyses and expert interviews. The selection was carried out in two steps. First, we developed a pre-selection of 18 medium-sized cities in the north, south, west and east of Germany. The selection was based on a number of contextual factors, including migration-related diversity, economic situation and political context.

In a second step, my colleagues and I conducted expert interviews with 15 civil society representatives from different regions in Germany. We mainly looked for representatives of civil society organizations in each region and contacted them via email or phone. These interviews were crucial to pinpoint the cities that witnessed a pro-refugee mobilization around 2015/16. Not all

21 cities in our pre-selection actually experienced a pro-refugee mobilization around this time so the interviews were needed to make sure the necessary condition was met in each case.

Based on the extensive case research and expert interviews, we selected the final four cities that were representative of their region and experienced a pro-refugee mobilization. The final selection of cases fell on the following four cities: Loburg (East), Altenau (North), Neheim (West), and Lauda (South). The city names are anonymized as I justify under Data Analysis.

The final case selection

All four cities experienced an unprecedented pro-refugee mobilization around 2015. During this time, many different associations, groups, and organizations interacted with each other. In addition, the four cities share many key characteristics. For example, the size of the cities is similar, as is the local government, which is composed of parties that occupy the center of the political spectrum in Germany (social democratic or Christian conservative). Three of the four cities are the urban center of a more rural region with many surrounding small towns and villages. One of the cities, Neheim, is located in a more metropolitan region. At the same time, the city selection reflects regional variance. Loburg is in the east, Altenau in the north, Lauda in the south, and Neheim in the west.

Table 2: Case characteristics

Case	Pro-refugee mobilization	Socioeconomic characteristics	Political environment	Civic landscape
Loburg	Experienced pro-refugee mobilization in 2015/16	Population: 30.000 Unemployment rate: 10% Migration-Related Diversity: 3%	Strongest party in regional elections (2014): Social Democratic Party (SPD) Mayor: Independent (center left) (2005–2020)	Limited institutional infrastructure in the area of migration (before 2015) Strong history of movements in the recent past

Case	Pro-refugee mobilization	Socioeconomic characteristics	Political environment	Civic landscape
Altenau	Experienced pro-refugee mobilization in 2015/16	Population: 70.000 Unemployment rate: 12,2% Migration-Related Diversity: 8%	Strongest party in regional elections: Christian Democratic Party (CDU) Mayor: SPD, CDU (2017-)	Established municipal structures in the area of migration Limited history of movements, more traditional civil society
Lauda	Experienced pro-refugee mobilization in 2015/16	Population: 20.000 Unemployment rate: 2,7% Migration-Related Diversity: 12%	Strongest party in regional elections: Citizens for Lauda Mayor: Citizens for Lauda (conservative) (since 2002)	Limited institutional infrastructure in the area of migration (before 2015) Very limited history of movements, more traditional civil society
Neheim	Experienced pro-refugee mobilization in 2015/16	Population: 60.000 Unemployment rate: 15,9% Migration-Related Diversity: 15,9%	Strongest party in regional elections: Social Democratic Party (SPD) Mayor: SPD, Independent (economically liberal) (2016-)	Established municipal structures in the area of migration Strong movement history and traditional civil society

Data Collection and Analysis

The primary data for this study is based on extensive interview material combined with field visits, participant observation, and the analysis of documents. I chose to base the empirical data on semi-structured interviews because this provided the opportunity to get a more interpersonal perspective on the case and also allowed me to adjust information and presumptions I had about the case (Kaufmann, 1999, p. 65f.; Loosen, 2016, p. 143f.). A semi-structured interviewing technique often involves a flexible interview guide with prepared questions (Loosen, 2016, p. 143f.).

I traveled to the four cities for field research and interviews eight times. Between 2020 and 2022, I conducted 83 semi-structured qualitative interviews in the four selected medium-sized cities, each lasting between 45 and 90 minutes. The interviewees were volunteers, activists, and employees of organizations and groups, ranging from volunteer groups, grassroots associations, and political initiatives to sports clubs, church groups, and welfare organizations. In addition, I analyzed meeting minutes, brochures, and newsletters provided by the interviewees. I also attended some meetings where the actors active in refugee support and advocacy came together, such as Asylum Summits and council meetings. Before each interview, the interviewees signed a declaration of consent. On the declaration, the interviewees could decide whether the interview should be anonymized.

