Making good citizens: Local authorities' integration measures navigate national policies and local realities

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Abstract

Using the case of Odense (Denmark), this article explores how, in the process of devising and implementing integration measures, local authorities mitigate between the demands of national-level integration policies and the local realities. It shows that Odense’s local authorities combined local resources into a variety of horizontal governance structures geared towards supporting refugees’ integration, and engaged in vertical interactions responding to local priorities. The study finds that new governance structures emerging at sub-national create opportunities for refugees and help their integration. However, inequalities between national and sub-national levels may have negative consequences for refugees’ integration outcomes.

Keywords: multi-level governance, Denmark, civic integration, refugee agency,
1 Introduction

Once upon a time, Denmark was famous for liberal asylum regulations and its support for refugees. However, for the last two decades, Denmark has been at the forefront of a pan-European restrictive immigration approach, supplemented with increasingly demanding integration programs (Joppke 2007a,b; Mouritsen and Olsen 2013; Bak Jørgensen 2012; Goodman 2012). The current government intends to make Denmark “open to those who can and want [to integrate]. And lock the doors for those who do not want [to integrate]” (Danish Goverment 2015: 23, author's translation – a.t. hereafter) because “it is unacceptable that there are people in Denmark who are isolated from the surrounding society, and who live following their own norms and rules” (Danish Goverment 2015:24, a.t.).

Integration is a governmental priority (Danish Goverment 2015) and aims to ensure that immigrants become “participating, self-sustainable and contributory members of the community [medborger in original] on an equal footing with other citizens in society in accordance with the basic norms and values of the Danish society” (Danish Government 2016b Ch 1§1, a.t.). The Integration Act explicitely states that integration is immigrants’ responsibility (idem Ch1§2.1), while the society provides support (idem Ch1§3). Municipalities are tasked with policy implementation (idem Ch2), in particular the management of the 3-year Integration Program targeting refugees and reunified family members(1), and are encouraged to cooperate with non-state actors to achieve the stated outcomes.
This approach creates the space for new forms of governance. However, whether and how this occurs is still debated: while Bak Jørgensen (2012) argues that municipalities with resources and long experience with diverse populations (Copenhagen or Aarhus) develop integration discourses that sharply differ from the national one, and adopt measures reflecting local needs/interests, Emilsson (2015) claims that the central government’s control over laws and budget ensures its tight grip on municipalities, steering them towards centrally-decided aims, and limiting their room of manoeuvre.

Odense, Denmark’s third largest city, embodies these tensions. On the one hand, the city has experienced the closure of its traditional industries, and has an economy based on small and medium enterprises (Interview I1, municipality employee), which means that central government resources are relatively important for the local budget. On the other hand, as it redefines itself as a R&D and service hub (with its large University and high-tech companies), the city needs to attract new talent and to better use the existing workforce (Odense Municipality 2017a,b). This drives the need to develop an own approach to integration and local development (Interview I1, municipality employee). All city inhabitants, including immigrants, regardless of their entry category, are seen as an important resource for local development (Odense Municipality 2017a,b).

Using the Danish integration policy (in particular its focus on immigrants’ agency and responsibility in the process) as a backdrop, this paper explores how the local authorities in a municipality that only relatively recently has started to pay closer attention to integration interact with local non-state actors and with the central government in their effort to reach both centrally decided aims and local priorities. In doing so, the paper relies on theoretical constructs derived from the multi-level governance framework (hereafter MLG), in particular the distinction between Type I and II, and layering and networking (Marks & Hooghe 2003;
which are elaborated upon in the next section.

2 Multi-level governance of integration policies

The focus on governance structures underpinning the implementation of integration policies incorporates both vertical (cross-level, national-local) and horizontal (across-actors, state-non-state) dimensions. The MLG framework provides insights into these structures, because it explicitly recognises that policy making/implementation emerges from interactions between levels of government (vertical), and state and non-state actors (horizontal) (Marks and Hooghe 2003; Piattoni 2009; Caponio and Brokert 2010), and that the devolution of tasks from national to local level has created new opportunities for the latter.

