

RESEARCH PLAN

Creating an Urban Hub for Social Integration

Problem statement

Friedrichshain consists of variety of contrast, diversity, and multiplicity regarding architecture, functions, gentrification, atmospheres, users, and cultures. This multiplicity gives a unique quality to the area. Berlin has a history of migration and has been experiencing a high refugee inflow in recent years. After 2015's refugee crisis in Berlin and Germany, according to the Berlin Senate in April 2022 there was another influx of around 60 thousand Ukrainian refugees (Berlin.de, 2022). Consequently, society have faced social and academic integration challenges. Moreover, data from 2018 shows, about 126,650 residents (44%) in Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg have migration backgrounds (Bettina, 2020). Therefore, this study aims to investigate to what extent architecture of a public condenser can contribute to sociocultural integration.

The intent of this project is to generate a central and accessible place to escape from daily rush of live amidst the diverse and busy district. A refuge to bring refugees, migrants, and locals together for integration with a main function of sports/event hall for the whole community. Workshop spaces to explore and improve skills by producing art, crafts, a library to study languages. To integrate with the local culture and people by cultural performances, music/dance/theater performances and classes, by cooking together, dining together, gardening, studying together, having food markets as connection and job opportunity. In addition, practical functions such as legal help, language lessons and labor market integration for migrants and refugees will be provided by locals. Not to forget, places of worship and meditation or yoga.

Importance

Why this is important for the district is related to the theme of the commons. This project intent to bring displaced people together with locals through interaction by intellectual, cultural, religious and food related activities. Another common, is the aspect of a refuge. All people, either flying from unsafe areas, periods or from daily life and the hustle and bustle of the city are in search of a nice place to meet, study, read, attend a cultural/musical performance, or get in touch with new cultures and food. Therefore, an inclusive building will be realized since refugees who are after arriving (temporarily) part of the community and migrants living mainly in Kreuzberg are included. The aspect of flexibility and multifunction spaces needs to be taken into consideration, since the needs will change based on the influx of people and their needs.

Approach and Methods

This research will be conducted by gathering quantitative and theoretical information by means of literature research. To gain insight into the numbers of refugees and migrants in the district and in Berlin, political quantitative data will be examined. By researching through designing the different functions usability should be tested and lead the research by answering the suitability of certain functions for integration. By testing through design strategies and investigating case studies, existing and planned projects can be questioned. Case studies as Absalon Community Centre in Copenhagen and the Integration Hub by Robert Bosch Stiftung will be investigated (Arcgency, 2015, Integration Hub, n.d.). Research will be conducted on displacement and architecture by investigation the book by Andrew Herscher: Displacements, Architecture and Refugee (Herscher & Fast, 2017)

Research Aim

Eventually, by researching opportunities for architecture to create this center for the commons, inclusivity, diversity, and the sense of belonging will be investigated and can be adapted into different projects within the discipline. This research can contribute to the discipline at large since sociocultural challenges of integration and migration is a worldwide issue and therefore findings can be adapted to several multicultural cities elsewhere especially in Europe with similar situations of multiplicity in society.

