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CONSTRUCTING EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION FOR DISPLACED PERSONS IN URBAN CONTEXTS: A GOVERNMENT PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: In the summer of 2016, ten semi-structured interviews were conducted with government agencies in four German cities. Data from these interviews were qualitatively analyzed to discover the various approaches taken by each city's government. The data describe participant's perceived challenges, positive impacts and priorities involved with coordinating accommodations and present predominant themes within each of these areas, highlighting what needs to be improved, what worked well and what was prioritized throughout the process. Results from this study contribute critical insight to the limited research regarding construction practices and organizational design of infrastructure for emergency accommodation in an urban context. For example, the greatest challenge expressed by government officials were associated with the process of finding available housing and preparing facilities. External coordination with the community and private companies was identified as one of the predominant positive impacts of the housing operation. The biggest priority expressed by employees addressed challenges in the preparation of facilities, such as minimizing costs, finding available properties and providing utility upgrades. Describing governments' organizational approach, along with their benefits and drawbacks provides other government agencies with foresight in emergency planning and crisis response techniques and contributes to increased infrastructure resilience in future emergency response.

1 Introduction

According to the UNHCR, more than two million displaced persons have fled their country of origin to seek refuge in Europe during 2015 (UNHCR 2016). This rapid influx of asylum-seekers migrating to other countries creates a potential for new demands in infrastructure services and poses a significant challenge for cities' built environments. From a construction standpoint, the response has required both new development projects and the repurposing or rehabilitation of existing assets. Germany hosted nearly 750,000 displaced people in the last year and has processed the largest volume of asylum applications in the European Union over the last five years (UNHCR 2016). This paper describes the challenges, positive impacts and priorities four German cities have experienced as they seek to expand emergency accommodations. Results are used to highlight areas for future attention in the event of another population influx.

2 Points of Departure

2.1 Germany's History of Accommodating Asylum-seekers

Although the recent migration situation in Germany gained global attention in the last few years, receiving displaced persons has been a part of the country's history. During the late 1980s, people sought asylum in

Germany following the war conflict in Yugoslavia, Romania and Turkey (Solsten 1995). Due to this increase of displaced persons and the welcoming social benefits policy Germany offers, permanent structures have been constructed for use in accommodating displaced persons during their asylum application process. Recent media has expressed the demand for housing in German cities due to accommodating asylum-seekers (Debrent 2016), but this has also been the case in the last two decades (STAR 1991). Recent literature has presented investigations of health amongst asylum-seekers in German housing accommodations (Niedermeier and Dreweck 2011; Führer, Eichner, and Stang 2016; Kern 2016), concerns about abuse in temporary facilities (Komaromi 2016), social empowerment in reception centers (Safouane 2016) and the role of volunteer engagement in temporary housing accommodations (Karakayali and Kleist 2016). A review of literature produced no studies discussing the built environment and providing temporary accommodation within an urban context. However, news articles did address challenges with repurposing buildings and constructing temporary facilities in German cities: using container housing to meet demand (Wagstyl 2015) and acknowledging the difficulty due to environmental laws and building regulations (Dauer 2015).

2.2 Germany's Current Organizational Approach

The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) has outlined reception procedures for displaced persons seeking asylum. There are three major categories for accommodations, as shown in Figure 1:

1. **Initial reception centers.** These facilities are the first accommodations where displaced persons are expected to live for up to three months after applying for asylum. After three to six months, people are expected to move into collective accommodation centers or private accommodations. Reception centers are the responsibility of the federal states. Allocation of individuals is determined by the Königstein Key, a distribution method amongst the federal states determined by annual tax revenue and population (BAMF 2017a).
2. **Unaccompanied minors.** Young adults or children under the age of 18 who have entered Germany without a recognized guardian are considered unaccompanied minors according to BAMF (BAMF 2017b). Unaccompanied minors are placed under the responsibility and coordination of local social welfare offices in municipalities while their asylum applications are processed.
3. **Emergency accommodations.** More recently, the number of displaced persons seeking accommodations has surpassed the number of available beds in initial reception centers. Therefore, the federal states have coordinated with municipalities to construct temporary housing facilities while more permanent solutions are constructed. These are renovated office buildings, container housing, hotels, schools, and light-frame structures. Although the municipalities are employed to help find these properties, the federal state is still responsible for the facility itself (AIDA 2016).
4. **Collective accommodation centers.** Ideally, after the initial period in the reception centers, asylum-seekers are encouraged to move into more established housing managed by local municipalities. The purpose of these facilities is to help provide housing for displaced persons who have received their refugee status and are in the process of securing more permanent housing in the locality. Collective accommodation centers are usually a higher quality facility with centralized facilities such as kitchens, showers, toilets according to the Asylum Seekers' Benefits Act (BAMF 2016).
5. **Decentralized accommodation.** This is private accommodation managed by the municipality for persons who have received social benefits and can rent individual flats in the locality. Per the Asylum Seekers' Benefit Act, these social benefits include a basic compensation and housing stipend. Some municipalities do not have organized decentralized accommodation available due to lack of funding from the state and the fluctuating number of people requiring accommodation (AIDA 2016).