Traditionally, the governance structures of integration policies were considered to be typical examples of Type I (Marks and Hooghe 2003), where the policies were created at national levels, and were implemented by subnational state actors entrenched in stable hierarchical systems of governance. However, this understanding obscures dynamic and diverse subnational processes (Scholten & Penninx 2016). In particular, cities have emerged as dynamic actors, creating networks, enabling other sub-national actors (Dekker et al. 2015; Myrberg 2017), and developing innovative approaches (Penninx 2015; Bak Jørgensen 2012; Zapata-Barrero, Caponio and Scholten 2017; Scholten and Penninx 2016), which may diverge from those of national governments (Hoekstra 2015; Bak Jørgensen 2012).
Consequently, a new array of structures (subsummed under the label Type II MLG) emerge, where actors with expertise or with stakes in integration are included in policy processes (Marks and Hooghe 2003). These actors fulfill a multitude of roles. For example, Scholten et al. (2015) illustrate the impact of research communities on policy formulation, while Però discusses how the state mobilizes public service broadcasters and quangos to manage diversity and to articulate “a particular and powerful cultural politics” (Però 2013, 1254). Some cities include representatives of ethnic groups in the policy process (Bak Jørgensen 2012), while others encourage NGOs and volunteer groups to provide complementary services or to bring new initiatives to the fore (Ostergaard-Nielsen 2011; Permoser, Rosenberger & Stockl 2010; Schmidtke & Zaslove 2014). Many of these processes involve layering (as responsibilities are re-distributed across levels) and networking (as new networks encompass state and non-state actors), but also raise questions about blurring of private-public limits, with consequences for accountability and legitimacy of policy processes and their effects/results (see a discussion in Panizzon & van Riemsdijk this issue).

The distinction between vertical (Type I) and horizontal (Type II) forms of governance is not relevant only in terms of their basic structure and inclusiveness. Equally relevant are the implications for actors’ opportunities. Vertical structures imply encompassing jurisdictions with clear borders and clear hierarchies (Marks & Hooghe 2003), which define actors’ powers and roles. There may be opportunities for bottom-up input, but the final decision belongs to the upper levels. Compliance is ensured through legal and financial means: regulations and laws specify the tasks of the lower-level actors or the direction of actions, while control over budget ensures that priorities are met (see also Emilsson 2015). Thus, the lower-level actors’ opportunities are limited, circumscribed by the regulations set at upper levels. Legitimacy and accountability are straightforward: the national-level actors are the legitimate decision-making
actors in virtue of democratic processes, and hold the local-level actors accountable for their actions.

Horizontal structures are task-specific (Marks & Hooghe 2003), which means that the power balance is shifting between actors in function of their expertise and/or initiative. In some instances, local authorities are the main driver, as the implementing agents of governmental programs/policies, while in others, other actors take the initiative. In such horizontal structures, exchanges and outcomes are often negotiated between equal participants, which ultimately results in a process more adaptive to contextual changes. For example, knowledge that workers are needed in a certain domain may result in firms offering specific training and/or NGOs offering additional support through mentoring. As such horizontal structures are task-specific, their members have stakes in particular issues, take ownership of the task-solving processes and become responsible for their implementation and outcomes. Arguably, the horizontal structures, in particular those involving non-state actors, democratize policy processes, by enhancing accountability and legitimacy through participation and inclusion (Harlow and Rawlings 2006; Nadalutti 2015), or bring forth innovative and efficient solutions (Skelcher 2005; Peters and Pierre 2004). It is also argued, however, that inclusion of non-state actors blurs the public-private limits (Piattoni 2009) and challenges accountability and legitimacy of public policies (Skelcher 2005; Milio 2014), as non-state non-elected actors might be driven by other interests than the public good.

Figure 1 summarizes interactions underpinning the path from policies to outcomes. If turning refugees into good citizens is the intended outcome of Danish integration policies (see section 4), then occurrence of this result depends on the state and non-state actors managing/implementing the policy measures and on the vertical and horizontal structures binding them. However, the outcome depends also on the opportunities that these structures create for refugees themselves: As the Danish integration discourse and law expect that
refugees use/develop own agency to become successfully integrated (Mouristen and Olsen 2013; Scholten, Collett and Petrovic 2017), how the governance structures created to support refugees’ integration affect their agency is of utmost importance for the outcome of the integration policies.

After introducing the case-study and the data sources, the interactions and structures depicted in Figure 1 will be presented (section 4). The discussion (section 5) will reflect upon their role in the integration of refugees and their likely impact on refugees’ agency. This discussion will illustrate that local authorities in Odense have combined local resources into new structures geared towards ensuring refugees’ integration, and it will also show that although these local-level developments create opportunities for refugees, the inequalities between levels may have negative consequences for the integration outcomes of refugees.

