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Roomies for Life? An Assessment of How Staying with a Local Facilitates Refugee Integration

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ABSTRACT

In light of failing integration policies and practices, we provide a qualitative evaluation of a social innovation that aims to facilitate integration by providing refugees an opportunity to reside temporarily with locals. Our analysis of the experiences shared by refugee guests and local hosts provides insight on the theory and practice of refugee integration in three ways: we (1) inform research and policy on the effectiveness of staying with a local as a means for integrating refugees, (2) unpack the mechanisms through which staying with a local facilitates refugee integration, and (3) theoretically enrich the literature on indicators of integration.

KEYWORDS

Refugee integration; refugee housing; social innovation; social bridges; indicators of integration

In response to the insufficient governmental policies and practices (Engbersen et al., 2015; Konle-Seidl & Bolits, 2016), in recent years across Europe there was a widespread increase in efforts by members of communities to address refugees' plights and worries (Thomas et al., 2019). Many citizen empowerment and socio-structural change mechanisms in the form of *social innovations* have emerged, aiming to facilitate the integration of refugees (Kornberger et al., 2018; Nicholls & Ziegler, 2015). Social innovations (SIs) are novel solutions created and implemented by citizens to address social problems (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014; Mulgan, 2006). Governments are increasingly trying to identify effective SIs (Edwards-Schachter et al. 2012) with the aim of supporting them to deal with grand societal challenges, such as refugee integration (Urama and Acheampong 2013).

There has been a particular sharp rise of SIs that aim to facilitate refugee integration in recent years (e.g., Patuzzi et al., 2019; Schreiner, 2018). However, empirical research on SIs with a primary goal of integration is scarce, particularly SIs focusing on *refugee* integration within new host communities. Therefore, in this paper, we present a study on the SI TakeCareBnB that aims to facilitate refugee integration by letting refugees temporarily reside with local residents. We consider this particular SI as highly relevant because it has been implemented in several countries around the world. Moreover, given that social isolation of refugees in host countries is one of the primary reasons why integration fails (Strang & Quinn, 2019), and that contact between refugees and residents plays a prominent role in reducing negative attitudes toward refugees among citizens (Knappert et al., 2020), the approach of this SI by matching a refugee with a local host has the potential to greatly benefit integration.

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Conceptualizing refugee integration

There has been little agreement on what integration comprises, and debates have particularly focused on what constitutes ‘successful’ integration. To provide a structure for understanding what constitutes integration as well as normatively evaluating integration efforts and initiatives, we draw upon Ager and Strang (2004; 2008) Indicators of Integration (IoI) framework.

The IoI framework suggests that there are ten main domains or indicators of integration. These domains are distributed across four categories. First, *Markers and means*, consists of four domains that are considered indicative of successful integration and that are known to facilitate further integration: Employment, Housing, Education, and Health. Second, *Social connection*, refers to three different types of relationships that enable integration in different ways: Social bonds (i.e. relationships with family and like-ethnic groups), Social bridges (i.e. relationships between refugees and local communities), and Social links (i.e. relationships between refugees and structures of the state). Third, *Facilitators*, consists of the removal of two main barriers that obstruct integration: Language and cultural knowledge, and Safety. Finally, *Foundation*, covers only one domain that influences all other domains: Citizenship and rights.

The IoI framework has sparked many debates about the suitability of the framework in capturing and assessing integration as well as about the nature and meaning of integration in general. One central point of critique is that the framework focuses on integration efforts by refugees only, thus providing a one-sided view on integration (Phillimore 2012; Spencer & Charsley, 2016). In contrast, more holistic conceptualizations of societal integration suggest mutual accommodation by refugees and residents (Carrera & Atger, 2011). In his seminal acculturation model, Berry (1997) proposes that adaptation by host country institutions is critical for integration, which he defines as the only acculturation strategy that maintains the newcomers’ integrity while allowing them to be an integral part of the larger society. Later, also Strang and Ager (2010) indicated that the host government determines refugees’ citizenship and rights, and that various other elements of the IoI framework require adaptation from host institutions, organizations, and residents (cf. Losoncz, 2015). However, such two-sided relationships remain underspecified and understudied in the IoI framework. To address this gap, this study sheds light on how TakeCareBnB facilitates integration via adjustments by local hosts as well as refugee guests.

Another point of debate is related to repeated suggestions for adding or altering domains in the IoI framework. For instance, several studies have assessed whether some social connections are more important than others, with mixed outcomes: Gilmartin and Migge (2015) suggest that social bonds may come at the expense of social bridges, but other studies found that social bonds are really important for integration (e.g. Phillimore 2012; Wilmsen, 2013), and yet others claimed that social bonds provide the capacity to build social bridges (e.g. Grzymała-Kazłowska, 2015; Pittaway et al., 2016). Furthermore, two studies suggested that recreational sports may be an additional marker and means of integration (Block & Gibbs, 2017; Spaaij, 2012), one study suggested that having a social anchor (i.e. socio-psychological stability and security) should be included as an additional domain (Grzymała-Kazłowska, 2018), and another suggested that trust should be added as a facilitator (Strang & Quinn, 2019). We contribute to these debates by making our own assessment of the importance of social bonds versus social bridges for refugee integration, examining the centrality of specific domains in facilitating refugee integration, and exploring potentially undiscovered domains of refugee integration.

