Marielle Olivia Zill

# FAMILIAR STRANGERS, DISTANT NEIGHBOURS



How the openness of asylum accommodation influences familiarization between asylum seekers and local residents.

# Familiar strangers, distant neighbours: How the openness of asylum accommodation influences familiarization between asylum seekers and local residents

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## How the openness of asylum accommodation influences familiarization between asylum seekers and local residents.

**BEKENDE VREEMDEN, AFSTANDELIJKE BUREN**

Hoe de openheid van asielzoekersaccommodatie de vertrouwdheid tussen asielzoekers en lokale bewoners beïnvloedt.

(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

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*„Sorgfältig prüf ich meinen Plan; er ist groß genug; er ist unverwirklichbar."*

*‚Carefully I am testing my plan, it is grand enough, it is unachievable'*
*– Bertolt Brecht*

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Marielle Zill
Utrecht, November 2022

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## Introduction

## 1.1 General introduction

*'We will create the alien nation, not outside our borders, but within our midst. And we will have only ourselves to blame for future generations of distance, distrust and disenchantment.'* (Goodwin-Gill 1997: 16)

Nearly ten years ago in 2012, the 'Grandhotel Cosmopolis' made national and international headlines for combining a tourist hotel with asylum seeker accommodation. Several years before the so-called refugee crisis of 2015, a group of artists, activists and local residents came together in the city of Augsburg, Germany, to build what they called a 'social sculpture', a living artwork inspired by the ideas of artist Joseph Beuys, showcasing an alternative way of accommodating asylum seekers 'in the heart of the city'. With growing numbers of people applying for asylum in Germany and across Europe, the project attracted the attention of journalists who captured the apparent contradiction between asylum seekers and ideas of luxury in headlines such as *'A grandhotel for refugees'* or *'Asylum de luxe'.* Headlines such as these drew attention to a perceived contradiction between asylum seekers and high-standard living conditions. This perceived contradiction is based on public debates which for several decades have firmly implanted in imagery and writing that the camp is the 'rightful place' of the refugee (Malkki, 1995). According to German asylum law, asylum seekers should be accommodated in collective accommodation, the so-called *'Gemeinschaftsunterkunft'* or 'community accommodation', which has been the dominant form of accommodating asylum seekers since the 1990s and are often large scale, spatially isolated forms of accommodation with living standards frequently not surpassing the bare minimum (Hess & Elle, 2017).

The 'Grandhotel Cosmopolis' is among the first of a series of projects and initiatives questioning how asylum seekers are accommodated in Germany and across Europe. The Grandhotel Cosmopolis itself has inspired similar projects, including the 'Bellevue di Monaco' in Munich as well as the 'Campus Cosmopolis' in Berlin. Another prominent example of local innovation in asylum accommodation is the 'Plan Einstein' project in the Dutch city of Utrecht, which combined housing for asylum seekers with housing for Dutch youngsters and aimed to provide asylum seekers' with 'future proof' skills by offering language and business courses (Geuijen et al., 2020). Taking a broader perspective, municipalities across Europe are not only at the forefront of developing alternative forms of asylum accommodation, but are themselves key players in developing more inclusive forms of asylum seeker and refugee reception policies and practices (Caponio & Borkert, 2010; Glorius & Doomernik, 2020). The efforts of municipalities and citizen-based initiatives towards developing more inclusive alternatives for asylum seeker accommodation on the one hand and the continuing securitization of migration and large-scale collective accommodation on the other, alert us to the high degree of

variation in the policies and practices of asylum seeker reception and accommodation within and between European member states.

Collective forms of asylum accommodation with low standard living conditions are one among several political measures of migration control aimed at deterring migrants from entering or from remaining in European member states (FitzGerald, 2019; Kreichauf, 2021). Asylum accommodation is part of a 'politics of discomfort', which downgrades asylum seekers living conditions in order to "reassure and enable the comfort and 'ease' of others" (Darling, 2011, 269) and reassert political control over migration. This downgrading of asylum seekers living conditions, along with restrictions in the areas of employment, education and freedom of movement, has been shown to negatively impact asylum seekers' mental and physical health, as well as their future integration (Ghorashi, 2005; Bakker et al., 2014; Bakker et al., 2016). Apart from negative effects on asylum seekers, it is also questionable to what extent a politics of discomfort actually provides reassurance and comfort to those witnessing asylum seekers' discomfort. The high number of protests against large scale collective asylum accommodation in Germany and other European members states should be read not simply as anti-asylum seeker sentiments, but also as an affective reaction of *local discomfort* with large scale collective forms of accommodation. In other words, are collective forms of asylum accommodation harmful beyond their negative effects on asylum seekers?

Projects such as the Grandhotel Cosmopolis or Plan Einstein raise a fundamental question, namely what are the effects of accommodating asylum seekers in a more 'open' inclusive manner in contrast to more isolated and 'closed' forms of accommodation? Previous research defines the openness of asylum accommodation only along the legal dimension, with 'legally open' meaning able 'to leave at free will or within reasonable confines' (Guild, 2005). Yet a sole focus on the legal dimension of openness, that is, whether or not an individual is able to leave at free will, is often insufficient to describe the lived realities of asylum seekers living in accommodation which often isolates asylum seekers materially or spatially from the wider reception location. Nor does a legal understanding of openness include local residents' perceptions and experiences of differences in the openness of asylum accommodation. What is thus still insufficiently understood is the relation between asylum accommodation, built environment and local context, meaning the wider urban or rural area an asylum seeker is dispersed to. The focus of this thesis lies on the process of familiarization between asylum seekers, local residents and the reception location and the role that spatially, materially or institutionally 'open' or 'closed' asylum accommodation plays in enabling or inhibiting familiarization. This is captured in the main research question of this thesis:

*'What are the effects of variations in the spatial, material and institutional dimensions of openness of asylum centres on the process of familiarization between asylum seekers and local residents?'.*

To answer this research question, the thesis compares two collective asylum centres in the city of Augsburg, Germany, one of which is the aforementioned Grandhotel Cosmopolis, the other, a larger state-run asylum centre. The following chapters focus on the effects differences in openness or closure have on familiarization between asylum seekers, local residents and the reception location. A distinctly geographical approach to asylum accommodation informs this thesis, centring on a relational approach to asylum accommodation and the role of space, place or scale for processes of familiarization. This relational perspective, meaning an understanding of asylum accommodation as a series of relationships, is one of four key theoretical contributions of this thesis. The second key contribution is the notion of 'spatial, material and institutional degrees of open- and closedness', capturing the variation of asylum accommodation across space. A third contribution is employing the concept of (un)familiarity and familiarization as a way to understand everyday social relations between asylum seekers and local residents. Lastly, the thesis also reflects on the ethical and methodological consequences of knowledge production in over-researched settings, aiming to raise awareness of this widespread issue.

The introduction is structured as follows: The subsequent **second section** provides an overview of the academic debates that inform the different chapters of this thesis, which are summarized as three perspectives on asylum accommodation. The **third section** presents the conceptual framework underlying this thesis, while the **fourth section** gives an overview of asylum seeker reception and accommodation in Germany. In the **fifth section**, the reader is introduced to the research setting and the two case studies at the heart of this research, while the **sixth section** summarizes the methodological approach taken. The **last section** provides a brief overview of the different chapters of this thesis.

## 1.2 Locating asylum accommodation: A brief overview of the academic debate

The aim of this thesis is to understand how spatial, material and institutional differences in the open- or closedness of asylum accommodation influence familiarization between asylum seekers and local residents[1] and between asylum seekers and the reception

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1    It has to be noted that asylum seekers are of course also 'local residents'. In the thesis, 'local residents' is used to refer to what is also called 'more established residents', meaning those that have already lived in a certain location for a longer period of time or are permanent residents.

location. The thesis takes a distinctly geographical approach to this question, as it conceptualizes spatial, material and institutional differences in accommodation from a relational viewpoint, focusing not only on what happens 'in' but 'in-between' asylum accommodation and the reception context. The geographical approach of this thesis is informed by several interrelated debates which connect the chapters and are summarized here as three different perspectives on asylum accommodation. The first perspective introduces asylum accommodation as a space of everyday bordering and confinement, the second examines asylum accommodation as a space of negotiation and innovation while the third explores asylum accommodation as an urban space and asylum seekers as urban actors.

### 1.2.1 Asylum accommodation as a space of everyday bordering and confinement: Geographical migration studies and carceral geography

This thesis situates asylum accommodation within the broader geographical debates on forced migration and carceral geography. Geographical perspectives on forced migration highlight diverse sets of 'spatial tactics' which seek to immobilize migrants and control migration, meaning "the use of space to control people, objects, and their movement" (Martin & Mitchelson, 2009, 459). Thereby, geographical perspectives on forced migration go beyond the historical focus on the influence of migration on a territorially defined nation state (Brun, 2001) and include studies of spaces and practices of confinement, bordering and exclusion of forced migrants (Welch & Schuster, 2005; Ehrkamp, 2016). The rise in spatial tactics to control forced migrants is connected to the growing securitization of migration across Europe, meaning the framing of migrants and especially asylum seekers and refugees as a security threat (Huysmans, 2006). Following Huysmans, the framing of migration and asylum as a threat to security is a political and social construct, as migration and asylum could also be framed within a discourse of human rights. Importantly, framing migration and asylum as an existential threat to the security of a political community not only depends on media discourse, but just as much on "everyday stigmatizing practices, infrastructural policies such as urban planning, and administrative instruments and procedures such as vouchers" (ibid, 57). This thesis then conceptualizes the policies and practices of asylum in Germany within the broader context of the securitization of migration and interprets the current form of asylum accommodation as one among several spatial tactics of migration control.