****Insert Figure1 here****

3 The case-study

Although civic integration policies link integration to immigrants’ inclusion in the national community, they identify the local level as the appropriate level to embed immigrants in the social fabric (Schinkel 2010). Thus, in order to capture the processes managing immigrants’ integration, city-level is the natural choice. However, since cities are embedded in institutional and legal frameworks developed at national level, both levels of government will be included in the analysis. Denmark offers a good context for studying dynamics between and within levels of governance, because its administrative framework, while establishing a clear hierarchy between levels, provides municipalities with a large autonomy in implementing policies decided by the central government.
Odense is used here as an instrumental case-study (Stakes 1995): of interest is not the city per se, but rather the interactions between actors within the governance structures created, with an eye on the ability of these interactions to foster refugees’ integration. Odense has been selected as case-study based on considerations drawn from the literature on integration policies and MLG. This literature emphasizes not only that cities play an increasingly important role in integration, but also that their success is often predicated on whether they develop own approaches, by defining goals and how integration measures interact with these goals (Bak Jørgensen 2012; Penninx 2009; Penninx 2015). Thus, a first criterion is ‘local-level integration approach/discourse’. Existence of diverse population is a precondition for developing and implementing integration policies (Bak Jørgensen 2012; Gebhardt 2014). Thus, a second criterion is ‘experience with immigrants/integration’. Based on existing studies, several Danish cities can be placed in the four cells resulting from the intersection of these two criteria (see Table 1).

***Insert Table 1 here****

Odense can be situated in the lower-left cell. Odense has a relatively large non-Danish population (see Figure 1), but its experience with ethnic diversity is relatively recent, compared to Copenhagen and Aarhus (Bak Jørgensen 2012; Myrberg 2017). Its intake of recognised refugees has steadily increased from 2010 on, with a peak in 2015 (2) (see Table 2). As will be elaborated further below, in 2011 the city has moved from simply implementing and monitoring the government’s integration measures to develop its own approach, which built on the concept of diversity.

**** Insert Figure 2 here ****

**** Insert Table 2 here ****
Data

The data for this study combines interviews with key-informants and analysis of written policy materials, an approach used by similar studies (Bak-Jorgensen 2012; Zapata-Barbero 2017; Myrberg 2017). Qualitative semi-structured interviews with public officials and refugees enrolled in the Integration Program have been conducted between March and June 2016. Three representatives of the Department of Employment and Social Affairs (ESA hereafter) who had key roles in developing and implementing integration strategies, one member of the Diversity Council (advisory function with ESA) and two civil society activists were interviewed. The interviews focused on their organisations’ views about integration, diversity, and cooperation with other local-level and national-level actors. Four refugees were recruited via an NGO working with refugees. One was volunteer translator and later was hired to mediate between local authorities and other refugees/immigrants. Their interviews focused on their experiences in the Integration Program and added to the researcher’s understanding of the interaction between local state and non-state actors and their clients. All interviews were conducted in English and lasted between one and two hours. With exception of refugees, who preferred to be interviewed at University, all the other interviews were conducted at interviewees’ work places. Another source of data were national- and local-level documents and reports. The laws on integration, naturalisation and residence complemented with expert analyses have been used to extract information on national-level policies. Odense’s strategies for integration, diversity and employment, the minutes of ESA Council meetings concerning integration, the reports of the Diversity Council meetings, and press releases have been used to identify the local-level approach to integration, diversity and good citizenship. Reports from the municipalities' interest organisation (Kommunernes Landsforening, KL) and from the Institute for Municipal and Regional Research (KORA) have provided additional insights.
4 Discourse, actors and multi-level governance structures

4.1 The national level

At the end of the 1990s civic integration emerged as a reaction to the perceived failures of previous integration approaches (Fernandes 2015; Joppke 2007a,b; Goodman 2012). At its core is the concept of good citizenship, understood in terms of civicism and not in terms of access to political rights. Essentially, before being a political citizen, an immigrant must be a good civic citizen. More than respecting the laws, a good civic citizen secures his/her livelihood through work, is responsible, and able and willing to take action for his/her own wellbeing and for the wellbeing of the community (Joppke 2007a,b; Goodman 2012; Hoekstra 2015).

This understanding of good citizenship resonates well with the Danish societal ethos (Forsander 2004): The Danish welfare society relies on each member’s contribution through work (and thus taxes, which finance the welfare state), and through activism in civic organisations (which strengthens the social fabric). Thus, the connection which the Integration Act makes between integration and refugees being “participating, self-sustainable and contributory members of the community [...] in accordance with the basic norms and values of the Danish society” (Danish Government 2016b, Ch1§1, a.t.) indicates that for the Danish government, refugees become good citizens when they pay taxes, do not depend on social benefits and embrace the Danish social norms and values. In addition to an assimilationist tone (Mouritsen and Olsen 2013; Jensen 2016; Strokes-DuPass 2015), the implication is that, in order to become valuable members of the Danish society, refugees must display individual agency.

After its adoption in 1999, the Integration Act has been amended multiple times, the successive versions adding demands and conditions on immigrants, in particular refugees, who were largely seen as not integrated, living in segregated areas, displaying little knowledge of Danish language, not espousing Danish values and abusing the welfare state (Mouritsen and
Jensen 2014; Jønsson 2013). In a country where everyone must contribute to the welfare society (Forsander 2004), immigrants were clearly not ‘good citizens’.