Finally, Ager and Strang (2008) themselves indicated that much room for development lies in understanding the relationships among the domains. Phillimore (2012: 543) concurred by stating that the IoI framework “did little to aid understanding about the interlinkages between domains”, and that “further work is needed to (...) record, analyze and theorize such interaction”. A number of studies have done this. For example, Phillimore and Goodson (2008) showed that housing and health affects progress in areas such as employment and education. Li et al. (2016) argued that mental health is affected by citizenship and rights via employment, housing, and social

bridges. Bakker et al. (2016) also showed that housing affects health, and found a link between language ability and social bridges. In examining how TakeCareBnB facilitates refugee integration, we also pay attention to relationships among domains that may emerge out of our findings.

The role of social innovations in refugee integration

Social innovation as a concept has endured a plethora of definitions across various disciplines. However, it is generally understood as civil society's creation and implementation of new solutions to social problems that government has been unable to sufficiently tackle (Mulgan, 2006; Tracey & Stott, 2017). In their bibliometric analysis and synthesis of the SI literature, van der Have and Rubacaba (2016) have shown that four research clusters can be distinguished: community psychology, creativity research, social and societal challenges, and local development. TakeCareBnB is located in the third theme, given that social and societal challenges are concerned with innovative solutions to social challenges. This theme fits well with our study given that our paper shows how TakeCareBnB is a bottom-up SI that provides a platform that empowers locals to contribute to the integration of refugees.

In the first 9 months of 2015, 487,000 people seeking refuge entered Europe, doubling the number from the whole of 2014, leading the European Commission to call this the largest global humanitarian crisis of our time (McNally et al., 2020). The vast scope of this crisis in combination with the diverse stakeholders in society and their corresponding interests in such a crisis makes it difficult for governments to meet the needs of those seeking refuge in such large numbers. Governments therefore increasingly turn to SIs to meet such societal needs (Grimm et al. 2013). Indeed, research has illustrated how local communities and civil society actors create numerous social innovations during such crises. They evidence how they embody a bottom-up approach and rely on the fundamental understanding that communities and citizens can interpret their own lives, recognize problems and competently find solutions (e.g., Kornberger et al., 2018; McNally et al., 2020).

Staying with a local as a means to facilitate refugee integration

The potential appeal of staying with a local in facilitating refugee integration is evidenced by the sheer number of similar SIs that have emerged in recent years. There are at least 18 different countries (Australia, Austria, Canada, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Japan, Northern Ireland, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, The Netherlands, UK, USA) in which a similar SI has been founded, of which several liaise with a global homesharing organization by using their website infrastructure to match refugees seeking temporary accommodation with residents offering accommodation.

There are various reasons why staying with a local could facilitate refugee integration. Among others, it can benefit the refugee's integration regarding the domains of housing and safety and security. Furthermore, in being around and living with locals, it can also improve locals' integration attitudes and refugees' social bridges (cf. the contact hypothesis, Allport, 1954; Knappert et al., 2020) as well as language and cultural knowledge. However, staying with a local can also be invasive and intense for the refugee as well as the local. Given the widespread use of this SI, the likely benefits in terms of refugee integration but also the potential downside of it, we consider an evaluation of its effectiveness high time.

Method

Our study focuses on the SI TakeCareBnB, which operates in The Netherlands. We first provide some background information on Dutch integration policy and the functioning of TakeCareBnB, followed by a description of the data, participants, and analysis.

The Dutch context

While applying for a residence permit, refugees in The Netherlands have to stay in an asylum accommodation center (AZC), which tend to be in remote locations and during which refugees generally are not allowed to work. When receiving their residence permit, they are assigned to a municipality, which is responsible for allocating accommodation to the refugees (DE Gruijter & VAN Rooijen, 2019). However, the average waiting time is 20 to 24 weeks, during which refugees generally remain at the AZC due to a lack of alternatives. With the initial goal of increasing the capacity of the AZCs, the Dutch government introduced the “*logeerregeling*” [lodging arrangement] in 2015 and 2016, which enables refugees to temporarily reside with family, friends or a host family until they are assigned a house (DE Gruijter & VAN Rooijen, 2019).

At the end of 2016, the government determined that the capacity of the AZCs was sufficient to shelter all refugees, which made the *logeerregeling* redundant for this particular goal (DE Gruijter & VAN Rooijen, 2019). However, research continued to conclude that Dutch integration policies were failing, with only half of the refugees passing their integration test in time, primarily because of their insufficient language skills and the bureaucratic nature of the Dutch system (Boot et al. 2020). Because reports suggested that staying with others while waiting for accommodation can foster integration (DE Gruijter & VAN Rooijen, 2019; VAN Dijk et al., 2017), the primary goal of the *logeerregeling* shifted from facilitating housing to facilitating all facets of integration and participation (Rijksoverheid, 2020).