Geographical perspectives on forced migration also detail the practices and consequences of bordering practices related to the securitization of migration. The current paradox of increased de-bordering alongside increased re-bordering is captured by van Houtum and Naerssen (2002, 128) who wrote

*"Within the territorial strategy that is dominant in present capitalist societies the speed, flexibility and frictionless movement of money sharply contrasts with the movement of people without meaningful economic resources. It is the utopian dream of an ordered, consistent and stabilised unity that implicitly asks for a non-stop monitoring of control of access and a close examination of those entering. Complete closure and complete openness of the borders are generally seen as extremes on an imagined border continuum, of which the degree of openness dominates liberal economic debates and the degree of closure dominates the debate on the immigration of refugees."*

This 'non-stop monitoring of access' has found its expression in both the deterritorialization of Europe's borders, referring to the externalization and internalization of bordering practices (Andrijasevic, 2010). The externalization of bordering practices refers to the process of moving borders beyond the boundaries of states, through administrative strategies like visa requirements, but also through spatial strategies such as detention on islands or interception at sea (Hyndman & Mountz, 2008; Pinelli, 2018). At the same time, bordering processes also take place within everyday life, referred to as the internalization of borders, a process which is intricately related to practices of ordering and othering (van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002). In this sense, bordering practices also take place in everyday settings, with the purpose of establishing a certain kind of social order by defining and delimiting others and otherness through for instance ideology, discourse, political institutions or attitudes. The deterritorialization of European and national borders also implies that state bordering and border control practices are performed by a range of actors, including government agencies, private companies and citizens (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, & Cassidy, 2018).

A direct result of this proliferation of these everyday bordering practices is the increased use of immigration detention across the globe, especially the United States, Europe and Australia (Bosworth, 2019). The deterritorialization of border control becomes visible within and through immigration detention, as this practice is deployed not only at or beyond Europe's borders, but also within. Following Mountz et al (2012, 534), "detention itself blurs the boundaries between inside and outside the nation state by reifying boundaries between migrants and citizens. In other words, detention produces paradoxical processes of deterritorialization, externalization, and internalization of borders through the deliberate bordering and marking of migrant bodies." This increase in everyday bordering practices, including immigration detention, has given rise to an overall growth in spaces of confinement. Geographers have pointed out the overlap between practices of detention and imprisonment, arguing that it is crucial to question

where prison spaces and practices of detention overlap and form a continuum of spaces of confinement (Martin & Mitchelson, 2009).

The increased reliance on confinement as an everyday bordering practice is also visible within European asylum regimes and the accommodation of seekers, a process which Kreichauf (2018) describes as the 'campization' of asylum accommodation. Kreichauf (ibid, p. 4) points towards two interrelated tendencies visible in current systems of asylum seeker and refugee accommodation, which are "first, the legal stabilization of permanent, enlarged, remotely located, and spatially isolated camps with lowered living standards, increased capacities, and a closed character; and second, the changing notions and forms of containment, exclusion, and temporality of these infrastructures." This thesis takes account of the interrelatedness of practices of confinement and everyday bordering and conceptualizes asylum accommodation as not separate from but located on a carceral continuum, termed 'degrees of open- and closedness of asylum accommodation', which is most apparent in chapter four of this thesis.

### 1.2.2 Asylum accommodation as a space of negotiation and innovation: Local migration policy studies and urban geographies of asylum

A second perspective on asylum accommodation is the role of the local level in shaping the conditions of asylum seeker reception and integration (Glorius & Doomernik, 2020). Forced migration studies has historically focused on the influence of the national level on the policies and practices of migration (Wimmer & Glick-Schiller, 2002). Yet over the course of the last two decades, scholars have highlighted the importance of the local level in shaping and developing the policies, discourses and practices of migration and the conditions for integration (Caponio & Borkert, 2010). Rather than assuming that the local level as at the receiving end of national asylum policies, the local is increasingly conceptualized a site in which national migration policies are continuously reproduced and challenged. It would hence be misleading to think of a 'local perspective' as one that studies migration 'from below'; rather, a local perspective makes it possible to study how migration and asylum is regulated in and through different localities and how spatial practices of bordering, locating and scaling migration intersect (Hinger, Schäfer, & Pott, 2016).

Forced migration scholars increasingly adopt a regime perspective to grasp the relational construction of migration processes and policies between national, regional and local scales. Instead of assuming a top-down relationship between the national and the local scale, a 'migration regime' perspective "includes a multitude of actors whose practices relate to each other, without, however, being ordered in the form of a central logic or rationality. Rather, the concept of 'regime' implies a space of negotiating practices" (Tsianos & Karakayali, 2010, 375). A regime perspective thus implies a non-essentialist

conception of the state, meaning that the state cannot be seen as an external entity in the production of asylum (Gill, 2010). Rather, a regime perspective places the focus on different constellations of actors and practices shaping and contesting local asylum regimes, including migrants themselves as well as civil society actors and other local stakeholders (Schmiz & Räuchle, 2019). Local migration regimes can thus be understood as 'microcosms' from which to gain an understanding of how variation within national migration regimes is produced through processes of negotiations and conflicts between different state and non-state actors. By conceptualizing local migration regimes as a result of negotiations between different state and non-state actors, rather than a bounded entity in which national asylum policy is simply implemented, the regime perspective highlights power-asymmetries between migrants, civil society and state actors as well as between different localities and scales (Hinger et al., 2016).

The focus on processes of negotiation and the resulting power-asymmetries between state and non-state actors brings into view the complexity and contestation of the issue of asylum accommodation on the local level. The conditions of asylum seeker reception and accommodation vary immensely, not only between European member states, but also within (Brekke & Vevstad, 2007; Brekke & Brochmann, 2014). The issue of asylum seeker reception accommodation is characterized by the simultaneity of reactions and practices of welcome and opposition from both state and non-state actors (Gill, 2018; Glorius et al., 2019). Chapter three of this thesis refers to the outcome of these processes of negotiation as 'uneven geographies of asylum accommodation'. This means that the local level cannot a priori be taken to be more progressive than the national level; rather, local migration regimes can just as much lay the groundwork for more conservative and repressive asylum policies and practices (Schmiz & Räuchle, 2019). This contrast between the local as a site of innovation and negotiation on the one hand and opposition on the other is captured in this thesis. The close examination and comparison of two cases of asylum seeker accommodation reveal that innovation and opposition are visible even on the micro-scale; especially chapters two and four demonstrate the role of different local actors, the effects of innovation in the case of the 'Grandhotel Cosmopolis' and the discomfort caused by nationally imposed minimum reception standards.

### 1.2.3    Asylum accommodation as an urban space: Asylum seekers and the city

While the previous perspective focused primarily on the difference between national and local migration regimes and the emergence of variation between local migration regimes, the third perspective is one which connects asylum accommodation with the city itself and with the role of asylum seekers in the making and remaking of urban spaces. Ever since the Chicago School developed a model to understand the relation between the settlement of migrants and their integration in the 1920s, the relation between migrants and cities has been a key concern of urban scholars (Caponio &

Borkert, 2010). It is therefore surprising that less attention has been paid to the relation between forced migrants, especially asylum seekers and refugees, and urban areas in both the Global North and South (Darling, 2016). The reason for this lack of attention is the strong analytical focus of forced migration studies on the state, what is known as 'methodological nationalism' (Wimmer & Glick-Schiller, 2002). As already mentioned in the first section, a more recent geographical focus has been on border externalization and spaces of confinement, which is mostly concerned with detailing the influence of state practices on asylum seekers and refugees and less with the relation of these spaces with the local context (yet see Leddy-Owen, 2015). It is for this reason that Darling (2016, 2) argues to pay attention to "the city as a space of refugee politics".

Dominating the public and to some extent the academic debate on asylum seekers and refugees in urban and to some extent rural spaces is the question of encountering 'strangers', of strangers in 'our neighbourhood' and of strange(r)ness 'invading' what is usually imagined to be a previously homogeneous place (Ahmed, 2000; Hubbard, 2005). One focal point has thus been on encounters and the 'contact zone' as the concrete location of interaction and encounter (Pratt, 1991; Wilson, 2016). This concept re-emerged in geographical studies as 'living with difference', primarily as a means to understand how 'meaningful encounters' between different social groups can be facilitated (Valentine, 2008; Leitner, 2012; Lawson & Elwood, 2013). This line of scholarship has built upon 'intergroup contact theory' (Allport, 1954), providing insights into spaces of contact within public or institutional spaces such as cafés or schools (Laurier & Philo, 2006; Hemming, 2011). However, this line of research is also critiqued for 'romanticizing' the transformative potential of such spaces, while neglecting their conflictive potential (Valentine, 2008). In the search to illuminate what mediates social relations between asylum seekers and communities, it is thus crucial to highlight both the conflictive and 'bridging' dynamics within spaces (Putnam, 2000), as well as to uncover where boundaries serve as a means of protection versus exclusion (Marcuse, 1997).

How asylum seekers and refugees are perceived and to some extent racialized in the everyday spaces of the city is an important part of understanding how forced migration is experienced and how it affects everyday social relations (Yacobi, 2011; Leitner, 2012). Yet the focus on strangers and strange(r)ness and their perception by a 'more established' population has also been critiqued as drawing upon a notion of urban space as a bounded entity which is 'ruptured' by the presence of migrants and as essentializing ethnicity as a marker of 'difference' (Collins, 2011). A number of authors have therefore argued to shift attention to the ordinary ways through which forced migrants become part of urban space as well as to the ways they appropriate and make use of urban infrastructures to facilitate arrival and survive under adverse circumstances (Meeus et al., 2019; Hanhörster & Wessendorf, 2020). The question is therefore not 'can we live

with difference', implying a unified we, but rather how forced migration shapes urban spaces and how different types of migrants make use of and contribute to the making of cities. A number of studies increasingly highlight the agency of forced migrants in processes of city-making, ranging from contesting and circumnavigating their often dire living conditions to being political agents demanding not only hospitality but a 'right to the city' (Ghorashi et al., 2018; Kreichauf & Glorius, 2021; Kreichauf & Mayer, 2021). For instance, Cancellieri and Ostanel (2015, 506f) examine how forced migrants make use of public space in the Italian city of Padua, illustrating how migrants are spatial actors "in that they try continuously to use and re-signify urban spaces in order to search out symbolic as well as material resources" by creating social infrastructures around the railway station. On a larger scale, Glick-Schiller & Caglar (2009) draw attention to the ways in which migrants act as scale makers in the global positioning of cities.