To remedy the situation, the government relies on several instruments. The first is the 3-year Integration Program, compulsory for refugees and reunified family members, which are considered particularly at risk of remaining not-integrated. While the government delegates at subnational level the implementation of the program (and compensates the municipalities for 50% of the costs of the integration measures), it retains sole decision-making power with regards to status recognition and residence rights. Recognised refugees are provided with financial support and required to follow language and labour market-related courses. They cannot opt-out and are subject to benefit cuts for non-compliance. Within three months from being assigned to a municipality and enrolled in the program, the refugees have to sign the Integration Contract, a tool for local administrations to monitor integration progress (Fernandes 2015), and the Declaration of integration and active citizenship, a list of values that refugees must uphold in their public and private lives (Mouritsen and Olsen 2013). A second instrument is the granting of permanent residence and naturalization. The rules regarding these two statuses, which legalize and bind individuals to communities, have been often changed, resulting in long lists of demanding conditions (ex. between 2015 and 2017 the qualification period for permanent residence increased from 5 to 8 years, crimes can be penalized with denial of the possibility to apply for residence for as much as 15 years, high levels of Danish knowledge, proven social engagement). Arguably, from instruments of recognition of immigrants’ as members of the community residence and naturalisation became instruments of exclusion (Mouritsen and Olsen 2013).

The demanding and punitive nature of national-level measures managing immigrants’ integration processes has been extensively discussed elsewhere (Mouritsen and Olsen 2013; Jønsson 2013; Jensen 2016). Regarded through the prism of governance structures, the national
authorities’ approach to integration is typical of Type I, indicated by the clear division of tasks between the levels of government, with the upper level retaining the control over the legal framework, financial support and ultimate rewards (residence and naturalisation), and the lower level tasked with implementation. Immigrants’ themselves are effectively relegated to the role of objects of policies, with no input into the policy process. Despite the notion that refugees should show agency by taking-up opportunities, the policies’ emphasis on obligations and punishment effectively reduce this agency, as immigrants are left with little room of choice and preference expression (see also Fernandes 2015).

4.2. The local level

In Odense, integration is subsumed to the Department for Employment and Social Affairs (ESA), whose Council of elected politicians sets policy priorities. Odense’s earlier approach to integration, namely implementing measures targeting family reunified persons and non-Danish youth, changed in 2011 when the municipality decided for an approached tailored to local needs (Interview I1, I5 municipality employees), focused on diversity because “we see diversity as being more broad ... integration is more fixed on ethnicity, but for us, ethnicity is one among many parameters” (I1, municipality employee).

The new discourse sees immigrants’ value in their diversity and connects it to civic values and economic development “immigrants should be encouraged to express this diversity to improve the city and its community of citizens” (I5, municipality employee) because “diversity is [...] a resource” (I1, municipality employee):

Diversity arises when people with different backgrounds interact with each other. It provides not only economic benefits, but also cultural benefits. [...] Democracy, civic citizenship, dialogue and difference are essential values in Odense’s diverse community (Odense Municipality 2016b,7, a.t.).
Integration re-emerged into focus after 2015, this time concentrating on refugees, and the integration discourse developed in connection to the Integration Program. However, the diversity-integration distinction has been abandoned, and the 2017 Integration Strategy (Odense Municipality 2017b) combines the concept of diversity with a focus on employment as the path towards individual self-sufficiency and integration. This new strategy is strongly circumscribed by the notion of integration as a means for local development. It explicitly recognizes that refugees have similar potential as other (labour) immigrants, and this potential can be tapped through similar measures (I1, I5 municipality employees, Odense Municipality 2017b).

We know that diversity is a strength for Odense. Encouraging diversity stimulates innovation and enlarges the recruitment pool for Odense’s companies. We must therefore take advantage of the growth potential which the new citizens [borgere, in original] have. […] We know that successful integration takes place in firms. We know as well that some refugees bring competences which are needed in firms. These are competences which can support the growth of firms in Odense. […] Good integration is more than work. It also implies that the new citizens become an active part of the society, learn the language, become active in associations, as well as have knowledge about the Danish values and norms. (Odense Municipality 2017a:1, a.t.)

The overall aim is to increase Odense’s competitiveness (Odense Municipality 2016a,b; 2017a,b; I5, municipality representative), and liveability “Odense must be an open, tolerant and diverse metropolis, which takes care of all its citizens. Odense must be safe to live in and easy to be integrated into” (Odense Municipality 2017b:8, a.t.). Like Aarhus and Copenhagen (Bak Jøgensen 2012), Odense identified own priorities and elaborated an own integration approach/discourse (Odense Municipality 2016b). Local authorities see their duty as to help all immigrants, refugees included, to enter the Danish labour market, to get the skills and
networks needed to support themselves (Odense Municipality 2016a, 2017b). This view dovetails with the notion that good citizens are those who live “a life on their own terms without the involvement of the municipality” (Odense Municipality 2011:4, a.t.) and give back to the community. Notable is the explicit recognition that immigrants’ participation in social and economic activities should reflect their abilities, and that everybody’s contribution is valuable (Odense Municipality 2016b; I5, municipality employee). All immigrants are thus expected to demonstrate agency and contribute to the economic, social and cultural city life.