Interview phases

In the following section, I outline the interview collection process. As shown in Table 3, this process involved three interview phases: (1) interview sampling and expert interviews, (2) in-depth interviews, and (3) follow-up interviews.

Table 3: Interview phases

Phase 1: Interview sampling and expert interviews
Timeline: Spring and summer of 2020 · Identified key organizations and groups in each city through online research · Conducted 12 expert interviews with these key organizations and groups · Selected 10 – 17 organizations and groups in each city for Phase 2
Phase 2: In-depth interviews
Timeline: Fall 2020 to winter 2021 · Interviewed 10 – 17 organizations and groups in each city (57 interviewees) · Adapted to pandemic travel restrictions in Altenau by conducting most interviews via Zoom
Phase 3: Follow-Up interviews
Timeline: Spring and summer 2022 · Re-interviewed 14 respondents in each city · Aimed to gain insight into post-pandemic reactivation and new mobilization to support refugees from Ukraine. · Verified main hypothesis

I first identified key organizations involved in the 2015/16 pro-refugee mobilization through a combination of online research and expert interviews. I gathered contextual information from online and offline documents, local newspapers, blogs, social media, and organizations’ websites. This helped identify active organizations during the mobilization. I then contacted 2–3 organizations in each city for interviews with their representatives, resulting in 12 expert interviews that provided deeper insights into the local civic landscape and dynamics during mobilization. These interviews also helped identify additional relevant organizations for further research.

I then conducted guided interviews with 10–17 central organizations per city, depending on saturation. These interviews, lasting 45 to 90 minutes, took place in diverse settings such as cafés, living rooms, parks, and organization facilities.

In the final phase, I conducted 2–5 follow-up interviews per case in 2022, which provided valuable insights into civil society reactivation post-pandemic and new mobilizations linked to the Ukrainian refugee crisis. These interviews also validated key hypotheses developed during the initial phase.

Interview guide

In preparation for these interviews, I developed a detailed interview guide based on the following six analytical dimensions: (i) Organization, (ii) Interorganizational networks, (iii) Vertical Networks, (iv) Political context, (v) Contextual conditions, and (vi) Effects of COVID-19 pandemic. The interview guide helped me to structure the interview process but allowed the openness to include new questions and leave others out (Loosen, 2016, p. 142f.). After every interview, I reflected on my interview technique and revised some of the questions in the interview guide.

The operationalization of the research question was structured into five analytical dimensions. First, I examined the engagement of key organizations and groups involved in refugee support during the 2015/16 mobilization, focusing on changes in their engagement and organizational structure between 2015/16 and 2020/2021. The second dimension centered on identifying the network connections of each organization, exploring the quality and extent of these relationships. This dimension formed the core of the ego-centered network analysis (see the data analysis section), and it constituted a major portion of the interview, beginning with questions about the organization's top 5 contacts and extending to detailed discussions on the nature and development of these relationships.

In the third dimension, I analyzed the political opportunity structures in each city, focusing on the relationships between the interviewed organizations and local government officials. The fourth dimension explored the political scope of pro-refugee engagement and participation in protest activities. In the fifth dimension, I assessed the state of the local civic landscape, particularly regarding mobilization potential, volunteer recruitment, and underlying conflicts or dominant interaction patterns not addressed in earlier parts of the interview. The final dimension investigated the impact of COVID-19-related contact restrictions on the activities of the organizations and groups.

To increase the validity of my findings, I cross-checked key information across interviews. I asked interviewees to elaborate on stories shared by others

and verified protest timelines and activities from online documents during the interviews.

Collection of documents

In addition to the qualitative interviews, I collected 31 documents with a total of 786 pages to support and verify some of the findings from my interviews. I collected online documents, meeting minutes, newsletters, and project reports for each case. People involved in the organizations and groups I interviewed provided the minutes and newsletters. I used the documents to gain more background information about the activities of the organizations and groups I interviewed and the events that took place in the city in the area of refugee support.