It is hence high time to conceptualize forced migrants not as passive victims of global regimes of control, but as active agents in the making of different localities. This thesis tries to navigate the aforementioned three debates by bringing together perspectives on both the ways that asylum accommodation acts as a space of everyday bordering, as well as the agency of both its inhabitants and neighbourhood residents in challenging the effects of bordering and containment. More, the thesis also links up to the debate on local migration regimes by conceiving asylum accommodation as a space that is made and remade by different local groups and stakeholders. Lastly, the thesis also explores the question of asylum seekers' accessibility to urban arrival infrastructures and the ways asylum seekers make use of public spaces to create infrastructures of information, language-learning and sociability. The next section presents the conceptual framework underlying this thesis.

## 1.3    Conceptual framework

The key concern of this thesis is the extent to which asylum accommodation interferes in the process of familiarization between asylum seekers, local residents and the reception location. Building on literature that emphasizes the relational construction of subjectivity and difference, this thesis looks into the spatial, material and institutional mechanisms contributing to variation in the degrees of open- or closedness of asylum accommodation. The main argument being that differences in open- and closedness influence the process of familiarization by reinforcing or challenging processes of categorization and estrangement. The following three sections introduce the key concepts employed in this thesis, namely spatial, material and institutional degrees of open- and closedness and (un)familiarity, and how they contribute to the overarching aim of a relational approach to asylum accommodation.

### 1.3.1 Thinking asylum accommodation relationally: A geographical approach

The previous section demonstrated the centrality of space as a mechanism of control within the field of migration and refugee studies and the added value of a geographical perspective to uncover these mechanisms. This thesis seeks to build on those perspectives by emphasizing the value of a relational approach for studying asylum accommodation. This section specifies not only what is understood by relational thinking within geography, but also summarizes how different traditions of relational thinking implicitly inform my work as a scholar. Next to key concepts like space, place and scale, relative and relational concepts of space have informed geographical work for the last decades (Jackson, 2006). Relative and relational thinking is often used to critique conceptions of space as absolute, that is, as a 'container', as bounded and with fixed geometries. By contrast, relative space views space as a product of the distance or proximity between people, objects or places. Importantly, this distance is not 'fixed' but is dependent upon modes of travel and costs which not only change frequently due to technical innovation, but which also depend on difference in gender and class among other variables. Relational thinking on the other hand emphasizes that space and time is not to be viewed as independent from societal processes, but that societal processes construct space and time (Warf, 2010). In other words, space is both the product of social relations as well as productive of them.

An emerging body of work within migration and refugee studies is demonstrating the value of a relational approach for understanding the relationship between migrants and cities. Collins (2011) argues that migration studies has focused to a large extent on permanent settlement of migrants, while temporary migrants have often been thought of in terms of a disturbance of the 'normal' order of things. Such ideas of 'rupture' implicitly employ bounded ways of thinking leading to methodological territorialism in migration studies. He argues that cities need to be conceived in both relational and territorial terms, to take account of how the state facilitates or constrains the lives of temporary migrants, while also showing how temporary migrants are part of urban life and how everyday spaces are negotiated between migrants and more established residents of the city. Similarly, Darling (2010, 2016) applies a relational approach to the study of the cities of sanctuary movement in the city of Sheffield. He draws on Massey's (2005) conception of relational space, which defines relationality in three ways, namely as the product of interrelations, the sphere of multiplicity and space as always under construction. Implicated in this definition is that space is also a political and performative production; similar to Collins, Darling argues to that in order to understand the relation between migrants and cities, it is necessary to think concepts of territoriality alongside relationality.

What does a relational approach to asylum accommodation imply? Analysing asylum accommodation as bounded and detached from its spatial context emphasizes the

exceptionality and spatial and social isolation of these spaces, with the danger of obscuring which political, institutional, economic or social processes enter into the production of their apparent socio-spatial isolation. It is thus necessary to think territoriality alongside relationality in order to emphasize that isolation is a process and product of sets of relations. A relational approach also makes visible how these spaces shape and are shaped by diverse sets of global, European, national, regional and local relations and regulations. Accordingly, this thesis considers asylum accommodation not as an isolated entity, but takes a closer look at how asylum accommodation shapes asylum seekers' and local residents' everyday contact and interaction and how both groups actively shape and change these spaces (see chapters two and four). By including an analysis of the media representation of the GHC, the second chapter also demonstrates the relationality between asylum accommodation as lived space and a conceived space, highlighting how asylum centres influence everyday interaction through the way they are imagined and portrayed in the media. A relational approach to asylum accommodation also makes visible how asylum seekers are active agents in making and re-making urban spaces by appropriating, using and re-constructing material and immaterial infrastructures of the city (see chapter five).

Relationality is also present within the implicit epistemological orientations informing this work. This research is based on a feminist relational epistemology, which means that phenomena such as nature or culture, male or female, cannot be known in-themselves, but only exist through their interrelations (Dixon & Jones, 2006). A feminist relational epistemology means to view identity and difference not as a natural given, but as relationally constructed. In this research, being an 'asylum seeker' is therefore viewed as a social construction, continuously made and remade through different political, administrative or social framings which give this category meaning. An essential part of these different ways of framing asylum seekers is the spatial construction of their subjectivity, that is, how subjectivity and difference are constructed in and through spaces (Probyn, 2003). The focus hence lies not on collecting and enumerating statistical characteristics adhering to the category 'asylum seekers', but on the 'difference producing mechanisms' that render asylum seekers knowable (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992).

Lastly, relational thinking is also an ethical and moral orientation in geography, calling into question how we relate towards distant strangers (Darling, 2009). Bounded thinking creates the impression that our moral boundaries stop at our community's or nations borders, while relational thinking emphasizes the connections we have with distant others (Massey, 2004). This thesis employs the concept of (un)familiarity as it incorporates the dimension of social proximity or distance, capturing that we can feel both close or distant to those that are in spatial proximity. The relational approach

implicated in the concept of unfamiliarity thus calls into question our moral relations to 'strangers in our midst', it questions relations of indifference and estrangement by illuminating the connections that already exist and enter into the production of 'us' and 'them' relations. As individuals living in affluent countries, we are becoming more aware of how our actions impact those in less affluent countries and that our actions here impact people at a distance. What is not quite as widely observed is how indifference towards different others is created in spatial proximity, that indifference towards the suffering of asylum seekers is not a product of who 'they' are but of the relations that enter into the production of difference. By focusing on the 'in-between', relationality thus places the focus on how people are made different to 'us' and how a common 'we' is constructed against 'them' through these difference producing mechanisms.

### 1.3.2    Spatial, material and institutional degrees of open- and closedness

The cornerstone of this research is the argument that spatial, material and institutional variation of asylum accommodation create 'uneven geographies of asylum accommodation', contributing to asylum accommodation being perceived and experienced as more 'open' or more closed' by asylum seekers as well as local residents. For instance, an asylum centre may be legally 'open', yet experienced as closed if located in very remote location without access to public transportation. Similarly, a centre might be experienced as closed when located in an urban neighbourhood offering few opportunities for social interaction. Consequentially, the main focus of this thesis is to what extent differences in the 'degrees of openness or closedness' influence familiarization between asylum seekers, local residents and the reception location. While previous research has conceptualized differing degrees of confinement of asylum seekers and refugees in relation to the state and national and European migration regimes, this thesis takes a more everyday approach to the question of open- and closedness to analyse how differing degrees of openness or closedness influence asylum seekers experiences of living in asylum accommodation and familiarization with local residents and the reception location. The notion of 'spatial, material and institutional degrees of open- and closedness' aims to specify how asylum accommodation is turned into an everyday bordering practice, but also that this everyday bordering practice varies across space.

The lived reality of asylum accommodation in Germany is extremely heterogeneous, while the concepts employed to understand these spaces, such as the 'camp' or 'heterotopia', implicitly suggest uniformity and boundedness, spaces which are disconnected from their environment and dominated by external forces of control. What is obscured by this perspective is not only asylum seekers' and refugees' everyday experiences of these spaces, but also the heterogeneity between these spaces and their interrelatedness with the local urban or rural context. The thesis looks at three

dimensions of variation between asylum accommodation, namely the spatial, material and institutional dimension.

First, asylum accommodation varies in its spatial dimension, which includes both the relative and relational spatial dimension explained above. The relative spatial approach to asylum accommodation is operationalized here as differences between more urban and rural settings, differences between neighbourhoods and the built environment and differences in the accessibility of arrival infrastructures. A relational approach to asylum accommodation is understood as variation between asylum accommodation resulting from the specificity of actors continuously shaping and being shaped by these spaces, which not only include asylum seekers, but also local residents, members of staff, volunteers and the general public.

Second, it is not only the location of asylum accommodation that matters, but also its architectural design and built environment, as architecture often functions as a symbolic referent for social difference or status (Lees, 2001; Kraftl, 2010). Geographers have long held that subjectivity and identity is a relational construction in which space plays an important role. Probyn (2003, 294) writes "subjectivity is not a given but rather a process and a production. [...] In other words, the space and place we inhabit produce us. It follows too that how we inhabit those spaces is an interactive affair." Hence, the subjectivity of the 'asylum seeker' is not only produced by media discourse, but also by the material characteristics of the spaces in which they are accommodated. Simultaneously, as the example of the GHC demonstrates, how asylum seekers are perceived is not fixed but - to a certain extent - a process of daily negotiation. This negotiation between categorizing and decategorizing asylum seekers within and through space is most vividly illustrated in chapters two and four. Chapter two portrays how local residents experience the more materially 'open' spaces of the Grandhotel Cosmopolis and how being invited to enter an asylum centre changed local residents' perceptions of safety. Chapter four draws a more elaborate comparison between differences in the material dimension of asylum accommodation, showing how the size of accommodation contributes to asylum seekers' depersonalization.

Lastly, variation in the institutional dimension refers to the national and regional rules and regulations that work in and through asylum accommodation, as well as to its status as an 'institutional' living environment similar to asylums, prisons or other spaces of 'care and control'. As outlined in section two above, this applies especially to Germany, as every federal state has a different set of regulations governing asylum accommodation. These regulations differ also in the extent to which asylum seekers are permitted to live in independent flats or in mandatory collective accommodation. Chapter two and four illustrate local residents' perceptions and experiences of asylum accommodation

as a space of care and control. As asylum seekers were perceived as a population under the care of the state, local residents felt inhibited from approaching and engaging with asylum seekers 'as neighbours'. Chapter five shows the influence of institutional regulations on asylum seekers' ability to access urban arrival infrastructures and how asylum seekers experience different kinds of constraints in their efforts to access infrastructures of information, language-learning and socialization.