Recognizing that “It is the joint effort that creates a good integration in Odense” (Odense Municipality 2017b:3, a.t.), the local authorities’ endeavour to create the conditions for the ‘joint effort’ results in complex interactions, which combine Type I and emerging Type II governance structures. A first instance of Type I MLG is the implementation of the Integration Program, which sets local authorities in a double role: as the agent of the government and as principal vis-à-vis refugees. Both relationships are strictly hierarchical: As agent, they have to ensure implementation of the integration program. As principal, they exert control over refugees through the Integration Contracts. These Contracts contain each refugee’s integration goals, therefore, arguably they are expressions of agency. In reality, there is little decision left to the refugees themselves, because their choices are limited to the options available within the framework of the program, are closely monitored and non-fulfillment is punished (Fernandes 2015). Refugees can express some preferences, but there is no guarantee that these are taken into account. The options offered in the Integration Program are subsumed to local priorities, in particular rapid employment (I1, municipality employee). However, treating individual options as means for local development runs the risk of stunting individual agency and development, as one refugee pointed out:

Their main concern is us get a job and get off the kontant hjælp [social assistance, author's note]. [...] I did not know that you can also study in English. [...] I just started to work.
I can get money right now, but in the long run, is better to have an education. (I7, refugee male, Eritrea, 24 years)

A second set of interactions illustrate a combination between Type I and Type II governance structures. The ESA Council decides local priorities and delegates the formulation of strategies/measures to different ESA sub-units, a process illustrative of Type I MLG. The development of various local strategies exemplifies emerging Type II structures, as other actors become involved at the initiative of local authorities. For example, as informants I1 and I5 noted, the Diversity Council, composed of immigrants with expertise in different domains, firms and NGOs are consulted when new initiatives are on the drawing board. The municipality has initiated cooperations with firms to create employment opportunities for refugees. As interviewee I1 noted, the municipality co-opts NGOs and civic organisations which provide complementary services or engage immigrants in social activities. The municipality financially supports those organisations “who help us a lot and whom we think will do a good job in the future” (J1, municipality employee). While these initiatives radially connect the municipality to different non-state actors, others require polycentric structures in which municipality is not the main actor anymore, approaching the Type II ideal. For example, the Diversity Charter brings together firms interested in diversifying their workforce and disseminating good practices (Diversity Charter, 2017), and SPP is a cooperation between police, schools, NGOs and municipal youth services to prevent youth criminality/radicalisation.

In addition to building horizontal networks, local authorities engage in vertical interactions via the municipalities’ peak interest organisation, Kommunernes Landsforening (KL), lobbying the government or interacting with other peak organisations. For example, current discussions focus on early measures to screen refugees’ competences in order to speed their labour market entry (a local priority in Odense(3), and the cooperation with peak social partners has produced an agreement which made possible the Integration-basic education
program (Integrationsgrunduddannelsen IGU). These bottom-up interactions illustrate how the local authorities mobilize resources beyond the local level to address the local priorities.

Most of the initiatives so-far discussed generate opportunities for refugees, but, as already noted, refugees themselves have no influence over them. However, this is not the entire picture, as the local authorities also include refugees in activities connected to integration and diversity promotion. For example, the newly constituted Integration Forum (since 2017) includes refugees and their voice is directly heard in debates. Well-integrated refugees are recruited to help others as mentors (paired to newly-arrived refugees whom they regularly meet, advise and support), ambassadors (acting as contact points between municipality and newly arrived refugees), or role models (sharing their integration stories with other immigrants) (I1 municipality employee, I3, I4 NGO representatives, I6 refugee, Marselis 2013).