Background of TakeCareBnB

Founded in 2015, TakeCareBnB enables refugees in the Netherlands who hold a residence permit to temporarily stay with a local host while waiting for their allocated accommodation. In light of the *logeerregeling*, the basic aim of TakeCareBnB was to connect refugees who are waiting for a house with locals who are willing to temporarily host refugees. However, at a deeper level, TakeCareBnB from the beginning aimed to do so because they believe that such a stay “creates mutual understanding and removes fear, “helps the process of integration”, “may turn into friendship”, and thereby can have “positive effects on the guest and host” (TakeCareBnB, 2020; cf. DE Gruijter & VAN Rooijen, 2019). As such, TakeCareBnB considers refugee integration to represent a two-way relationship that involves adjustments from refugees as well as locals.

When a refugee or a host registers with TakeCareBnB, a ‘matchmaker’ will personally meet with them for an intake conversation, during which both parties can indicate their wishes and preferences. When a match is identified by a team of matchmakers and suggested to the refugee guest and local host, they will meet together with a matchmaker at a neutral location for a first meeting. If both parties evaluate this first meeting positively, the refugee will stay for one weekend at the accommodation of the host. If that also goes well, the refugee will move in with the host for a maximum of three months, depending on whether the refugee is appointed their own housing in the meantime. If the guest no longer is able or willing to stay with the host after three months, the guest has to return to the AZC until a house is appointed.

When refugees decide to stay at a local host (or friends or family) instead of at an AZC, they receive an extra 25 euro per week for ‘housing’, on top of the financial provision all refugees are entitled to, to make a decent living (DE Gruijter & VAN Rooijen, 2019). However, TakeCareBnB policy is that guests do not need to pay rent. Instead, hosts and guests can informally arrange a contribution for household necessities or share efforts in cooking and grocery shopping. Hosts do not receive any (financial) compensation.

In their first year, TakeCareBnB solely relied on volunteers. In 2017, TakeCareBnB managed to attract enough funds and financial stability to provide a salary for a director and to professionalize further. In March 2017, a co-founder of TakeCareBnB contacted the first author with the

request to conduct an independent evaluation of the effectiveness of TakeCareBnB in facilitating refugee integration. Based on the report (VAN Dijk et al., 2017), TakeCareBnB started a one-year pilot study in close cooperation with the Dutch government in 2018, receiving financial support for every successful match made between host and guest. After a positive evaluation of the pilot (DE Gruijter & VAN Rooijen, 2019), the cooperation between TakeCareBnB and the Dutch government has continued indefinitely (Rijksoverheid, 2020).

Data collection and participants

Data was collected in April-May 2017 via an online survey containing closed as well as open-ended questions among all TakeCareBnB hosts and guests. With this format, respondents were ensured sufficient time and anonymity such that we could expect honest and rich answers (cf. Hoggart et al., 2002; VAN Selm & Jankowski, 2006). In line with the Declaration of Helsinki, respondents were informed at the beginning of the survey about the study's purpose, the way their data would be used, and that they could skip any question or stop at any time. Respondents had to provide their consent in order to start with the survey.

In total 53 refugees (68%) and 51 hosts (68%) responded. Refugees were aged 21 years or older (a requirement by TakeCareBnB), with a mean of 31 years. This is roughly in accordance with the distribution of age across all refugees in the Netherlands in the beginning of 2017, since the vast majority was between 25 and 35 years old (Statistics Netherlands (CBS), 2017). Hosts were on average 50 years old. Whereas 75% of the hosts were women, 96% of the refugees were men (compared to 57% of the refugees in the Dutch population; Statistics Netherlands (CBS), 2017). Most of the refugees and hosts were relatively highly educated: 79% of the refugees and 82% of the hosts held a degree in higher vocational education or university. With regard to ethnicity and religion, 90% of the refugees were Syrian (compared to roughly half of the refugees in the Dutch population; Statistics Netherlands (CBS), 2017) and 62% were Muslim, whereas 96% of the hosts were Dutch and none were Muslim. Further, 76% of the hosts had children, of which 40% was living at home while one or more guests stayed with them.

We lack data to determine the educational and religious background of all refugees in the Netherlands at the beginning of 2017 specifically, but Dagevos et al. (2018) conclude that of all Syrian refugees who received a residence permit between 2014 and 2016, 20% held a degree in higher vocational education or university and 76% were Muslim. We therefore (carefully) conclude that male, higher educated and Syrian refugees were overrepresented in our sample, while Muslims were somewhat underrepresented. Hosts were disproportionally higher educated.

The survey was distributed in Dutch and in English, optionally. After securing informed consent from all individual participants, the first set of questions focused on demographics and other background information. The second set of questions aimed at understanding the motivations to be host/guest and the participant's experiences. The third set of questions was about the refugees' and hosts' (dis)satisfaction with TakeCareBnB. The last set of questions focused on the consequences of being a refugee/host.