The next section discusses the effects of asylum accommodation as an everyday bordering practice and the consequences of variation in spatial, material and institutional degrees of open- and closedness.

### 1.3.3 Between arrival and integration: (Un)familiarity, familiarization and estrangement

Central to this thesis is the argument that differences in the spatial, material and institutional degrees of open- or closedness of asylum accommodation influence the process of familiarization and result in relations of closeness or distance between asylum seekers, local residents and the reception location. The concept of (un)familiarity is suggested as a way to conceptualize how asylum accommodation as an everyday bordering practice influences social relations and asylum seekers' feelings of belonging and future integration. Being or feeling familiar or unfamiliar describes a relational process between self and other and is thereby able to capture how difference is produced within and through socio-spatial relations (Andersen, 2014). (Un)familiarity emphasizes that social relations are not fixed but always in a state of becoming, making it possible to capture how social relations as a whole are transformed by everyday bordering practices such as asylum accommodation. Given its inherent relationality and processual focus, the concept seems more apt than the concept of integration, which is critiqued as being oriented towards a fixed future goal and focused on one societal group only (Bakker et al., 2016; Schinkel, 2018).

The concept of (un)familiarity has its origin in border and tourism studies and is employed to explain both the reasons for and experiences of cross-border mobility, whether for the purpose of tourism, consumption or labour mobility (Spierings & van der Velde, 2008). In tourism studies, familiarity in the form of knowledge or personal experience with a travel destination is an important factor explaining how tourists perceive a destination, the so-called destination image, and the likelihood that tourists will visit a destination (Baloglu, 2001; Prentice, 2004). Border and tourism studies specify several dimensions which influence being or feeling familiar with someone or something; this thesis draws on three dimensions which are experience, knowledge, social distance. The dimension of experience relates to both individual and collective experiences of difference. Individually, people can both have personal experiences of

being regarded as 'different' as well as of being exposed to what is held to be 'different' (Spierings & van der Velde, 2008; Szytniewski & Spierings, 2014). Collectively, cities vary not only in their level of diversity, but also in their historical experiences with minority groups (Robinson, 2010). Augsburg, the city in which the two case studies are located, is a case in point, being the city with the highest percentage of inhabitants with international history[2] in Germany. Equally important for the development of close relations with someone or some place is the dimension of knowledge, made up of both direct and indirect sources of information. While direct sources of information are personal experience, indirect sources of information are family and friends, the media or governmental or non-governmental organizations (Szytniewski & Spierings, 2014). Chapters two and four demonstrate the importance of local residents' sources of knowledge on asylum seekers and asylum accommodation and how a lack of specific localized information contributes to feelings of discomfort.

Familiarity with someone or someplace does not only relate to the personal experience or knowledge of someone or some place, but can also be expressed as a feeling of closeness or distance, which is expressed by the dimension of social distance. Border and border region studies conceptualize familiarity or unfamiliarity as a feeling which emerges through different kinds of bordering processes. Andersen (2014, 331) writes that the concept of (un)familiarity reflect "the political core to bordering processes", as it is related to the construction of the self and other and how these are relationally constructed through different narratives. The author further emphasizes that it is "not the other who generates unfamiliarity [...] Rather, it is in the confrontation itself that unfamiliarity arises" (ibid). This links back to the discussion on relationality in section 3.1, as it emphasizes that it is not 'the other' who is different, but that feelings of sameness or difference emerge through encounters between people or between people and places. The question is therefore not 'who' is strange or unfamiliar, but how and where 'strange(r)ness' occurs. More, Ahmed (2000, 12) alerts us to the fact that the stranger is not unfamiliar, but already familiar, as the stranger is someone we recognize "as not belonging, as being out of place". Given Ahmed's conceptualization as the stranger being someone that is already familiar, this thesis avoids speaking of the stranger as someone that is 'unfamiliar', but rather employs the concept of 'estrangement' to refer to a social and political process through which difference is produced. The following section gives a short summary of asylum seeker reception and accommodation in Germany.

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2    The term 'inhabitants with international history' is proposed as an alternative to the statistical category of 'inhabitants with migratory background' which has been critiqued for contributing to the discrimination of minority groups and for misrepresenting German citizens with foreign born parents or grandparents as immigrants (NdM 2022; Mediendienst Integration 2020).

## 1.4 Asylum seeker reception and accommodation in Germany

The system of reception and accommodation of asylum seekers in Germany is characterized by Germany's federal system, according to which all competencies that are not explicitly defined to be national responsibility are the task of federal states. While the national government provides the overall legal framework on matters of asylum, including the type and amount of material benefits, the sixteen federal states are tasked with the reception and accommodation of asylum seekers (Leptien, 2013). A consequence of this division in responsibilities between the national, federal and local level is that reception conditions vary widely between and even within federal states, with some federal states interpreting the asylum seekers benefits act (ASBA) from a liberal welfare state perspective, resulting in overall better living conditions for asylum seekers, while other federal states interpret the ASBA from a restrictive and regulatory perspective, resulting in lowered and more restrictive living conditions (Schammann, 2015a). Most federal states delegate implementation of the ASBA to the next lower administrative level of municipalities, which are then remunerated by the federal state. Next to their role as the lower administrative authority of a federal state, municipalities also have a right to self-administration, and consequently municipalities have considerable room to manoeuvre regarding the benefits and integration measures they offer to asylum seekers (Aumüller, Daphi, & Biesenkamp, 2015; Schammann, 2015b).

After arrival in Germany, individuals seeking asylum are directed to a local branch of the federal office of migration and refugees (BAMF), which processes their asylum claims on a national level. Asylum seekers' freedom of movement is restricted, meaning that after a claim to asylum has been registered, asylum seekers are dispersed to a first reception facility in one of the sixteen federal states following a distribution key, the 'Königssteiner Schlüssel', which is based on population and tax revenue. According to this distribution key, North Rhine-Westphalia receives the highest percentage of asylum seekers (21%), followed by Bavaria (15%) and Baden-Württemberg (13%). A similar distribution key is applied within federal states. Legally, asylum seekers are required to stay in first reception facilities between a minimum of six weeks and a maximum of six months and are not allowed to leave the district in which the local branch of the BAMF is located. Following the coalition agreement of 2018, changes were made regarding asylum seekers' dispersal to secondary reception facilities. Before 2018, asylum seekers were dispersed to a second reception facility after the initial stay in a first reception centre. Since 2018, asylum seekers are required to stay in a so-called 'AnkER' facility for up to eighteen months. The official goal of these facilities is to accelerate procedures and increase the efficiency in the 'voluntary' return and deportation of asylum seekers;

a direct result of the coalition agreement's stated goal to further 'regulate and limit migration' (Schader et al., 2018).

Asylum seekers material living conditions are a key instrument within German asylum policy, as the lowering of asylum seekers' living standards is used to curb the number of asylum seekers as well as to fend off public perceptions of the abuse of asylum. In 1993, the 'Asylum Seekers Benefits Act' (ASBA) was passed, which regulates both asylum accommodation and financial benefits for asylum seekers and separates asylum seekers' welfare provisions from those of the general population (Müller, 2010). The benefits provided to asylum seekers are paid either in cash or in kind and are supposed to cover basic needs, including food, accommodation, heating, clothing, personal hygiene and consumer goods, as well as personal needs, including public transportation and mobile phones. The discretionary powers of both federal states and municipalities regarding the payment of benefits in cash or in kind further contributes to the variation in reception conditions (Beinhorn et al., 2019; Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik, 2021). In the years between 1992 and 2015, asylum seekers' benefits were not adjusted and remained about 35% lower than for German citizens receiving social benefits (Beinhorn et al., 2019). In 2016 the benefit rates were adjusted, yet the adjustment resulted in a net reduction of benefits, as costs for entertainment, leisure and culture were excluded. Moreover, a differentiation was made between asylum seekers living in first reception facilities and those in follow up accommodation; while the former receive benefits in kind, asylum seekers living outside of first reception facilities receive cash payments. After a period of up to 18 months, asylum seekers can apply for receiving regular social benefits (Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik, 2021).

Collective forms of asylum accommodation are still the dominant form of housing for asylum seekers during their asylum application. However, the so-called 'Gemeinschaftsunterkunft' (GU), translating as 'community accommodation', is not legally mandatory according to the ASBA but only recommended. Federal law does not specify any minimum accommodation requirements; several federal states have issued their own mandatory minimum requirements, including Baden Wurttemberg, Berlin or Thuringia, while other federal states only issued recommendations, such as Bavaria, or have no minimum accommodation requirements. The presence or absence of minimum standards in federal state law does not automatically guarantee higher living standards, as minimum standards are often understood as general guidelines and not 'minimum' requirements and are insufficiently monitored (Aumüller et al., 2015). More, since the increase in asylum applications in 2015, many federal states have suspended any minimum requirements or monitoring activities they did have. It is for this reason that Elle & Hess (2017, 8) conclude that German federal asylum law makes visible not only that 'asylum seekers are treated as objects to be accommodated,

but also that humane accommodation is not the focus of German asylum and reception policy'. Municipalities across Germany have issued their own minimum requirements and reception guidelines to compensate for the lack of national and regional standards, yet thereby further exacerbate the unevenness of reception and accommodation conditions across Germany.

## 1.5  Arriving in Augsburg: Research area and case studies

The research area is the city of Augsburg, a middle-sized city of nearly 300.000 inhabitants in the federal state of Bavaria in the south of Germany. Augsburg is the second oldest city of Germany, founded around 15 B.C by the Romans. In its more recent history, Augsburg became a popular destination for labour migrants from Turkey, Greece and Italy between the 1960s and the 1980s (Haus der Bayerischen Geschichte, 2019). Statistically speaking, nearly 46% of its inhabitants have a 'migratory background'[3], which includes naturalized foreign nationals, ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe and children of foreign nationals (Augsburg, 2017). The high presence of 'inhabitants with international history', a term that is said to be less stigmatizing (NDM, 2022), makes cultural, ethnic and religious diversity a feature of everyday life. Asylum seekers are accommodated in four different types of asylum accommodation in Augsburg, including state-administered AnkER-centres and follow-up collective asylum centres (Ger. 'Gemeinschaftsunterkunft' or 'GU'), municipally administered smaller housing units and several facilities for unaccompanied minors. Around 2000 asylum seekers are accommodated in Augsburg in eleven state-administered collective asylum centres and 53 smaller decentralized municipal units (Stadt Augsburg, 2020).