During my face-to-face interviews in each case, two to three interviewees per case showed me the facilities and places where most of the refugee support activities took place. For example, in Loburg, a volunteer at the Multicultural Café invited me to their weekly organizational meeting and dinner. In Lauda, a volunteer invited me to experience a German class for Ukrainian refugees. Since in Altenau and Neheim the daily support of refugees has largely disappeared, I did not have the same experiences. Nevertheless, I visited the office and community rooms used for migration counseling. I also attended a bi-monthly meeting of the Migration Council in Loburg and a biennial Asylum Summit in Lauda.

Analysis

In total, external transcription services transcribed all 83 interviews, except for the 12 interviews conducted during the preparatory first phase. For these, I opted not to record but instead took detailed notes. I used the thematic analysis approach to analyze my interview data. For the coding process, I used the qualitative coding software MAXQDA. My approach was heavily based on a methodological approach by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 79), who define this type of qualitative analysis as follows: “Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail.” The method allowed me to approach my data in a very systematic way and helped me to sufficiently answer my two research questions.

I chose a combination of approaching the interviews inductively and deductively. This approach meant that I went back and forth between the theoretical literature and my empirical data. Since there was little previous research on my exact topic, I considered theoretical concepts from various fields of research. Particularly at the beginning of the analysis, I remained open to new themes and patterns I noticed in the interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83ff.)

Ethical Considerations

In my research, I made several ethical considerations to ensure the well-being and rights of my respondents and to uphold ethical standards. The three most important aspects were reflexivity and power dynamics, informed consent, and confidentiality and anonymity (Wiles, 2013, p. 80ff.).

First, I acknowledge that my personal background may have influenced my perceptions of the actors and forms of interaction I observed during my interviews and field visits, as well as my interactions with my interviewees and the people I met. I came to the field of refugee support and advocacy as a young, white woman from West Germany with an academic background and native German language skills. Therefore, I was sensitive to three dimensions: the power dynamics between East and West Germany, between researcher and interviewee, and between a German citizen and a refugee without permanent residence status.

In addition to the reflexivity and power dynamics, I secondly ensured that I received informed consent by all interviewees. Thus, before each interview, I explained the purpose of my research and how I would deal with the results. I ensured that interviewees gave voluntary and informed consent.

Third, I addressed an issue that most interviewees were concerned about confidentiality and anonymity. Since most interviewees tended to prefer complete anonymity, I decided to anonymize all names, including the names of interviewees and organizations and groups. I also decided to extend anonymization to city names, given the smaller size of these cities and the existence of single prominent groups, such as a refugee-support group or a refugee council. Therefore, I pseudonymized the city names as well as the names of individuals and organizations. For the city names, I used old German city names that are no longer in use in the respective regions.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the research design I developed to examine the impact of the pro-refugee mobilization of 2015/16 on the emergence and stabilization of pro-refugee communities. I operationalized the impact of the pro-refugee mobilization on community building by examining the sustained forms of interaction and the newly created and strengthened networks among organizations and groups active in refugee support and advocacy six years after the mobilization. Methodologically, I used a comparative case analysis approach based on qualitative, problem-focused interviews and extensive thematic and ego-centered network analysis. I also reviewed organizational reports, meeting minutes, and other documents. In an extensive case selection process involving contextual analysis and expert interviews, I selected four medium-sized cities as cases representing different regions of Germany. Each case experienced the pro-refugee mobilization of 2015/16.

The data I collected in each city was based on extensive interview material and 83 semi-structured qualitative interviews with volunteers, activists, and staff of organizations involved in refugee support and advocacy. The data also included site visits to the cities and participant observation of more formal roundtable discussions and other meetings. Before beginning the interview process, I developed a detailed interview guide based on six analytical dimensions. I conducted the interviews in three phases: initial contact and scheduling, primary interviews in 2020 and 2021, and some follow-up interviews in 2022.

In the next chapter, I will provide a detailed answer to my first research question regarding the lasting impact of pro-refugee mobilization on the lasting emergence of pro-refugee communities, which I will call pro-refugee communities for my specific research. I will describe and analyze the interaction and network dynamics patterns in each case, followed by a final comparison of the four cases.