Data analysis

To analyze the rich answers to the open-ended questions, a three-step approach was used. The first step consisted of inductive thematic coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006), by staying close to the interview material when identifying and naming codes. Second, after having become familiar with the answers, a number of latent patterns (i.e. themes) were identified. In order to decide what counted as a theme, the 'keyness' of the pattern was critical, meaning that codes were categorized into themes based on importance rather than prevalence. The list of themes emerged after a series of iterations which ensured that the themes are broad enough to capture a coherent pattern, but

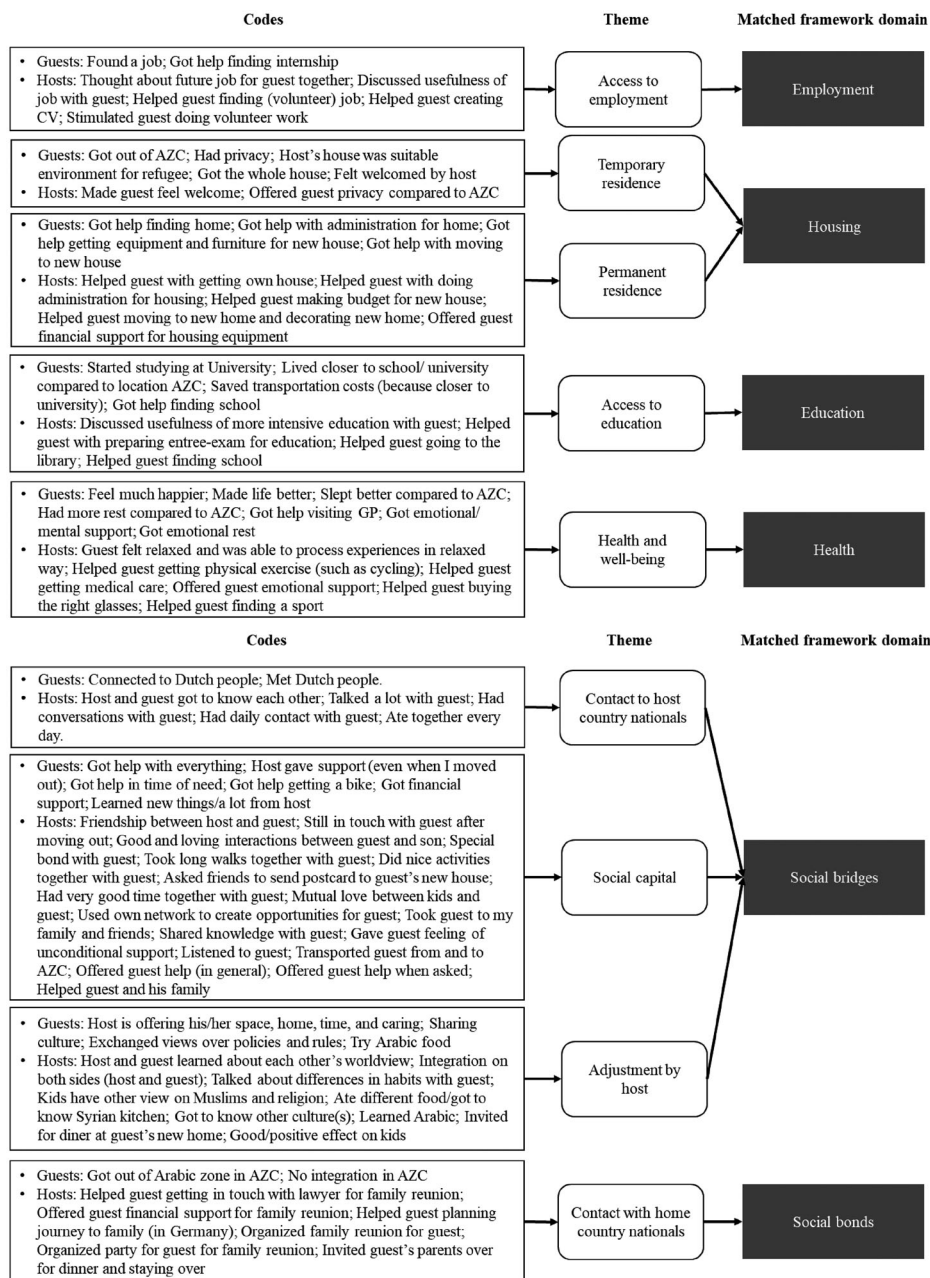


Figure 1. Data structure.

also distinctive enough to not overlap. Eventually, fourteen themes were obtained, and after helpful suggestions from the reviewers regarding ways in which hosts made adjustments to foster refugee integration, we arrived at our final selection of fifteen themes. The third author, who conducted the first and second step, was blind to Ager and Strang's IoI Framework (2008). Finally, to evaluate the influence of TakeCareBnB on integration, these themes were contrasted and matched with the domains of the IoI framework. This categorization was discussed within the research team and rearranged several times until consensus was reached. A theme was categorized into a framework domain if it captured one or more issues of that domain, regardless of its