Asylum accommodation also differs within the city of Augsburg due to the division between accommodation administered by the federal state of Bavaria and accommodation administered directly by the city of Augsburg. Following the rapid increase of asylum applications in 2015, the municipality was tasked by the district administration with accommodating asylum seekers, which is referred to as 'decentralised accommodation'. Whereas the larger GU's are administered by federal state authorities, these smaller, decentralised units are administered directly by the municipality, which therefore could impose certain minimum requirements for these units. The city administration required these smaller units to be dispersed across all city districts and that buildings should not accommodate more than 90 people, leading to more than 50 small units dispersed over the whole city. The five main countries of origin of asylum seekers living

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3    See footnote 2.

in state-administered GU's are Nigeria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Eritrea and Somalia (Stadt Augsburg, 2020).

The research focuses on two state-administered collective asylum centres in the city of Augsburg (see figures 1 and 2). The first case study is the 'Grandhotel Cosmopolis' (hereafter GHC), known in administrative terms as 'GU 15'. The selection of this case study is based on the uniqueness of its concept, which combines asylum accommodation with a tourist hotel, spaces for artists, a café and a restaurant. The GHC dates back to 2011, when a group of artists and activists came up with the original concept of a 'social sculpture in the heart of Augsburg' (Heber et al., 2011). Although widely heralded as a model 'integration' project, the GHC defines itself first and foremost as an art project combining Joseph Beuys' concept of the social sculpture with the image of the 'grandhotels' of the turn of the 20th century. The GHC aims to provide a space that facilitates encounters between 'guests with' or 'without asylum', "the Grandhotel Cosmopolis is a concrete utopia – realizing a cosmopolitan everyday culture without limits where refugees, travellers, guests, artists and neighbours meet and are welcome" (Grandhotel Cosmopolis, 2014). The building in which the GHC is located is a former elderly care home, run by a protestant welfare organization, which stood empty for several years. Built in the 1950s, the building did not meet modern care home standards any longer in the early 2000s and was abandoned. Over the course of two years, artists, activists and volunteers renovated the building, gave public tours and organized events. The first group of asylum seekers arrived in August 2013, in October 2013 the GHC opened for hotel guests. The building accommodates 56 asylum seekers, 44 hotel guests and 18 artist studios (Grandhotel Cosmopolis, 2018). Similar to other 'GUs', asylum seekers' living quarters are facilitated and maintained by the district administration.
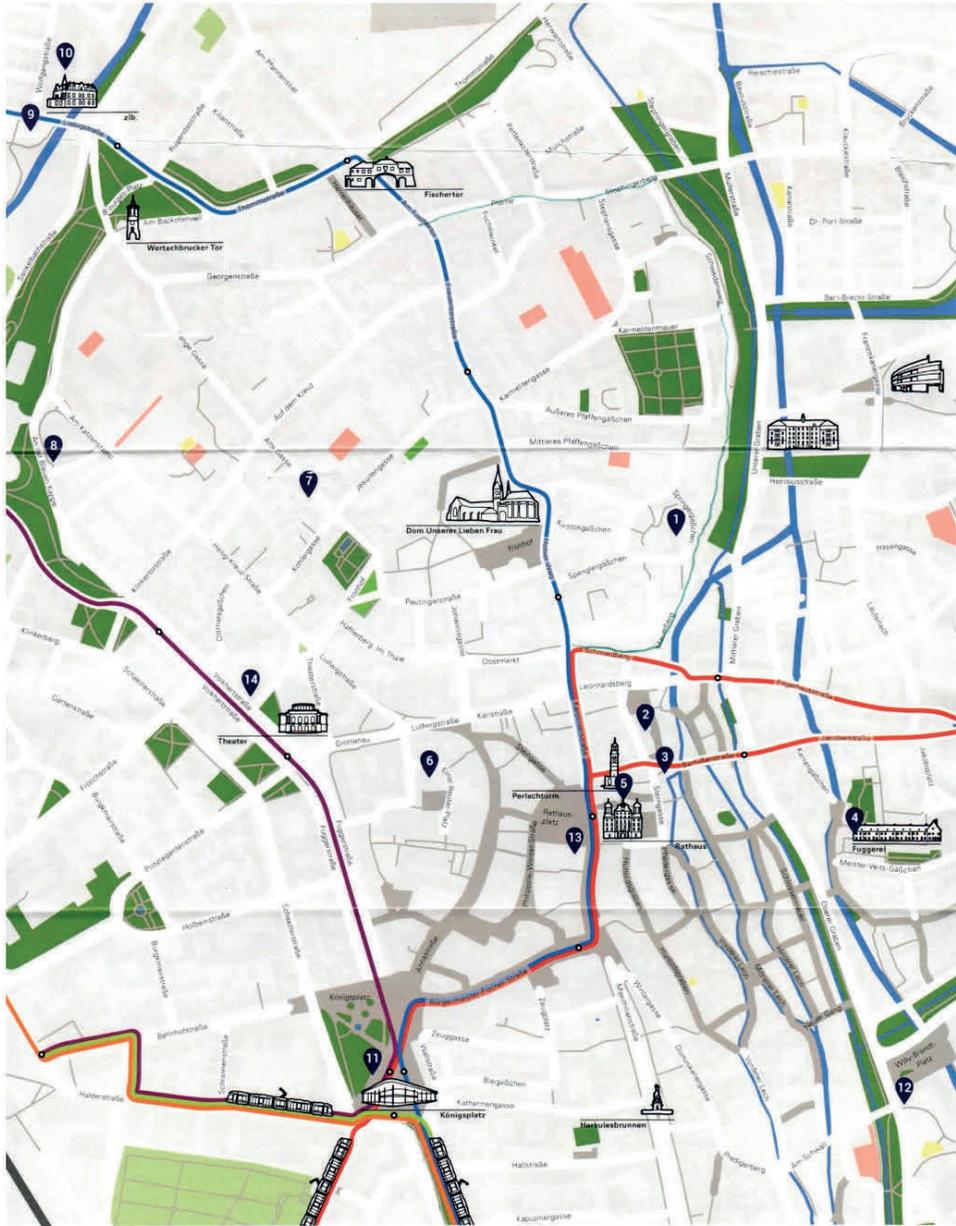
**Figure 1** Map of the inner-city of Augsburg made for the 'welcome tour' initiative in 2016. The tour passed the following stations: (1) The GHC (2) social welfare office (3) the 'Kresslessmühle', a theatre and café (4) the 'Fuggerei', "the World's oldest social housing project" (5) the town hall (6) central library (7) café 'Neruda' (8) foreigner's office (9) employment agency (10) NGO Tür an Tür (11) Königsplatz (12) community college (13) main tourist office (14) German association for child protection (Source: Farhad Sidiqi, 2017)

**Figure 2** Map made by a volunteer initiative connected to GUO for its residents, displaying shopping facilities and services nearby. The area is located north-west of the inner-city (see point 10 in figure 1) (Source: Otto2 – Unterstützerinnenkreis der Gemeinschaftsunterkunft Ottostraße, 2015)

The second case study is a larger, state-administered collective accommodation centre in Augsburg, known as 'Gemeinschaftsunterkunft Ottostraße' (hereafter GUO). The centre is located in a former manufacturing plant for hot air balloons, the building dating back to the 1920s. In 2012 the building was acquired by the local district administration, who transformed it into accommodation for asylum seekers who have left first reception facilities. The building can accommodate up to 160 asylum seekers, including disabled refugees, as it has barrier free entrances and bathrooms. Families with children are accommodated on the ground floor, families and single travelling women on the second floor and single travelling men on the second floor. Next to the centre administrator and a janitor, two welfare organizations share an office in the building, with a social worker present during weekdays. To help curb the initial protest against the facility, close ties with a local NGO were established who initiated a volunteer circle of neighbourhood residents who help with homework and organize events (see chapter four). The building is located in a centrally located, primarily working class neighbourhood, with a high number of apartment buildings owned by building cooperatives dating back to the 1920s. The following section gives a brief overview of the research approach, including data collection methods and analysis.

# 1.6    Research approach

This research employed a qualitative case study design comparing two inner-city asylum centres in Augsburg, Germany. A qualitative approach was chosen as this type of research focuses on people's experiences, perceptions and behaviours. The goal of a qualitative approach is explore the different facets of a phenomenon by examining how individuals or groups experience it; in this sense it is less about establishing causal relationships but about explaining how a given phenomenon is perceived or experienced (Hay, 2010). In order to understand how and to what extent familiarization takes place between asylum seekers and local residents it is necessary to know how and where contact takes place in everyday settings, what people know about each other and how they perceive each other. Another reason to conduct a qualitative small-scale study into people's everyday experiences and perceptions in and around asylum accommodation is that this approach helps paint a more nuanced picture of a heavily contested societal phenomenon and sheds light onto underlying factors which offer new ways of understanding people's reactions.

The research opted for a qualitative comparative case study approach as this approach helps reveal and compare the dynamics within single settings. According to Yin (2009, 13), a case study is an "empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident". Using a case study approach is then particularly applicable for studying asylum seekers' and local residents' experiences and perceptions of everyday social interaction in and around asylum accommodation and the wider local context, as the aim of this research is to determine how and in which ways contextual factors such as an urban location influence everyday interaction. Far more than merely describing a situation, case studies help establish causal relationships between factors, thereby explaining both the 'how' and 'why' of the phenomenon in question (Gray, 2018). This research therefore compared two inner-city asylum centres in the city of Augsburg, Germany, which were selected on the basis of being opposites of each other in terms of their material and institutional characteristics while seeking to minimize the amount and variation of contextual factors by choosing cases that were located in the same city. The comparative approach not only led to insights into how a more 'open' and a more 'closed' asylum centre influences familiarization between asylum seekers, local residents and the reception location, but it also helped develop and refine the concept of spatial, material and institutional degrees of open- and closedness.