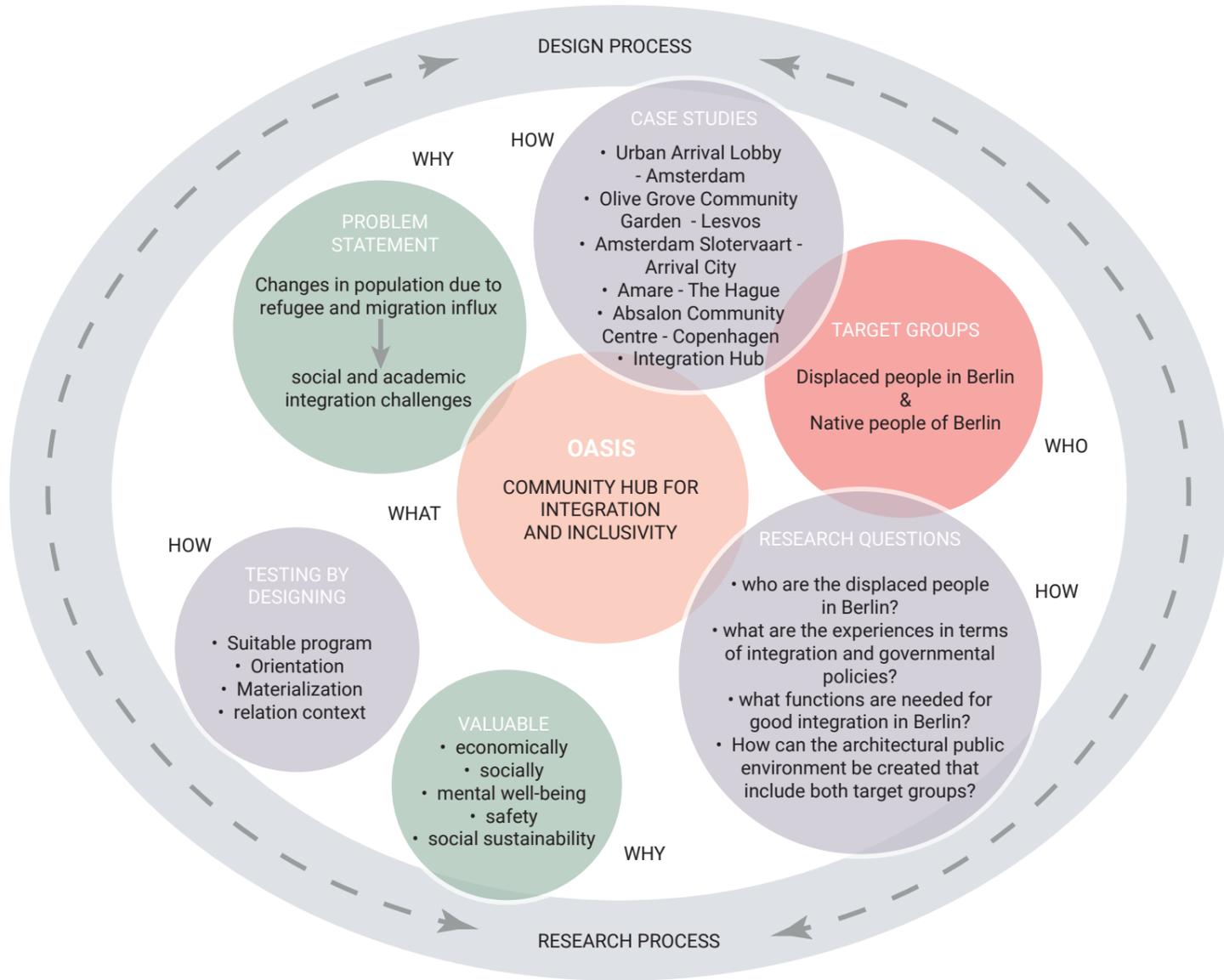
Keywords – integration, interaction, inclusivity, diversity, multiculturalism, refuge, public condenser, commons, labor market integration

Research questions

- How to create a center of the district that attracts displaced people and locals for social interaction, and over all contribute to the integration of the refugees and migrant within the local community?
- Who are the refugees and migrants in the community?
- What are the experiences in terms of integration and governmental policies?
- What functions are needed for good integration in Berlin?
- How can the architectural environment of a public condenser be created that include both displaced people and locals?

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Why designing for Integration?

Why investigating the research question and the impact of architecture on social integration of displaced people is important has to do with the following theoretical background.

First, why designing for social integration for the target group of refugees into the community of Berlin is important is discussed by design expert on the Dutch Design Week in 2017 (Fairs, 2017):

Crimson architectural historian Michelle Provoost stressed that population movements have occurred throughout human history and are impossible to prevent. “I think stopping migration would be a very unhistorical position,” she said, stating instead that refugee integration should be seen as a programming issue. She also states: “It is a permanent phenomenon; that happens all the time” (Figure 1). “Still, refugees are a global phenomenon: in 2016, a record 65.6 million people were forced to leave their homes.” (Fairs, 2017) According to Provoost population movements are predicted to increase further in the future, since climate change will dramatically increase population movement. This stresses the need of the future for cities that has to deal with integration of different cultures within their communities (Fairs, 2017).