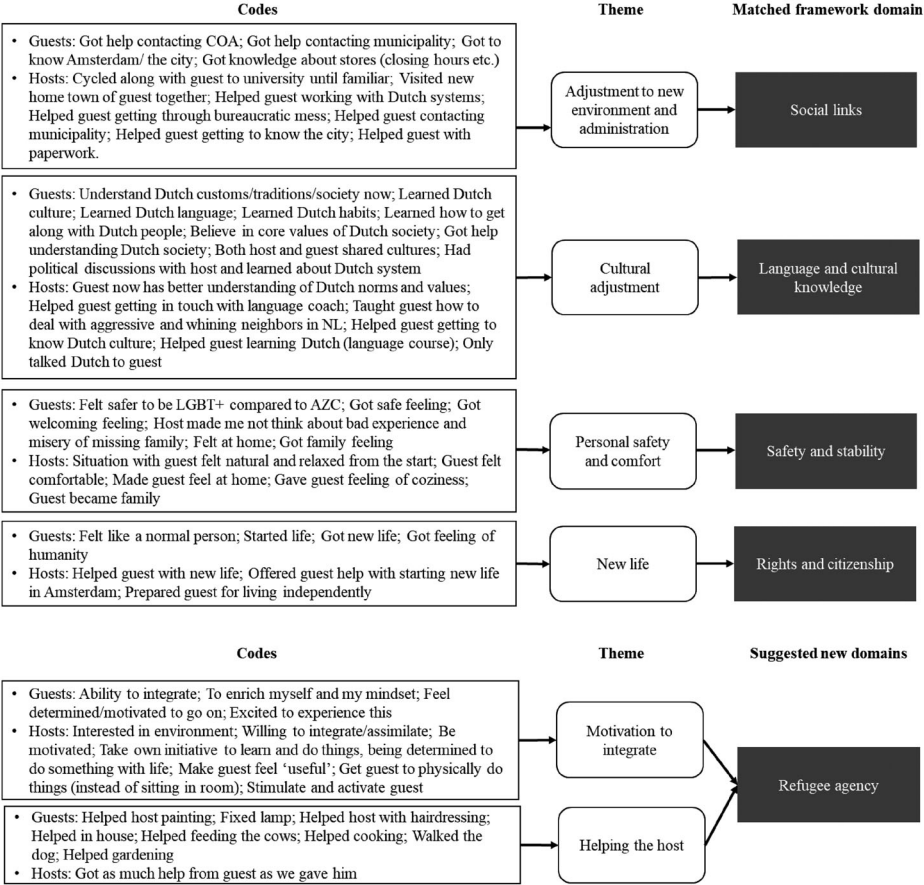


Figure 1. Continued.

positive or negative association with integration. Other themes, particularly those that emerged around links and mechanisms between the domains, did not fit the existing framework and hence indicate a possible extension of it.

Results

Figure 1 presents our findings along the data structure. Because the aim of TakeCareBnB as well as the *logeerregeling* is to facilitate integration in general, we first examine TakeCareBnB’s influence on integration by reporting themes per domain of the IoI framework and indicating how TakeCareBnB contributes to integration regarding those domains. We subsequently present additional findings that contribute to the debates about the IoI framework. For each domain and theme we first discuss responses by guests and then by hosts.

TakeCareBnB’s influence on refugee integration

Employment

A number of refugees were stimulated by their hosts to get involved in volunteering, which tends to be a good step toward employment (cf. Rodell, 2013). Some refugees indicated that staying with a local helped them to find an internship or a job:” Through TakeCareBnB, I could find a

place to stay in Amsterdam for three months with awesome people, and learned a lot through them. I started from there to know the city and I got my first work" (Guest 25).

Various hosts criticized the current integration policies, which would not help refugees finding a job: *"We had discussions about how to budget money. Getting paid weekly as a refugee is not stimulating in actively looking for a job"* (Host 3). Hosts also indicated that they helped refugees in various ways in their trajectory toward finding a job, ranging from theoretically discussing the usefulness of (volunteer) work to practical assistance in crafting a CV: *"Thought about what kind of job he would like to have, and created a CV together"* (Host 16).

Housing

An obvious way in which TakeCareBnB facilitates refugee integration is in providing temporary residence. Refugees predominantly emphasized how staying with a local was an improvement compared to staying in an AZC: *"I was in the camp, had 'bad feeling', so for sure it is better than camp!!"* (Guest 34). Hosts also mentioned that they had the impression that staying with a local in terms of housing is better for a refugee: *"I believe that large-scaled, centralized sheltering is an inhumane approach that definitely does not benefit integration"* (Host 32).

In addition to providing temporary residence, hosts also helped refugees with their permanent residence: *"She also was very persistent and patient with contacting the municipality to get them finding me a house"* (Guest 37). Hosts also indicated that they helped refugees with finding a place for themselves and moving there.

Education

Given that AZCs tend to be located in remote parts of the Netherlands whereas 68% of the TakeCareBnB accommodations are in (the vicinity of) a city, refugees indicated that staying with a local helped them to get access to education: *"I signed up for Amsterdam, because it was closer to the university, so I saved transportation costs"* (Guest 14).

Hosts did not mention that the specific location of their accommodation helped refugees get access to education. However, they did indicate that they supported refugees in a variety of other ways regarding their (access to) education, ranging from discussing the usefulness of (more) education and explaining specific rules of educational institutes to practical support in preparing entry-exams, going to the library, and finding a suitable school.