Refugees’ incorporation in initiatives considered relevant for local priorities illustrate radial governance structures initiated by local authorities. At the same time, secondary activities, which are driven solely by refugees themselves, flourish from some of these initiatives. These activities, which mobilize horizontal resources within larger immigrant communities, occur in Type II polycentric structures coalesced to address their needs. For example, in addition to running a program to help children after school, SAHAN, the association of Somali women in Odense, is involved in the SPP project, which tackles youth criminality and radicalisation (I4, NGO representative) as well as in community projects for children and women. Like other NGOs, SAHAN balances between fulfilling public tasks (fighting youth criminality) and following their own priorities (support for community). Cooperating with local authorities not only secures access to resources, but also, and more importantly, brings about trust and influence, as the local authorities open up the policy process to trusted partners from civil society (I3, I4 NGO representatives; I1 municipality employee). At the same time, NGOs value their independence and priorities. For example, SAHAN has
not joined the municipality in a project aimed at improving youth employability, because employment is not high on its agenda. It is however actively cooperating with the municipality’s youth department, as social integration of ethnic youth is its main concern. As the representative of an NGO which supports ethnic associations noted, this independence is welcome because

We want the ethnic associations to be able to set the agenda and not to be overruled by the municipality. [...] to define their own goals and not be part of an integration program played out by the municipality. (I4, NGO representative)

5. Discussion
The introduction of this special issue emphasizes that migration brings to light new dimensions of the MLG conceptual framework and discusses several ‘variations of with respect to network governance, inclusion of non-state actors, layering and blurring MLG’ (Panizzon & van Riemsdijk this issue). The following section uses these notions to discuss sub-national processes observed in this case study. Referring to Figure 1, this discussion will focus on emerging forms of governance which manage the integration process (the full line arrows), and will reflect on their influence on immigrants’ agency (the dotted arrows).

The term network governance captures flexible forms of governance, based on networks which can appear between and within levels, which respond to specific issues/problems, and give actors with stakes in those issues an opportunity to make their voice heard and to take ownership of solutions. In this picture, immigrants-as-actors-with-stakes are a particular category: they form a diverse group with poor resources, limited organisational basis and (often) with limited knowledge about the possible channels to making their voice heard. Thus, their inclusion depends on other actors.
As illustrated with evidence from Odense, the latitude the local authorities enjoy in managing the integration process creates opportunities for refugees to have an input. It takes mainly two forms. In the first one, local authorities take the initiative to include individual refugees or ethnic NGOs. The result are radial structures, where the initiator and financial supporter, as well as ultimate decision-maker, are local authorities, which co-opt and reward non-state actors based on their relevance for pre-existing local development priorities (Interviews I2 municipality employee, I3, I4 NGO representatives, I6 refugee; Odense Municipality 2017b).

Arguably, such radial structures have an ambivalent effect on refugees’ agency. On the one hand, tasking some refugees to help others contributes to building their individual agency, as in the process they learn new skills (Marselis 2013). On the other hand, the fact that this cooptation is strongly circumscribed by local goals defined by local authorities may raise questions as to whether the agency thus created benefits the individual refugees in the long run (leading to their integration) or is mainly an instrument for achieving local development aims. For now, the long-term impact of these structures and their ability to foster refugees’ integration remains an open question and invites future scholarly attention.

A second form is the emergence of polycentric structures, which may include local authorities, but are not driven by them, and which focus on specific (local) problems, ex. youth criminality/radicalisation, or exchanges of good practices in firms with diverse workforce (as in the Diversity Charter). The Diversity Charter is an interesting example because, while bringing together local actors (firms, the municipality, NGOs and interest organisations), creates bridges across municipalities and to the EU level (as it is part of an EU-level initiative). Such structures create more opportunities for agency expression and development, although they are more demanding, as they tend to rely on institutional actors and less on individuals. Thus, refugees’ agency develops through their being members of non-state organisations who
interact in these polycentric structures. As such structures emerge to solve specific problems and no actor dominates hierarchically, they arguably constitute venues in which the voice of refugees can be heard more than in radial structures.

Summing up, the newly formed structures open the space for new actors. Not all of these structures allow for broad decision-making participation of non-state actors (their participation in governance may thus be limited), but all of them complement (as opposed to a substitution process highlighted by Panizzon and van Riemsdijk this issue) the actions that local authorities are expected to take in fulfilling their tasks concerning the integration of refugees.

A second aspect that migration brings forward illuminates issues related to distribution of responsibilities across governance layers. Some authors identify virtuous and vicious layering, distinguishing between situations of well vs. poorly designed decentralisation, with clear/unclear distribution of responsibilities (Arlotti & Aguilar-Hendrickson 2017). Denmark has a highly decentralised administration, which gives municipalities broad competences in managing their affairs (Chatzopoulou and Poulsen 2017). As the case of Odense has illustrated, some municipalities (Copenhagen and Aarhus have been previously highlighted as examples of innovators, Bak Jørgensen 2012, Myrberg 2017) take the opportunity and develop complex strategies redefining integration to suit local developmental goals. In other words, they use their position as powerful agents/principals as an opportunity to tailor the implementation to local needs. For example, Odense’s interest in becoming an R&D hub has led the local authorities to pay more attention to the skills of refugees and to lobby (together with other municipalities and KL) for measures which allow skill identification and recognition (Odense Municipality 2017b; Interviews I1,I2 municipality employees). Arguably, such measures create paths to labour market incorporation for refugees and gives them the opportunity to use
the skills and knowledge they already have (part of agency expression), ultimately leading to their integration.