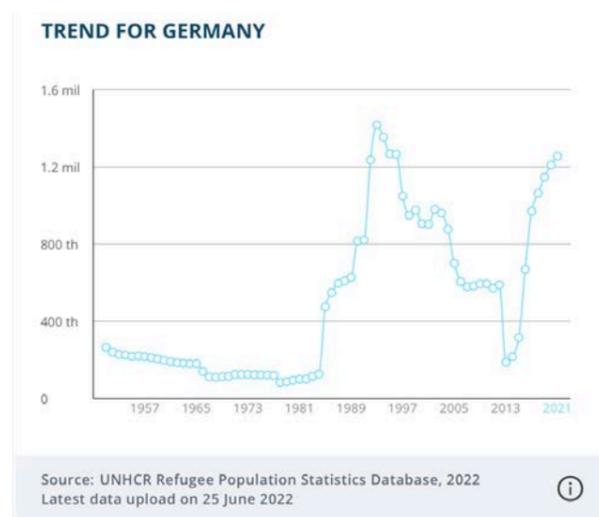


Figure 1: Refugees in Germany during the years (International Data, 2022)

In other words, ‘why do the people of Friedrichshain would want a public condenser that stimulates the integration of this target group?’ The answer to that can be that social integration and the sense of belonging of these target groups can have positive contribute on and can have benefits for the society.

Berlin has a large attractiveness internationally. According to Landesamt für Flüchtlingsangelegenheiten (LAF) there is an annually influx of around 40.000 to 50.000 of newcomers that settle in the German capital (Landesamt Für Flüchtlingsangelegenheiten, n.d.).

An article published by David Panis and Sarah Rummens in February 2019 on MO.be mentioned the benefits for Berlin, despite growing far-right ideology, refugee accommodation is a win-win for Berlin. In recent years, right-wing extremism rose sharply in Germany. In 2015, the peak of the refugee crisis, there were over thousand attacks on asylum centers. Berlin gives provisional residence permits to the refugees who are victims of far-right violence. This way, the city wants to make clear that they cannot drive asylum seekers away by violence and that they are accepted.

They mention that de German employers would have faced an even greater staff shortage in 2018 if not for 38.000 refugees entering Berlin in that year. Companies and organizations are finding it increasingly difficult to find workers with the right education and qualifications. Asylum seekers can fill these open vacancies, which is a win-win situation for all parties.’ Indeed, finding work in a bottleneck profession, such as train driver or nurse, can earn a residence permit in Germany.

In addition, more migrants are also pursuing further education. In 2017–2018, more than 14,000 refugees enrolled in vocational training, according to the Cologne Institute for Science (IW). There are also, refugees who continue their studies in higher education.

Evidence for long term benefits of labor market integration for Berlin:

Berlin’s long-term policy is bearing fruit. For example, refugees are integrating well into the labor market in Germany. According to the German Agency for Work, in May 2018 no fewer than 300,000 refugees from the countries Pakistan, Nigeria, Iran, Eritrea, Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia and Syria were working, with an increase of 100,000 than the year before.

By providing labor market integration help and further training and workshops on skills, Berlin’s economy benefits greatly in the long run (Panis & Rummens, 2019).

According to LIRS refugees bring a positive effect to a countries economy when integrated and states them as following:

1. “Refugees bring productivity to their host countries, where they are integrated across various communities.
2. They help enrich their local communities, creating a cultural diversity within the local population and helping nurture understanding and appreciation for social diversity.
3. Years after their settlement, refugees continue to stimulate the economy, often boosting economic activity and increasing wages.
4. They also complement the job market in the cities and states where they settle, boasting high rates of entrepreneurship and creating jobs.” (Thrive Agency, 2022)

These economic positive effects for German economy are mentioned in the article by Fratzscher ‘Integrating refugees: A long-term, worthwhile investment’.

“The key question is not whether refugee integration will gain enough momentum to outweigh the costs, but when. This is because refugees have a positive impact on the German economy after five to ten years, even if labor market integration is slow. Also, the long-term benefits outweigh the costs, emphasizing benefits to the economy as a whole” (Fratzscher, 2015).

In terms of benefits of integration of crime rates committed by refugees, there is a correlation. According to research by Maghularia & Übelmesser, crimes will be committed by refugees as a counter reaction on “discriminatory and violent acts by native individuals, or acts in accordance with social failure, frustration, and isolation, as poor labor market prospects confront the migrant.” So by acceptance and inclusion of these refugees these rates will decrease as a consequence, since this counter reaction will not take place. (Maghularia & Übelmesser, 2019)

From the perspective of the displaced people/diaspora/refugees it is evident that integration within the community of Friedrichshain will benefit their mental and physical health and a will create a sense of belonging within their new community to start a new life. According to the World Health Organization the health status of a migrant can be influenced by barriers including “language and culture differences, institutional discrimination and restricted use of health services.” When integration takes place (for example by language classes and social interaction, legal help), the barriers and gaps will be reduced and will positively affect mental or physical help of refugees (Refugee and Migrant Health, 2022).

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