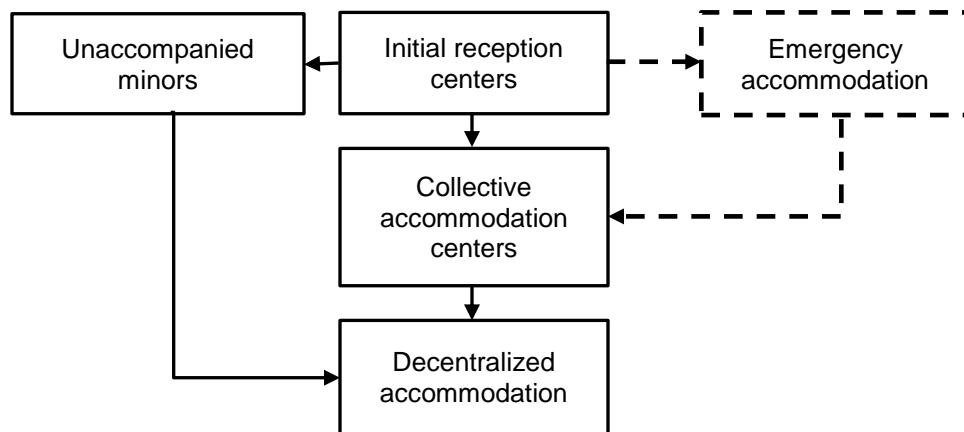


Figure 1: Overview of accommodations for people in the asylum process.

2.3 Urban Emergency Response

Until recently, little has been documented regarding the ability of governments to provide emergency housing to displaced persons in established urban environments. Literature and media outlets reported on instances of refugees being provided temporary housing in existing infrastructure, with one example being Ireland throughout the 1990s and 2000s: a population increase created a strain to find housing for people seeking asylum and created tension between improving living conditions and maintaining the temporary nature of housing (Ní Chiosáin 2016). In another article, the Irish government used floating hotels to accommodate asylum-seekers while permanent facilities were constructed (Irish Voice 2000). Accommodation has also been provided during natural disasters, using hotels for people who fled hurricane storms (Bly 2005). Studies about accommodations for displaced persons include topics such as: health status in facilities (Keygnaert et al. 2014; Gunther et al. 2016), quality of living in facilities (Hauge, Støa, and Denizou 2016; Nyrhinen et al. 2016; Zihnioglu 2015) and social implications of reception centers (Valenta and Berg 2010; Netto 2011; Safouane 2016). Articles and documents related to the built environment and accommodating refugees expressed the difference between standard refugee camp configurations and the challenge to provide housing in an urban context (Boustani 2015; Fawaz 2017). Examining available literature shows content relating to health status, social issues and the existence of challenges related to housing displaced persons in built infrastructure, but a gap exists in understanding the technical aspects associated with construction of these facilities.

This study serves to document and explore the organizational priorities, challenges and positive impacts observed by government employees in providing emergency accommodations within a built environment. These approaches connect impacts on construction practices and technical implications within organizational frameworks. Results from this analysis help build context in addition to the policy frameworks that have been created by the German government and highlight areas where future research may be required. The framework identifies what should theoretically take place, but interviews with employees expand on this theory and show where the system works well and what could be improved for future instances of rapid population influx.