## 1.6.1    Data collection methods

The main methods used in this research were semi-structured interviews and participant observation. The research also made use of media analysis and walk-along interviews

with asylum seekers. The combination of methods helped corroborate results; table 1 provides an overview of the different research methods that were employed and how they are connected to the individual chapters of the thesis. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as this method gave insight into the diversity of opinions, beliefs and experiences of asylum seekers and local residents. Semi-structured interviews follow an interview guide, but is flexible enough to leave room for additional questions on topics that come up during the interview (Hay, 2010). Given the sensitivity of the topic, choosing semi-structured interviews as one of the main methods also helped respondents voice their opinion on the matter and helped to provide more nuanced explanations.

| Chapter | Case(s) | Study population | Methods | Primary Data |
|---------|---------|------------------|---------|--------------|
| 2 | GHC | Local residents | semi-structured interviews; participant observation; media analysis | National & local news items; interviews data local residents |
| 4 | GHC & GUO | Asylum seekers; Local residents | semi-structured interviews; participant observation; | Interview data asylum seekers, local residents, staff, volunteers |
| 5 | GHC & GUO | Asylum seekers | semi-structured interviews; participant observation; walking interviews | Interview data asylum seekers |
| 6 | GHC | Researcher; Asylum seekers | semi-structured interviews; participant observation; | Interview data asylum seekers; fieldnotes |

**Table 1** Research methods and data per chapter

A second important method for this research was participant observation, as this method provided complementary evidence on the two asylum centres, the neighbourhood and the nature of social interaction in and around the two centres. During the time of fieldwork, I volunteered in the café of the first case study, as this was a good space to observe daily interactions between members of staff, volunteers, asylum seekers, hotel guests and local residents. Participant observation proved to be more difficult in the second case study, as there were no comparable semi-public settings to 'hang out' close to the asylum centre. To compensate for this, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the centre administrator, a social worker and several other representatives of neighbourhood organizations. These interviews helped provide additional information on the overall character of the neighbourhood, its residents and interaction with residents of the asylum centre. Upon invitation by volunteers, I also took part in several homework tutoring sessions, which provided a source of secondary data on the general atmosphere of the centre and interactions between volunteers and centre residents.

The research also employed two complementary methods used during the course of research. The first of these was the walking interview. In contrast to regular 'sedentary'

interviews, the walking or 'go-along' interview is conducted by accompanying respondents in their 'natural' environments. Thereby, insights can be gained on how individuals respond to and interact with their social and physical environment (Kusenbach, 2003). In this research, five walking interviews with asylum seekers were conducted in the city of Augsburg, exploring the meaning of public and semi-public spaces of the city for everyday social interaction with other residents of the city. The second complementary method was a media analysis of national and local news media reporting on the first case study. Given the prominence of the project, this method gave insight into not only the dominant frames used for this so-called exemplary project, but also how national and local news media differed in their reporting and how this type of 'conceived space' contrasted with local residents experience of the project.

### 1.6.2 Data collection process and analysis

Data was collected between September 2016 and November 2017. The study population of this research consists of local neighbourhood residents living in close proximity to and of asylum seekers accommodated in one of the two case studies. In the context of this research, local residents is defined as residents of the neighbourhood in which the centre is located, with the maximum distance to the centre being a five minute walking distance. The study population of local residents was also limited by the physical layout of the two neighbourhoods (see figure 1). 'Asylum seekers' in this research are current or former residents of one of the two case studies who are in the process of applying for asylum or who have already received or been denied a refugee status. The heterogeneity of both local residents and asylum seekers in terms of age, gender, country of origin and length of residence in the centre or neighbourhood allows for a range of experiences and opinions. Moreover, the research opted for heterogeneity in terms of asylum seekers' ethnic backgrounds, which was motivated by Dahinden's (2016) argument that while ethnicity can be an important social category, it should not a priori be assumed to be the key determinant of difference.

Local residents were recruited by distributing leaflets in the neighbourhoods in which the two case studies were located, the aim of which was also to inform neighbourhood residents about the research. In addition, local residents were recruited through snowballing and by directly approaching individuals in the vicinity of both centres, the latter proving to be the most successful recruitment strategy. Asylum seekers accommodated in the GHC were recruited by directly approaching them in the semi-public spaces of the building, while only few were recruited through snowballing or via gatekeepers who were themselves residents of the GHC. Asylum seekers living in GUO were recruited mostly through gatekeepers, which were members of the neighbourhood support group or via individuals who were themselves refugees and were friends with several residents of the centre. Chapter six of this thesis reflects on the issue of power-

relations and positionality as a researcher and highlights that research with vulnerable groups such as asylum seekers remains ethically challenging and involves certain risks due to the relatively precarious situation of asylum seekers (Hugman, Pittaway, & Bartolomei, 2011; Frazier, 2020).

During the course of fieldwork, a total of thirty-one semi-structured interviews with local residents of both cases were conducted. The interviews were held in German in a location of the respondent's choice and lasted between half an hour and one and a half hours. Especially in the second case it was evident that several local residents were hesitant about being interviewed due to the sensitive and potentially divisive nature of the topic. Still, the interviews that were obtained nevertheless illustrate a variety of opinions on the research topic. Local residents were asked about their relationship with their neighbours and their neighbourhood in general, their opinions of and experiences with the nearby asylum centre and their contact and interaction with resident asylum seekers. Starting with general questions on their interactions with their immediate 'next door' neighbours and the neighbourhood in general provided important background information to assess their relationship with the asylum centre and its residents. As for asylum seekers, a total of thirty interviews were conducted in a setting of their choice, which was either their room or a nearby café. Asylum seekers living in one of the two cases were asked about the structure of their daily lives, their experiences of living in asylum accommodation and their contact and interaction with neighbourhood residents and other residents of the city. Most interviews with asylum seekers were conducted in either English or German, a translator was used only in a few cases. After gaining consent from research participants the interviews were recorded, transcribed an anonymized.

All obtained data was analysed in MAXQDA following a grounded theory approach. According to Charmaz (2014, 1), grounded theory is not so much a 'theory' but rather a set of "systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analysing qualitative data to construct theories from the data themselves". Grounded theory was chosen as an analytic approach for this research as it is particularly well suited for studying individual motivations, experiences and behaviour while minimizing pre-conceived deductive assumptions. In short, grounded theory helps provide an in-depth understanding of a research setting based on what is occurring and on the data that is gathered. The analytical approach employed in this research is nevertheless an interplay between inductive and deductive analytic strategies. These characteristics of grounded theory make it especially useful for analysing 'controversial' themes, as its grounded approach to analysis brings forth new explanations and findings which help paint a more nuanced picture of a phenomenon. The data was analysed by developing both inductive and deductive codes, which later developed into broader concepts. These

concepts were both inductive and deductive in nature; an example of inductive codes and subcodes pertaining to local residents are 'feelings towards asylum seekers (code)/ trying to empathize (subcode)', while an example of a deductive code and subcode are 'spatial dimension/ rural vs. urban location'. The analytic process occurred in several cycles and drew upon several analytical techniques, such as 'thick description' (Geertz, 1977) of both individual respondents' interviews as well as of the codes and subcodes themselves.

## 1.7    Outline of thesis

The thesis consists of seven chapters, four of which have been published or are at the time of writing under review in an academic journal. Chapter six is published in peer-reviewed edited book. As these chapters first appeared independently of each other, there is some overlap in the background and methods section.

Chapters two to five focus on different aspects of the main research question. The *second chapter* takes the reader to the place 'where it all began': The Grandhotel Cosmopolis. The chapter compares and contrasts the national and local media representation of the GHC with local residents' direct experiences of the project. It also sets the scene for *chapter three*, which presents the theoretical framework and main argument of the thesis by introducing the notion of spatial, material and institutional degrees of open- and closedness and its possible effects on familiarization between asylum seekers and local residents. *Chapter four* compares both case studies in how their material and institutional characteristics influence everyday contact and interaction between asylum seekers living in the two centres and neighbouring residents. The chapter counters the argument that lower standards of asylum accommodation provide comfort to local residents, arguing instead that asylum accommodation contributes to discomfort for all parties involved. *Chapter five* delves deeper into the influence of spatial openness of asylum accommodation on familiarization between asylum seekers and the reception location. The chapter argues that asylum seekers' ability to arrive and familiarize with the reception location is dependent upon the extent to which asylum seekers have access to informational, language-learning and social infrastructures of the city. *Chapter six* is a methodological and ethical reflection on the research process and addresses the problem of over-research, an issue which I came across while doing fieldwork in the GHC. The chapter discusses how over-research influenced accessibility, gate-keeping and trust 'in the field'. These six chapters are followed by a *conclusion* which summarizes, discusses and reflects upon the main findings and contributions of this thesis and gives recommendations for future research and policy making.

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# CHAPTER 2

## The Grandhotel Cosmopolis – a concrete utopia? Reflections on the mediated and lived geographies of asylum accommodation.

## 2.1 Abstract

This paper argues that perceptions towards asylum seekers are shaped by both media representation as well as lived experiences in and around asylum accommodation. Drawing on Lefebvre's spatial triad, the paper aims at disentangling the conceived, perceived and lived spaces of asylum accommodation in order to understand asylum accommodation as a space that is produced and re-produced in everyday life. The paper discusses the case of the Grandhotel Cosmopolis (GHC), a prominent example of local innovation in asylum accommodation located in southern Germany. It compares and contrasts the GHC' media representation in national and local news media with local residents' evaluation and direct experiences with this project and its effects on how asylum seekers are perceived. The results of the media analysis highlight a difference between a national 'utopian' framing and a local 'experiment' framing of the GHC. Local residents' direct experiences proved influential in their evaluation of the project, yet could not overrule dominant media representations of asylum seekers. The paper concludes by suggesting that the GHC' relative openness produces a space which allows for contact and familiarization between local residents and asylum seekers, yet that dominant framings of asylum seekers as criminals or victims also contributed to a perceived closedness of its space and discouraged contact and familiarization.

## 2.2  Introduction

> *"The Grandhotel Cosmopolis is a concrete utopia – realizing a
> cosmopolitan everyday culture without limits where refugees, travellers,
> guests, artists and neighbours meet and are welcome."*
> (Grandhotel Cosmopolis, 2014, p. 2).