However, the vertical distribution of responsibilities has also negative consequences. This is visible in the way the powers retained by national authorities undercut some of the results achieved at local level. For example, as part of the integration process all refugees must sign the *Declaration of integration and active citizenship*, which embodies the national government’s view of integration in assimilationist terms (for a detailed discussion see Mouritsen and Olsen 2013). Remarkable is the inclusion of a point stating that the signatories “understand and accept that as a refugee one is no longer entitled to protection if the conditions in one’s home country have changed to the effect that one can return.” (Danish Government 2016a). In effect, this indicates that refugees’ integration achievements are relative and do not guarantee longterm residence rights. Thus, from the beginning of the integration process, refugees are set on a collision course between their efforts to integrate and the municipalities’ actions to help them along this path, and the discretion of national authorities to dismiss these efforts.

Furthermore, the *permanent residence, family reunification* and *naturalisation* regulations, which place decision-making responsibilities in the hands of national-level authorities, further restrict refugees’ access to secure membership in the community of civic citizens. This is not only due the difficulty of the conditions, which increase the burden in particular on refugees, and thereby have the potential to increase, at least in the short-term, the inequalities between different categories of immigrants, in this case, refugees and labour immigrants (for a similar finding see Marti, this issue).(6) It is also due to the discretion the national authorities have to interpret the fulfillment of these conditions, as evidenced by cases which emerged in public light.(7) Long waiting periods, the tests and the tough conditions are presented as means to help immigrants “to function better as citizens; it makes sure that they
love Denmark and prefer Denmark” (Rikke Hvilshoj (Liberal Party, Venstre) quoted in Mouritsen and Olsen 2013:700). But they are perceived as undermining one’s integration achievements, and drive people away by increasing their sense of insecurity and perception that their achievements do not matter, as one refugee who arrived in Denmark as a child remarked:

[…] I feel pushed away. I feel I have integrated into Denmark, I have taken an education, I know the language… Yet I think of myself as a second-rate citizen in Denmark […]. (K, refugee in Odense, quoted in Petersen 2017: 57).

The national authorities’ control over rewards (such as residence permits) and their discretion to relativize (or ignore) the integration achievements which are the results of local authorities’ endeavours indicates an unbalanced relationship between the two levels. While it is not possible to identify this inequality in distribution of responsibilities as vicious layering, in Arlotti & Aguilar-Hendrickson’s (2017) definition, one could term it “undermining layering”. Arguably, by affecting refugees’ perception that the host country’s system is fair and their attachment to it, this inequality undermines the very purpose of civic integration.

Both layering and networking blur divides between actors, and have consequences for legitimacy and accountability. Piattoni (2009) argues that by opening the access of public interest groups to authoritative decision-making Type II interactions blur public-private divides. Both state and non-state actors in Odense engage in activities across the divide: The municipality uses its peak organisation KL to promote its interests and negotiate with the government (and other peak organisations) policy solutions reflecting these interests, thus behaving like a private actor. At the same time, non-state actors take up public functions: for example, some NGOs complement local authorities’ offer of public integration services while firms perform integration tasks by running language-learning-on-the-job programs for refugees. However, the boundaries are not completely ‘blurred’, as one can identify in many of these instances Odense’s local authorities as the main-decision making factor which sets
integration agenda to mirror local priorities, and which supports financially the non-state actors whose activities reflect these priorities, while the latter’s access to decision-making remains limited to advisory functions.

The devolution of tasks from national to local level, and the emergence of new interactions at local level have legitimacy and accountability implications. One argument is that inclusion of non-state actors in policy processes increases the legitimacy and transparency of the decisions taken, which sets the bases of informed participation. All actors develop process ownership, increasing the likelihood that integration goals are reached. However, opening the policy space to other actors may lessen legitimacy by making it more difficult to attribute accountability (for a discussion, see Panizzon and van Riemsdijk this issue; Shelker 2005). The case of economic actors illustrates this tension: Firms’ involvement in creating employment schemes for refugees ensures them that these measures reflect their interests, and secures their cooperation in the implementation phase. In this process, the success of integration measures depends on the long-term commitment made by these firms to perform an integration function, as these employment schemes assume that firms provide not only a workplace, but also an environment where the refugees develop social relations and learn the language. However, firms are not accountable to the local authorities. If they change preferences, due to changes in economic conditions for example, they can act following their own interest, and not the public interest (ie. refugees’ integration). For example, currently firms which hire refugees do so through schemes which involve temporary financial incentives. However, fewer continue the employment relations once the incentive periods run out, and local authorities have no control over these decisions (Interview 19, municipality employee). In such situations, the legitimacy of these employment schemes for integration purposes and their longterm effects may be questioned.
5 Concluding remarks

This study started from the observation that cities are often caught in a tension between policy priorities defined by national governments (which also have legal and financial means to enforce them) and priorities identified at local level (for which resources must be identified primarily at local level). In the case of immigrants’ integration, the national governments assert strong prerogatives in defining what integration is, and in which conditions it is recognised as such. However, how these outcomes are arrived at, differ very much across countries.