Health

Refugees indicated that staying with a local improved their psychological health and well-being. Some refugees were quite specific on this matter by indicating that having more privacy helped them sleep better: *"I had a room with my sister in the camp, but there was no privacy or feeling comfortable there. [At our host's] we felt like normal people and not in a camp full of people that annoy us. At least, I could sleep better"* (Guest 2), or by indicating that hosts supported them emotionally as well as practically in their health by, for example, accompanying them to a General Practitioner. Other refugees more generally indicated that staying with a local helped them feel better and become happier: *"I could get out of the AZC, I am way happier here"* (Guest 52).

Hosts also had the impression that staying with them provided refugees with more rest compared to staying in an AZC. Furthermore, hosts indicated that they supported their guests in their health in a variety of ways, e.g., going to a GP and to the hospital, filling out healthcare administrative documents, providing emotional support.

Social bridges

An important way in which TakeCareBnB facilitates refugee integration is in creating social bridges between refugees and hosts. There are three themes that fit with this domain: Contact with host country nationals, social capital, and adjustment by host.

Regarding contact with host country nationals, nearly all refugees indicated that staying with locals helped them to meet Dutch people, and even to make friends or find a partner: *"I became friends with them, so we help each other by all means possible when one needs help"* (Guest 1). Hosts also indicated that hosting refugees helped hosts and refugees to really get to know one another and that it helped refugees to become part of family life: *"I am convinced that when a host family and a guest are living together so intensively at such a crucial moment in the guest's life, connectedness and companionship arise"* (Host 17).

Regarding the social capital theme, refugees indicated that they received support from their hosts in a variety of ways. Some were very specific: *"getting a bike"* (Guest 27), *"visiting many places in Amsterdam"* (Guest 41); whereas others indicated that they received help *"in general"* (Guest 36) or *"with everything"* (Guest 52). Hosts were equally specific in indicating how they assisted refugees, ranging from *"meeting new people"* (Host 14) and *"taking guest to family and friends"* (Host 46) to *"doing activities together"* (Host 33) and using one's personal network *"to create opportunities for the guest"* (Host 48).

As for the theme 'adjustments by hosts', hosts and guests reported several instances of mutual accommodation. For instance, hosts indicated that hosting a refugee came at the expense of their own privacy: *"You are close to each other, especially mentally. Our house is reasonably large, but you still hear everything from each other"* (Host 4), which was not always comfortable: *"it is not always convenient to be considerate"* (Host 47). Many steps toward integration that refugees could make were thus the result of their hosts adjusting in numerous ways to refugees. In addition, many hosts indicated that their lives were enriched in various ways by hosting a refugee. Examples include friendship (*"They both became friends for life I think"* - Host 4), improved attitudes (*"The children now look positively towards refugees (...). They also changed their attitudes towards Islam as a religion"* - Host 10), gratitude (*"Even more grateful for everything around me, freedom, family, peace etc."* - Host 13), tolerance (*"My understanding for people with different ideas has been enlarged"* - Host 15), cultural awareness (*"Learn about a new culture and habits (which also confront you with your own culture and habits)"* - Host 20), and understanding of the plight of refugees (*"More insight into/respect for their situation"* - Host 36).

Social bonds

Refugees indicated that staying with a local actually hurt their social bonds because at the AZC they would be among people from their own ethnic group. Interestingly, they indicated that getting away from their own ethnic group facilitated integration: *"Basically, living in the AZC, especially in a village, kept me staying in my traditional Arabic zone which didn't improve me in any aspect (language or Dutch culture), because I 'only' have a connection with Arab guys"* (Guest 26).

A number of hosts also perceived that staying in an AZC inhibits refugees' integration because it keeps them in their own culture: *"We think that refugees should get a home as soon as possible to enable them to get familiar with the Netherlands and the Dutch language. This goes way faster when they are among other people, instead of in a shelter endlessly"* (Host 31). At the same time, various hosts indicated that they helped refugees getting in touch with their family. For example, Host 43 indicated that they *"Bought plane tickets for a family reunion"*. These findings thus suggest that staying with a local compared to staying in an AZC decreases social bonds with like-ethnic groups, whereas it can contribute to contact with their own family. Being less around people from their own ethnic group and more in touch with their own family were both perceived to contribute to integration.

Social links

Refugees indicated that they tend to struggle with communication with governmental organizations, and that the locals they stayed with assisted them in their communication with those organizations: *"I asked questions about everything in- and outside the house: how to contact the municipality, information about stores"* (Guest 53).

Hosts concurred by asserting that refugees are confronted with a lot of bureaucracy and that they frequently assisted refugees in those matters *"We helped our guest getting through the mess of Dutch rules and regulations. The Netherlands is such a bureaucratic country"* (Host 8).

Language and cultural knowledge

The primary motivation for most refugees to stay with a local was to learn the Dutch language and learn about the Dutch culture: *"Get acquainted with Dutch traditions and habits to gain an insight in the life and the social codes in the Netherlands. I wanted to not learn the Dutch language in an abstract way, but actually, know the history and culture behind the language and its people"* (Guest 23). In line with this motivation, refugees indicated that staying with a local strongly contributed to this domain of integration.

Hosts similarly indicated that they helped refugees with learning the Dutch language and culture. A number of hosts also indicated that they occasionally struggled with the cultural differences, including religion: *"We had a 'religious clash' (he, a peaceful Muslim, me, agnostic). His habit to involve religion in everything every day annoyed me, together with his attempts to convert me to Islam"* (Host 32).