The Grandhotel Cosmopolis (GHC) opened its doors in 2013 and is a combination of hotel, asylum centre, café, restaurant and artistic space located in the inner-city of Augsburg, Germany. What is unique about the project is that it plays with the image of the grand hotels popular during the turn of the twentieth century, spaces that were associated with comfort and high standards for its guests. By housing asylum seekers in a more open way, the project aims "to take a stance against an institution that is seen as a burden" (Heber et al., 2011).  It is not only heralded as unique, it is also one of the most famous examples of local innovation in asylum seeker accommodation in Germany and was featured in all major German newspapers and national television programs. In short, the GHC exists not only as a 'real' space, but just as much a mediated and mental space. The case studies of innovation in asylum seeker reception presented in this special issue demonstrate that the GHC is only one among many alternative practices emerging at the local level. Across Europe, civil society organizations and actors are at the forefront of local innovation (Ambrosini & Boccagni, 2015), seeking to provide higher quality living standards than state or for-profit asylum accommodation (Rosenberger & König, 2011) and aim to combat prejudice against asylum seekers by providing higher standards and spaces for contact and familiarization.

Media representation of asylum seekers is held to be a key factor regarding local residents' reactions towards asylum accommodation. A recent review of European media discourse on immigration finds that "while migrant groups are generally underrepresented, when they are present in the media, they are often framed as either economic, cultural, or criminal threats and thus covered in a highly unfavourable way" (Eberl et al., 2018, p. 217). Only few studies focus on media representation of asylum accommodation; among these, Hubbard (2005) and Garner (2013) identified how opponents of asylum accommodation construct rural areas as exclusively white spaces within local media, while portraying asylum seekers as deviant and 'non-belonging'. This lack of attention on how asylum seeker and refugee accommodation is represented in the media is surprising, as space is key to constructions of the self and the other and associated processes of categorization and de-categorization (Dixon, 1997; Probyn, 2003). This article addresses the question of how media representation of a specific example of local innovation in asylum accommodation compares and contrasts with local residents' perceptions and direct experiences and to what extent it contributes to contact and familiarization.

Given that the central concern of this paper is local residents' perceptions of and lived experiences with asylum accommodation, asylum seekers' experiences of the GHC are featured in an upcoming publication. The paper is organized as follows: After situating the paper within debates on asylum seekers' media representation, the paper provides an overview of the methodological approach and a short description of the GHC and the German asylum system. The following three sections discuss the empirical findings, starting with the media analysis which highlights a contrast between a national utopian framing, a local experiment framing of the GHC and the project's self-description as a concrete utopia. This is followed by a discussion on how media representation compares and contrasts with local residents' knowledge and direct experiences of the GHC. Thereafter, the paper discusses the role of openness and closedness of asylum accommodation and how this can be read as a social and physical production of space which helps shift media representation in favour of individual, direct experiences. The conclusion reflects on the interrelatedness of conceived, perceived and lived spaces of asylum and their implications for innovation and familiarization at a local level.

## 2.3 The mediated and lived geographies of asylum accommodation

Several studies on local residents' reactions towards asylum seeker reception and accommodation seek to explain the individual or contextual factors behind objections. Using quantitative approaches, these studies found that socio-demographic factors such as level of education or income play an important role in shaping perceptions and attitudes (Bolt & Wetsteijn, 2018; Lubbers et al., 2006; Zorlu, 2017). There is also significant spatial variation in attitudes which are found to differ between urban and rural areas and even between neighbourhoods (Crawley et al., 2019; Friedrichs et al., 2019; Gregurović et al., 2019). An important contribution is Lubbers et al.'s (2006) study, as they show that attitudes towards asylum accommodation also vary between the size of centres. Most of these studies find a positive correlation between personal contacts with asylum seekers and positive attitudes, thereby supporting the so-called 'contact hypothesis' (Allport, 1954). However, these studies provide only limited insight into the kinds of spatial and place-based factors shaping perceptions and attitudes.

Qualitative studies on locals' reactions towards asylum accommodation provide more nuanced insight into the formation of attitudes, showing how political, socio-economic and historical place-based factors influence reactions towards asylum seekers (Bock, 2018). With regard to the temporal dimension, Bygnes (2019) studied attitudes towards the establishment of asylum accommodation in Norway and found changes in local residents' attitudes before and after the establishment of the centres. The author

attributes these mood changes to increased physical and geographical proximity to asylum seekers and asylum accommodation. The study also finds that contact and inter-personal interaction can help to correct dominant framings of asylum seekers in the media, yet that these local encounters have little effect on general perceptions towards migration on the national level. With regard to the spreading of information, Blommaert et al (2003) posits that spatial proximity to asylum accommodation affects the quality of shared information, as local residents can draw on direct experience. The authors explain that "translocal information is dominant prior to the establishing of the centre; but as soon as the centre is established a local community [...] emerge(s) which can draw upon locally constructed, experiential (direct or derived) information" (ibid, 2003, p. 325). What these qualitative studies highlight is that attitudes towards asylum accommodation have to be understood in relation to localized, direct experiences and not solely as a product of media representation.

In order to disentangle the imagined and mediatized spaces of asylum accommodation from those that are directly perceived and experienced in everyday life, this paper draws on the work of Lefebvre (1991). In what he terms the 'spatial triad', Lefebvre distinguishes between '*representations of space'* or 'conceived' space, *'representational space'* or 'lived' space and *'spatial practices'* or 'perceived space'. Conceived spaces may be constructed by media images and public discourse and enter individuals' mental spaces, while lived space describes the space of everyday experience and perceptions (Lefebvre, 1991). Spatial practices are "the physical city, its maintenance, redevelopment and the daily routines of everyday life" (Leary, 2009, p. 196). The value of taking a Lefebvrian approach for this case study lies within the emphasis on the *production of space* which turns asylum accommodation into a space that is physically and socially produced and makes societal relations within this process visible that would otherwise remain hidden (see also Conlon, 2011; Hartmann, 2017; McAllister, 2015; Vuolteenaho & Lyytinen, 2018).

Media discourse can be seen as a part of conceived space, as it frames how we perceive spaces associated 'different' others, such as asylum accommodation. Asylum seekers' media representation exhibits several commonalities across national contexts. One recurring finding is the racialization of asylum seekers in media discourse, frequently falling within a villain, victim or humanitarian frame (Crawley et al., 2016; Lynn & Lea, 2003; Pickering, 2001). Framing, according to Entman (1993, p. 52), means "to select some aspects of a perceived reality and to make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation". Chouliaraki and Zaborowski (2017) argue that these frames not only position asylum seekers as ambiguous figures, but also contribute to journalistic practices of symbolic bordering which strengthen

both misrecognition and in- or exclusion of asylum seekers. Their study uncovered a strict hierarchy of voice in which politicians' and elite voices were privileged above those of ordinary citizens or migrants' voices and that symbolic bordering is achieved through silencing, collectivization and decontextualization of refugees' voices. Still, media representation of asylum seekers and refugees is far from uniform, as differences have been found for the type of media, between public and commercial media and between national and local news media (D'Haenens et al., 2019; De Coninck et al., 2019). Finney and Robinson (2008) highlight how local news production on asylum and dispersal policy is influenced both by local power structures as well as local place identity and may not conform with national news media.

Important for the overall line of reasoning of this paper is that media discourse is only one among many sources of knowledge creating familiarity with someone or something. Crucially, familiarization and estrangement take place in the everyday, lived spaces of the city and create feelings of closeness or distance between people (Blokland & Nast, 2014; Karakayali, 2009; Koefoed & Simonsen, 2011). Knowledge and direct experience are crucial for familiarization; knowledge is formed by direct sources of information, such as personal experiences, and indirect sources of information, like the media or family and friends. Direct experience consists of collective and individual experiences of difference, aspects of a person's biography and collective or place-based histories of migration (Hickman & Mai, 2015; Phillips & Robinson, 2015; Szytniewski & Spierings, 2014). With regard to the direct experience of encountering strangers, Ahmed (2000) explains that the 'stranger is someone who is *already* known', someone that is then recognized as 'being out of place'. Therefore, strange(r)ness cannot exist outside of encounters with others, but is constructed through them.

Local residents' re-actions towards asylum seeker accommodation are also a question of behaviour and everyday experiences (Blommaert et al., 2003). In this sense, asylum accommodation is more than a material object that is reacted to; asylum accommodation is also a spatial practice that shapes and is shaped by a multitude of local, regional and national actors, by local residents as much as asylum seekers. Perceptions of who does not belong within a spatially demarcated and 'imagined community' contribute to symbolic boundary making processes by enabling or preventing familiarization with 'others' (van Eijk, 2011). Symbolic boundaries between ourselves and others may be unrelated to state bordering practices, yet as borders increasingly move inward into the everyday (Cassidy et al., 2016; Yuval-Davis et al., 2018), symbolic boundaries may lay the groundwork for bordering practices and debates of who rightfully belongs. Asylum accommodation contributes to practices of symbolic bordering by being legally open, yet perceived and experienced as symbolically closed (Zill et al., 2019).

## 2.4   Methods

The methods used for data collection were media analysis and semi-structured interviews with local residents. While media analysis gives insight into the conceived space of asylum accommodation, semi-structured interviews were used to illuminate local residents' perceptions and affective experiences of asylum accommodation in lived space. National and local news media was analysed by using a combination of qualitative content analysis and media frame analysis (Entman, 1993; Hay, 2010; Hodgetts & Chamberlain, 2014). In order to analyse national news reporting, 'Grandhotel Cosmopolis' was used as a search term in the LexisNexis news databank, resulting in 74 national news items containing a reference. Thirteen full-text articles were selected for in-depth analysis that featured the GHC as its main topic. Local news items were taken from the online archive of the 'Augsburger Allgemeine', the only local print newspaper based in Augsburg. 49 articles mentioned the Grandhotel Cosmopolis in the title or subtitle; from these, ten articles were selected that were rich in detail. Both national and local news articles were analysed by using a grid structure, highlighting general themes and changes in themes over time (Hodgetts & Chamberlain, 2014) and coded within MAXQDA.