In Denmark, the implementation tasks are devolved at municipality level. Municipalities have sole responsibility to ensure that integration programs are implemented and goals set by the government are attained. In doing so, they enjoy large administrative autonomy and can count on government covering part of the integration costs. The study has aimed to show that the multilevel governance structures which emerge in the implementation process enable the local authorities to fulfil goals set by the national government (immigrants as tax payers), and to develop solutions tailored to local priorities (recognition or development of refugees’ skills, diversity for local development).

The study has shown that in Odense local authorities have created a variety of horizontal radial structures and have opened the governance space for other polycentric ones. Moreover, in some of these structures, refugees are included not only as targets, but also as agents of their own change/transformation. These structures not only encapsulate refugees in societal processes (social activities, employment), but also use and develop refugees’ agency, thus fostering their integration. Generalising these findings is difficult, as the processes and interactions observed are conditioned by the legal framework and administrative decentralisation implemented in Denmark. However, they can be put into perspective, by
referring to previous studies which have mapped diverse trajectories taken by other Danish municipalities in their endeavours to implement integration measures (Bak Jørgensen 2012; Myrberg 2017): Albeit being a latecomer to the integration challenge, Odense has taken a path similar to the one of Copenhagen and Aarhus, cities with longer and more complex integration experience, by aiming to create a welcoming city for all inhabitants, by identifying diversity as an asset for local development, and by identifying refugees’ integration as a means for reaching local development priorities.

However, examining the interactions between actors has exposed implementation gaps within the horizontal and vertical governance structures. Typical examples are the situations when some implementing actors cannot be held accountable for outcomes of integration-related processes, or when unequal powers between actors on different levels enable those on upper levels to force certain (less-than-optimal) choices or to discount the integration results obtained by actors at lower levels. Summing up, this case study illustrates that multi-level governance has the potential to unlock creative resources to manage refugees’ integration, but it does not guarantee it.
Endnotes

(1). Since the Danish Integration Act distinguishes between refugees and reunified family members, who are subject to its requirements, and labour immigrants, who are not, this article will focus on refugees' integration.

(2). Recognised refugees in Denmark are dispersed across Danish municipalities according to a system which takes into account each municipality's resources and current non-Danish population.

(3). Personal communications with public administration experts, Odense(March 2017).


(5). Personal communication with NGO expert, Odense(April 2017).
(6). For example, the condition of not use of public funds for most of the qualifying period includes the receiving of integration benefits, for which only refugees are eligible, resulting in de facto longer qualifying periods for refugees in comparison to labour immigrants.

(7). A 60 years-old lady (US citizen) recently retired who has been living and working in Copenhagen most of life has been denied the permanent residence permit because her not having a family in Denmark was interpreted as lack of attachment (Copenhagen Post Online, 2017). A 13 year-old girl was removed by the police from her classroom and sent for deportation after her request for family reunification was denied on account that she would not be able to “achieve the necessary attachment to Denmark that is required for a successful integration.” (The Local, 2017) Both decisions were reversed after widespread popular outrage and media pressure.

Acknowledgements

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References


Caponio, T., and M. Borkert, eds. 2010. The Local Dimension of Migration Policymaking. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.


Marti, G. in this issue. To be added.


Tables and Figures

Table 1. Selection criteria (in parantheses, third country nationals as percentage of municipalities’ population as of 2017, source: Denmark Statistics)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience with immigrants/integration</th>
<th>Own integration approach/discourse</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>long-term</td>
<td>Copenhagen (15,1%), Aarhus (11,5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Bak Jørgensen 2012, Myrberg 2017)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>short-term</td>
<td>Odense (11,6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aalborg (6.7%), Thisted (4.2%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(Bak Jørgensen 2012)</td>
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</table>
Table 2. Refugees allocated to Odense municipality, 2007-2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>year</th>
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<th>refugees</th>
<th>year</th>
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<tr>
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<td>58</td>
<td>2016</td>
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<td>63</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>104</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: New in Denmark, https://www.nyidanmark.dk/da-dk/Statistik/visiteringskvoter/
Figure 1. Relationships between structures, actors in the process of implementing integration measures
Figure 2. Immigration trends in Odense, 1981-2016

Source: Denmark Statistics (2016), tables FOLK1C and BEF3