3 Research Method

3.1 Data Collection

Given the lack of research available for urban emergency response, an exploratory approach was taken for this study. The research team visited four German cities and coordinated meetings with various stakeholders in the temporary accommodation process including: non-profit organizations, water utility

companies, private construction companies, and government agencies. The data analyzed here are a subset of the larger collected dataset, using only interviews with government employees. Germany was selected because of the increase of asylum applications in 2015 and their status as the country accepting the largest number of asylum applications (UNHCR 2016). The four cities were selected based on their size and accessibility by the research team. Demographic information about these four cities is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Demographic overview of German cities

City	Population, 2015 ¹	% Asylum-Seekers Accepted by State ²	% Persons Received by Each City After Receiving Asylum ³	City Asylum Applications, 2015 (Based on distribution % and total applications)
City A	3,470,000	5.0%	100.0%	24,000
City B	544,000	5.1%	13.2%	3,200
City C	536,000	5.1%	13.1%	3,200
City D	1,430,000	15.3%	31.6%	23,100

¹ (UNdata 2015), ² (BAMF 2015), ³ Sources are city websites, redacted for confidentiality. This number represents the percentage that is assigned to each city based on the total received by each state.

Ten semi-structured, ethnographic interviews were conducted with employees from government agencies involved with the accommodation process. Interviews were conducted with a dual purpose: to better understand the role the participant played in the process and better understand their attitude towards the current arrangement. Questions addressed their role, how their department or group was involved in providing accommodation and how decisions were made for facility location, renovation, water utility services and their coordination with other stakeholders such as the utility company, other government agencies, non-profit organizations, and the community. Lastly, the participant was asked about the overall response of the government in accommodating displaced persons and what they would like to improve, what went well and priorities they had during the process. Following the interview, participants were asked for any additional individuals who may also be interested in participating in the study, creating a snowball sample for data collection. Interviews were conducted in either English, German or French, according to the individual's preference, and audio recorded for reference. Recordings were translated into English, if necessary, then transcribed.

3.2 Limitations

As an exploratory analysis, this project is subject to various limitations. These limitations include the limited number of interviews, potential language barrier in spite of translation being made available, cultural inhibitions to communication throughout the interview and in some cases, only one interview per category of government agencies. These limitations are acknowledged by the authors. In response, it is the purpose of this project is not to create generalizations across a population, but rather to tell the story of experiences from individuals involved in coordinating and constructing temporary emergency accommodation. As such, the results in this paper provide a point of departure for future work in this area of study.

3.3 Data Analysis

Transcriptions were topically coded using Dedoose software (SCRC 2016). Codes included topics such as government involvement, collaboration, response to crisis, buildings and other categories. *Buildings* was generically applied to statements referring to the accommodation or physical building associated with accommodation for displaced persons. Due to the construction-centered nature of this paper, all excerpts relating to *Buildings* were first extracted from the interview data. Then, from within that selection, all subsequent excerpts that were coded for either *Challenges*, *Positive Impacts* and/or *Priorities* were used for analysis. Definitions for these codes can be found in Table 2 along with the number of excerpts from the ten interviews.

Table 2: Topical Codes, Defined

Code	Excerpt Count	Definition
Buildings ¹	410	Statements describing or referencing the physical buildings in association to providing housing accommodation for refugees.
Challenges ²	130	Statements that address obstacles or barriers regarding providing accommodation to displaced persons. This is only for statements specifically addressing setbacks with the process or things that did not work at the time.
Positive Impacts ²	27	Statements that specifically address things that went well about providing accommodation to refugees.
Priorities ²	50	Statements that reference priorities or things considered by stakeholders (government, utilities, non-profit, companies) in providing accommodation for refugees.

¹ Total number of *Building* excerpts from all ten interviews, ² Excerpts from within the *Building* group.

After isolating excerpts to separate combinations of *Buildings* and *Challenges*, *Positive Impacts*, and *Priorities*, a secondary analysis was conducted to understand what themes were associated with the aforementioned codes (Bernard and Ryan 2010). Descriptions of these themes were extracted and grouped into subcategories, shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Topical Coding Subcategories, Defined

Subcategory	Excerpt Count	Definition
External Coordination	26	This is a challenge/positive impact/priority related to non-government agencies in providing accommodation for displaced persons. This could be related to the needs of the community, political parties not in governmental positions (i.e. PEGIDA activist group) or other outside parties.
Facility Characteristics	36	This is a challenge/positive impact/priority related to aspects of a facility that impact the process of providing accommodation. This could include amenities, location of the facility and other features.
Internal Coordination	37	A challenge/positive impact/priority related to working within government agencies for providing accommodation. This relates to communication, interaction with other offices, making decisions and planning for short-term and long-term solutions based on who is responsible.
Living Conditions in Facilities	21	Challenge/positive impact/priority related to quality of life in facilities. This includes function of appliances, quality of food, and usage of facilities.
Permitting & Regulations	30	A challenge/positive impact/priority related to meeting permitting requirements or regulations (federal, state, local level). This could include the process of receiving a permit, needing to meet regulations with inspections, and safety inspections.
Preparing Facilities	57	A challenge/positive impact/priority related to the process of getting a facility ready for accommodation. This relates to renovation, general availability of housing, and time needed for organizing a facility.