Safety and stability

Refugees indicated that staying with a local provided them with a feeling of being part of a family and having a home. Some explicitly contrasted it with staying at the AZC, which they perceived to be a more unsafe and difficult environment: *"Because I am gay and I had a lot of problems in the camp because of that. That is why I moved to that house until I got mine"* (Guest 15).

Several hosts explicitly mentioned that they offered accommodation to refugees because they want to offer a safe place that makes refugees feel at ease and have a home feeling: *"To offer him a home, someone who listens to him, and the freedom to act how he feels"* (Host 7). Some also indicated that the refugees who stayed with them became like family to them: *"Our son enjoyed the presence of the boys. He considered them foster-brother and -nephew respectively. He was cherished by the boys and all of a sudden, our family was even more 'typically male-dominated'. Amazing, such an enriching experience"* (Host 17).

Rights and citizenship

Refugees can only sign up for TakeCareBnB when they received their residence permit, which entails that technically they have the same rights as Dutch citizens. However, many refugees indicated that their refugee status did not make them feel like they were equal citizens. In that subjective sense of looking at rights and citizenship, refugees indicated that staying with a local enabled them to live a more normal life, improved their experience of being a regular person, and facilitated tolerance: *"Everything [made it a nice experience]. For example, I lived with a Jewish family and I am a Muslim, so we knew that nothing can be against a good and peaceful life between people"* (Guest 17). However, some guests indicated that being a guest in someone else's house still limited their freedom: *"Not being totally comfortable at the host's house, not feeling free to do everything you want. Sometimes there was some differences in eating habits, I was shy to say that the food is not enough for example."* (Guest 29).

Hosts indicated that they offered accommodation to refugees in order to provide them with a more humane living situation (compared to living in an AZC) and help them building up a new life: *“I wanted to do something for people in a horrible situation: they fled the war, after which they are put in a camp here without the possibility to start their lives again”* (Host 21).

Refugee agency

Our findings revealed two additional themes (motivation to integrate and helping the host) regarding refugee integration that did not fit under any of the IoI domains. Given that both pertain to the intentional enactment of refugees toward integration, we bundled those themes in the new dimension *Refugee agency*.

First, many quotes from refugees as well as hosts alluded to a factor that seems absent in the IoI framework, namely the motivation of the refugee to integrate. For example, Guest 27 indicated: *“If the guest doesn’t personally believe in the core values of the Dutch society, then he/she should try to learn/respect them, or at least not deny/fight them. Otherwise, it’s almost impossible to cope with a host family or even with life here in general”*. Host 23 illustrated how they experienced that their guest was not motivated enough to put in the effort to integrate, which led to a number of problems: *“We set clear rules in advance about the necessity to go to school to learn the language and to find a (volunteer) job: sitting at home was not an option. He went to school every now and then and he thought too highly of himself to go volunteering. We were not able to find him a job either. This resulted in boredom and caused tension in the house”* (Host 23). Host 7 explicitly indicated that a crucial factor in the integration process is *“the motivation of the guest to actively participate in society”*.

Second, refugees as well as hosts named numerous ways in which guests were helping hosts. Refugees predominantly mentioned practical help, for example by painting, helping in the house, and cooking. Refugees as well as hosts thus pointed at many instances where the refugees contributed to the household, showing that refugees were not just mere recipients of the hospitality of their benefactors (cf. Ortlieb et al., 2021), but that the hosts also received a lot in return.

Discussion

Overall, our findings indicate that a temporary stay of refugees with locals via TakeCareBnB contributed to refugees’ integration on all ten domains of Ager and Strang (2008) IoI framework. As such, our evaluation of TakeCareBnB is very positive regarding its potential to facilitate refugee integration in a host society. In a context where reviews indicate that integration has been failing (Konle-Seidl & Bolits, 2016), this is very welcoming news that can help shape policies aimed at improving refugee integration.

It is however equally important to understand *how* this SI shapes refugee integration. In essence, the core services that TakeCareBnB provides are hosting a platform where refugees and potential hosts can find each other, and facilitating in the matchmaking. For this SI to work, it depends on the hosts who subscribe to TakeCareBnB and decide to welcome a refugee in their home. As such, we argue that the main function of TakeCareBnB is empowering and mobilizing locals to act and that the hosts’ actions, in turn and over time, affect other crucial aspects of the refugees’ lives. Indeed, our results indicate that social bridges affected *all* other domains because they provide the network and support for refugees to seek and find volunteer work and employment, find a home, think about and find education, use health services, get in touch with their families, contact governmental organizations, learn the Dutch language and culture, feel like being part of a family, and feel like a normal human being. In addition, hosts shared their houses which helped some refugees to be closer to educational institutions, offered a more peaceful environment, brought the refugee out of an ingroup-network and into a network with outgroup people,

provided a safe environment, and helped refugees to live a normal life. We therefore argue that the process via which TakeCareBnB influences the domains of refugee integration works through the domains of social bridges and housing.