The excerpts for the primary analysis were re-coded with the subcategories and reviewed for accuracy in definition. A total of 130 excerpts were coded with *Buildings* and *Challenges*, 27 coded for *Buildings* and *Positive Impacts*, and 50 for *Buildings* and *Priorities*. Frequencies of code application are described in the results section (Table 4) and discussion of these applications are in the subsequent sections.

4 Results

All ten participants expressed areas that needed improvement (*Challenges*), things that went well (*Positive Impacts*) and priorities (*Priorities*) that were used to make decisions during the influx of displaced persons in 2015. While each of these excerpts were expressed in different verbiage, patterns emerged that were organized into subcategories (*Table 3*). The frequency of subcategories was observed and shown below in *Table 4*. These frequencies show what types of challenges, positive impacts and priorities were expressed by study participants and helps readers understand areas where further research may be needed; these categories are discussed further below. Responses for *Challenges* were predominantly focused on internal coordination with other governmental agencies (22%) and the process of preparing facilities (29%). Statements relating to things that worked well in the provision of accommodation were focused on external coordination (26%) and internal coordination (30%), although permitting and regulations (22%) were also close in relative frequency. Lastly, statements expressing main priorities throughout the accommodation operation were focused on preparing facilities (36%) and facility characteristics (30%) with permitting and regulations also having a high relative frequency (24%). Conversely, permitting and regulations had the lowest frequency relating to challenges (9%). Living conditions and preparing facilities were both at four percent relative frequency with respect to positive impacts, and internal coordination had no associated excerpts for priorities.

Table 4: Distribution of Subcategory Frequencies

	External Coordination	Facility Characteristics	Internal Coordination	Living Conditions in Facilities	Permitting & Regulations	Preparing Facilities
Challenges	13%	13%	22%	13%	9%	29%
Positive Impacts	26%	15%	30%	4%	22%	4%
Priorities	4%	30%	0%	6%	24%	36%

5 Discussion

As shown in Table 4, government employees expressed varying challenges, positive impacts and priorities in coordinating accommodation for displaced persons in 2015. Secondary analysis of these codes showed that certain subcategories were more prevalent in statements than others and are discussed in subsequent sections. Subcategories include: external coordination, facility characteristics, internal coordination, living conditions in facilities, permitting & regulations and preparing facilities. Descriptions of these subcategories, summarized from interview data, are provided in

Table 5.

Table 5: Examples of Subcategories within Challenges, Positive Impacts and Priorities

Subcategory	Challenges	Positive Impacts	Priorities
External Coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Community pushback - Need more schools - Needing facilities for other uses - Pressure from opposing political parties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Partnering with private companies/individuals for housing - Volunteer engagement - Partnering with co-ops to help refugees find long-term housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Providing housing for general population - Balancing the needs of the community - Decommissioning emergency housing facilities (sports halls, gyms)
Facility Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Facilities used for housing need to be renovated after being decommissioned - Not enough infrastructure near housing facilities - Facilities cost too much 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Region has good water services - not an issue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Choosing facility types that could be used for other purposes in future - Locations were near other infrastructure for integration (schools, other neighbors)
Internal Coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not enough state funding - Not enough personnel - Delays in making decisions - Poor communication between agencies - Politics with selecting facility locations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - City already had existing accommodation facilities for displaced persons - Added personnel - Creating a task force specifically to handle accommodations for displaced persons - Splitting responsibilities between state/local level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No excerpts were found to express internal coordination with priorities
Living Conditions in Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High utility consumption in facilities - Showing how to use facilities - Onsite water/wastewater facilities breakdown 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Trying to help displaced persons integrate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Facilities are hygienic - Improve quality of living in facilities - Quality of living was acceptable in facilities
Permitting & Regulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Too many regulations for developers - No time to follow standard permitting procedure - Concerns about safety violations - Meeting regulations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not making exceptions to regulations (fire protection) - Providing additional guidelines for refugee housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Simplifying permitting processes - Speeding up permitting processes - Providing security/safety inspections in buildings - Meeting federal, state and/or local regulations
Preparing Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not enough available housing - No time to prepare facilities - Providing accommodation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Available space for long-term housing - Smaller sized accommodations - Not using containers for accommodations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Responding quickly - Finding available properties for facilities - Providing fire protection - Renovating facilities - Minimizing cost