Building on this observation, we argue that the main reason why social bridges are so influential is because of the support function they provide. This is not unique to the social bridges category, as social bonds can also provide support. However, given the centrality of social bridges in our findings, it seems difficult to overstate the importance of the support of the local(s) with whom the refugees stayed in facilitating their integration. Our data also indicates that this support does not come effortless, but consisted of a multitude of ways in which hosts adjusted themselves and their environment to accommodate their guests and contribute to refugee integration.

Taken together, locals can thus play a much larger role in refugee integration than credited for in the IoI framework. Ager and Strang (2008: 180) proposed that friendliness of local communities toward refugees is the main way in which social bridges can contribute to refugee integration. Whereas they did mention that “more intense involvement with the local people (...) may be crucial in bridging longer-term social and economic benefits”, they did not explicate that further. Our findings thus provide a more substantial understanding of how social bridges – through their own adjustment and support in all other domains of integration – can facilitate refugee integration, which enables an understanding of how integration can be understood and filled in as a two-way relationship regarding this domain of integration (Carrera & Atger, 2011; Phillimore, 2012). We recommend future research to explore how adaptation from host institutions, organizations, and residents may take shape in the other domains of integration in the IoI framework.

Furthermore, our data revealed an additional domain of integration: refugee agency. This domain was composed out of the additional themes motivation to integrate and helping the host. Whereas the original domains of the IoI framework provide a summary of structural conditions that facilitate refugees’ societal integration, they do not consider how refugees engage with these structures. Therefore, we believe that research and policy can learn a lot from shedding light on how refugees act as “agents who actively resist and/or comply with the constellation of controls they are subject to” (Zanoni & Janssens, 2007, p. 1371), and as such make sense of and shape their host environment. To our best knowledge, refugee agency is highly understudied in both refugee integration (Ghorashi et al., 2018) as well as refugee employment research (Essers et al., 2008; Zanoni & Janssens, 2007). Indeed, our study is one of the first to show the potential of SIs in empowering not only locals but also refugees themselves in ‘doing integration’. We therefore propose to expand the IoI framework with refugee agency as an additional dimension that we would locate at the foundational level of the IoI framework, next to rights and citizenship, as these dimensions are fundamental in shaping the outcomes on other dimensions.

Another key finding of our study revolves around insights on the nature of and relationships among the different domains of integration that advance the IoI framework. Our findings suggest that there are many relationships among the domains of integration. Above we specified how social bridges and housing affect all other domains, and there are many more relationships that we could highlight here. Most important however is that these relationships suggest that progress in one domain is likely to facilitate progress in other domains. There is a great potential promise here: if integration in some domains seems difficult to accomplish, it may help to focus on other domains. By addressing more easily accessible domains of integration first, other domains may indirectly be addressed as well.

In light of the discussions about the role of social bonds in integration, our findings suggest that there is a tipping point to the merit of social bonds. Up to a certain point social bonds – in our data especially those related to family – might leverage integration. However, after that point, more social bonds keep refugees in their own culture, which comes at the expense of building social bridges (Gilmartin & Migge, 2015; Kalter & Kogan, 2014). Whereas for all other domains of integration higher levels equal more integration, for social bonds the optimum level seems more a matter of balance. There may be a qualitative difference between family bonds versus

bonds with people from one's ethnic group, such that family bonds overall are more helpful than bonds with people from one's ethnic group. We call for more research to examine if differences between these groups are meaningful enough to separate them as two distinct types of social bonds.

Despite the overall positive influence of TakeCareBnB on refugee integration and that refugees in particular but also hosts in general indicated their satisfaction with TakeCareBnB, it should be noted that there were exceptions to this rule. In those cases in general a lack of a match was indicated as the underlying reason (cf. Röder & Mühlau, 2014). More specific experiences involved clashes due to cultural differences, a perceived lack of motivation to integrate, a lack of privacy, not always feeling comfortable, and limited freedom. In part, such issues are likely to emerge among any group of strangers who live together for some time. But at least part of those issues can probably be resolved with more professional support and guidance. For example, cultural awareness training may help prevent cultural clashes, and counseling can help identify the source of motivational problems and/or provide more understanding for motivational issues. The lack of such professional support and guidance in TakeCareBnB is mainly due to a lack of financial means, which tends to be the bottleneck for many SIs (Edwards-Schachter et al. 2012; Urama and Acheampong 2013). As such, it is not only in the interest of the government to identify SIs that successfully address societal problems, but also in the interest of those SIs, because governmental support enables them to professionalize further.

A final point worth mentioning is that the majority of guests in TakeCareBnB and in our sample are highly-educated Syrian men, and that the majority of hosts are highly-educated. This may limit the generalizability of our findings (cf. DE Gruijter & VAN Rooijen, 2019). We therefore call for future research to examine whether and, if so, how different characteristics of hosts and guests in social innovations such as TakeCareBnB influence refugee integration.

Conclusion

At a time when the number of refugees is at an all-time high (UNHCR, 2021) and countries are struggling with integration (Konle-Seidl & Bolits, 2016), our paper provides hopeful insights regarding ways in which refugee integration can be fostered. Specifically, our paper shows that temporarily staying with a local helps refugees integrate into the host country. It is our hope that our theory and findings are picked up by researchers and practitioners in their efforts to further enhance refugee integration.

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