5.1 Challenges

Throughout the coordination process, various obstacles and barriers arose in finding and providing accommodation to displaced persons. Within the ten interviews, a total of 130 excerpts were associated

with expressing these challenges. Within these excerpts, preparing facilities and internal coordination were most associated with challenges, with a relative frequency of 29 and 22 percent, respectively. Statements related to preparing facilities expressed problems such as a lack of available housing, facilities needing renovation and not having enough time to prepare accommodations. For example, when asked about priorities in organizing housing, one employee stated, *“To be honest, we didn’t even have time or the possibility to think about priorities because the need for shelter rose so rapidly that we just took whatever properties we could get our hands on”* (City C, 8/19/16). Alternatively, internal coordination referred to problems including: frustration with communication between government agencies, politics in deciding where to locate housing facilities and issues with funding between agencies. For example, when asked about collaboration with the local water utility company, an employee stated: *“The city has sort of some influence on the [water utility]. They knew what to do and I think the problems were more if there were delays within the city administration itself. For example, somewhere we had a lack of money... or were somewhere in the process of deciding and developing the project development, something got stuck and then we couldn’t [place an order] with the [water utility], then there were delays”* (City D, 9/29/16).

5.2 Positive Impacts

Study participants had significantly fewer statements related to things that worked well during the coordination process, with only 27 excerpts expressed in the ten interviews. Coordination appeared to be the predominant area where people observed positive impacts, with external and internal coordination having the highest relative frequency, with 26 and 30 percent, respectively. Statements referred to external coordination with topics like partnering with private companies to provide available housing or expressing the vitality of utilizing volunteers to help prepare facilities before moving displaced persons in. Internal coordination in these statements usually described how the participant’s government agency interacted with other departments quickly, or responding well when needs arose. For example, when asked what went well with coordinating housing, one employee stated that, *“It was the right decision to create this project group, to really utilize the capacities and resources in the various city council offices”* (City C, 8/19/16).

5.3 Priorities

Finally, 50 excerpts were coded as expressing priorities by the participant, their government office, or the government generically from the ten interviews. The two major themes concerning priorities are preparing facilities and facility characteristics, with 36 and 30 percent, respectively. Preparing facilities referred to statements where participants expressed a need to organize accommodations quickly, or the need to minimize costs in renovating buildings. For example, when asked whether they would have done something different, the employee responded, *“Because it was the only option they had, and it’s still better to make people sleep in a sports hall than under a tent or the sky”* (City A, 7/12/16). The main priority was to provide any option other than the default: no accommodation. Alternatively, facility characteristics were also identified as being relevant to the coordination process with statements identifying the need for facility locations to meet certain needs, like being near established infrastructure, having fire safety features or being affordable for the government to rent. For example, when asked about what the government looks for when trying to rent buildings, an employee mentioned the importance of whether the building was accessible in case of an emergency (City B, 8/3/16).

6 Conclusion

Urban emergency response is currently underway in various countries throughout the world. Existing literature provides information regarding emergency accommodation for refugee camps outside of urban environments and construction techniques for rebuilding communities affected by war and natural disaster (Ohlson and Melich 2014). However, there is limited research understanding how governments provide emergency accommodation in developed urban settings. The emergency accommodation facilities in Germany during 2015 required collaboration between various levels of government and coordination with actors in the private sector; this process needs to be documented for possible replication in the future.

The ten interviews analyzed for this study produced 130 excerpts relating to challenges, 27 excerpts relating to positive impacts and 50 excerpts relating to priorities expressed during the interviewee’s role in

coordinating accommodation for displaced persons. These excerpts were divided into various subcategories to better understand what types of challenges, positive impacts and priorities were being described. These include: external coordination, facility characteristics, internal coordination, living conditions, permitting & regulations and preparing facilities. Based on relative frequency of these categories, challenges were related to preparing facilities and internal coordination. Statements of things that worked well, or perceived positive impacts were predominantly related to internal and external coordination. Finally, expressions of priorities were predominantly associated with preparing facilities and facility characteristics.

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