Semi-structured interviews gave insight into the everyday experiences, opinions and beliefs of local residents. Research participants were recruited by employing a mixture of sampling techniques. About 300 leaflets were distributed by hand into the mailboxes of the neighbourhood surrounding the GHC at the start of the research to inform local residents and recruit research participants. Only one person responded directly to the leaflet, two participants were recruited by using the snowballing method and one male resident was recruited directly in the café of the GHC. The majority of respondents was approached directly in neighbouring streets of the GHC at different times of the day. 14 interviews with local residents were conducted; the interviews were held in German in a setting of the participant's choice and lasted between thirty minutes and one and a half hours. Four interviews were conducted in the homes of participants, another four in the café of the GHC and six in cafés of the neighbourhood. After gaining consent from participants, the interviews were recorded, transcribed and anonymized for the purpose of analysis and coded in MAXQDA.

The sample was diverse in age and gender, ranging from 31 to 65 years and consisted of six women and eight men who lived in the neighbourhood surrounding the GHC, not more than a five minute walking distance away. Interviewees' length of residence in the area varied between several months to more than twenty years. Three interviewees self-identified as having a migratory background; two being from within Europe and one from Latin America. Interviewees' current or past occupations such as architect or teacher in higher education suggest secondary and tertiary levels of education, which

corresponds with the high level of education of the area population and is also reflected in the overall low percentage of unemployed residents in comparison with the city as a whole (2,5% vs 4,2% in 2017) (Augsburg, 2017). None of the interviewees was directly involved as a volunteer within the GHC, only one female resident had participated in a neighbourhood event organized by the GHC. None of the interviewees had reported strong objections towards asylum seekers during the interviews, which is also reflected in the area's voting behaviour in the German National Elections of 2017 (see figure 1). This may be explained by the manner of sampling as well as by the polarized nature of public debate on the topic of asylum seeking during the time of fieldwork.
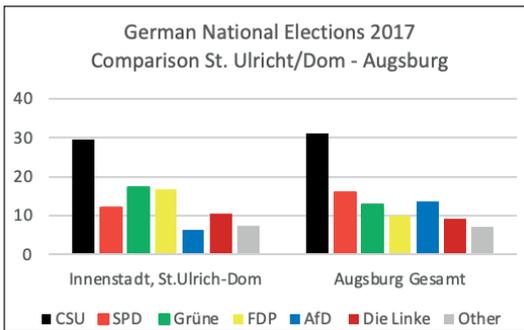
**Figure 1 Voting behaviour of area (inner city district, section 'St.Ulrich/Dom', Ger. 'Innenstadt') in comparison to the total results for Augsburg (Ger. 'Augsburg Gesamt')**

## 2.5    Asylum in Germany and the Grandhotel Cosmopolis

Individuals applying for asylum in Germany are required to stay in reception centers *(Erstaufnahmeeinrichtungen)* for a period of maximum three months, thereafter they are dispersed to collective accommodation *(Gemeinschaftsunterkunft)* in which residence is mandatory during the application process (Müller, 2013). Asylum seekers which have received a negative decision on their application (*Duldung)* are also required to stay in collective accommodation centres (Wendel, 2014). Asylum applications are decided on national level by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees *(BAMF)*, while its sixteen federal states *(Länder)* are given the task of organizing asylum seeker reception and accommodation (Leptien, 2013). Upon arrival, asylum seekers are dispersed to one of the sixteen *Länder,* following a quota based on tax revenue and population *(Königssteiner Schlüssel).* Bavaria receives the second highest percentage of asylum seekers (15%), preceded only by North Rhine-Westphalia (21%). The *Länder* often use a similar dispersal scheme; Bavaria has a fixed quota for the number of asylum seekers dispersed to each of its administrative districts *(Regierungsbezirke, see figure 1)* (Müller, 2013). The administrative district of Swabia is responsible for accommodating asylum

seekers in Augsburg.

Augsburg lies within the state of Bavaria and has a population of nearly 300.000 inhabitants of which 48% have a migratory background[1] (Augsburg, 2017), making religious and ethnic diversity a feature of everyday life. The relatively high ratio of foreign-born residents and residents with foreign-born parents is largely due to its history of being a popular destination for labour migrants from Turkey, Greece and Italy between the 1960s and 1980s (HdBG, 2019). The city has twelve collective accommodation centres that are run by the district administration and house up to 1250 asylum seekers. Their main countries of origin are Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and Nigeria.

The GHC was conceived by two local artists and an architect with previous experience in transforming temporarily empty buildings. The building dates back to the 1950s, built as an elderly care home run by a German protestant welfare organization. Artists and activists transformed the previously abandoned building over the course of one year, during which they gave public tours and organized events. The first group of asylum seekers arrived in August 2013, in October 2013 the GHC opened for hotel guests. The building has room for 56 asylum seekers, 44 hotel guests and 18 artists' studios (Grandhotel Cosmopolis, 2018; Stadt Augsburg, 2019). The original plan of mixing asylum seekers' and hotel rooms was opposed by the local district administration, leading to a separation of the floors of asylum seekers and hotel guests which are connected by a common staircase (see figure 3). The area surrounding the Grandhotel Cosmopolis is part of the inner-city district, with public squares such as the '*Rathausplatz*', and has a religious character as the cathedral *(Dom),* the bishop's residence and church-related care facilities are located there (see figure 2).



**Figure 2 Inner-city location of the GHC and Augsburg's location in Bavaria and Germany**
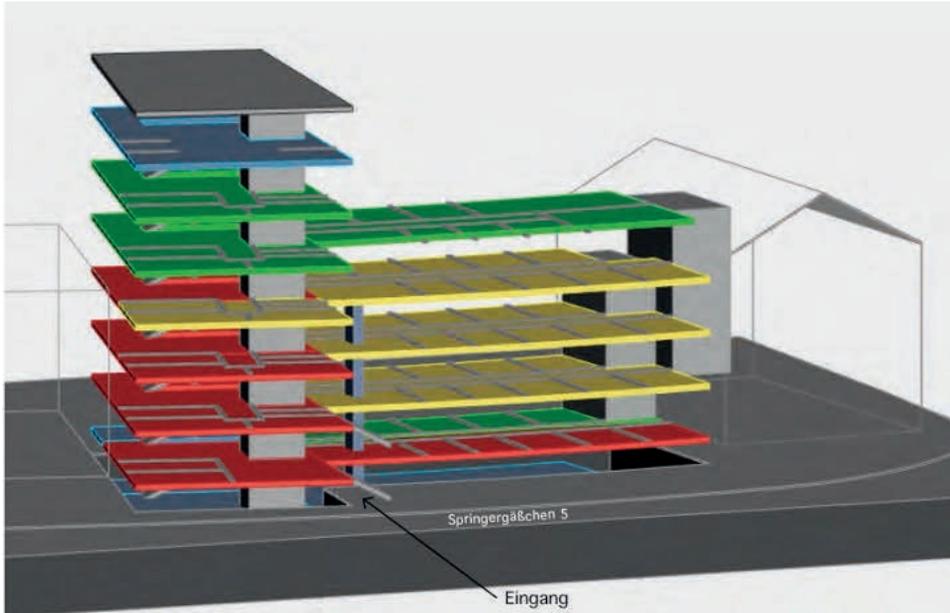
**Figure 3 The internal division of the GHC (red = artists' rooms, yellow = 'hotel with asylum', green = 'hotel without asylum', blue = restaurant and event space (Heber et al., 2011)**

## 2.6 National utopia or local experiment? The Grandhotel Cosmopolis' representation in news media.

Asylum accommodation operates as a conceived space through the networked production and circulation of images within and by the media. Representation, space and place intersect in at least two ways in the case of the GHC: Being the subject of multiple news items, it is a 'place-in-media' (Adams, 2011). Not only is the GHC represented in news media, it also intervenes in and reimagines the conceived spaces of asylum accommodation and its inhabitants: What was an asylum centre has become a 'grandhotel', the asylum seeker a cosmopolitan traveller of the world (Grandhotel Cosmopolis, 2014). National and local news items adopt the GHC's terminology within their reporting, such as 'guests with or without asylum', which can be seen as a successful intervention in dominant framings of asylum seekers. The media analysis also demonstrated that there are significant differences between the framing of the GHC in national and local news items. National news items tend to frame the GHC as a 'utopia', while local news items stress its 'model' or 'experimental' character. This difference in national and local framing is particularly prominent in the longest national feature article, describing the project in terms of a 'utopia' and a 'fairy tale':

*"But is this strange hotel, in which one almost cannot distinguish between guests, artists and refugees, worth more than an applause at an award ceremony? Is it enough to be considered a modern fairy tale?" (DZ, 06.03.2014)*

In the excerpt above, the combination of 'utopia' with 'fairy tale' appears as questioning the feasibility of the project by suggesting that the GHC exists outside of reality, rather than being considered an experiment which could contribute to reforming asylum accommodation. This dualism between 'utopia' and 'reality' is especially visible in the opening sentence of the same feature article, as it suggests a conflict between the Hoteliers, characterized as 'megalomaniacs', and state bureaucracy. This conflict is symbolized by 'two names' for the place; with 'GUXV' being the official state-administrative term for the fifteenth collective accommodation facility (Ger. GU = Gemeinschaftsunterkunft).

*"The place has two names. The first one was invented by megalomaniacs: Grandhotel Cosmopolis. [...] The bureaucrats of the Swabian state administration [...] call the place GU XV." (DZ, 06.03.2014)*

By contrast, local news items also covered how bureaucratic challenges were overcome and how the GHC contributed to a more humane approach to asylum accommodation and the integration of refugees in Augsburg.  One possible explanation for these differences lies in how the selective discussion of topics resonates with the scale and related preferences of its readership; the project's political framing applies more to the national level, while its framing as a space for integration is more salient on the local level, as demonstrated by the following quote:

*"Without the Grandhotel Cosmopolis Augsburg would be missing something important: A bit of humanity [humaneness]. This institution provides refugees with important social contact points, which they would be denied in remote or isolated centres. [...] The makers of the Grandhotel have shown that their ideas are not a pipe dream, but strengthen the 'togetherness' in Augsburg." (AA, 03.11.2018)*

How can we interpret these differences in the GHCs' representation as a utopia, a concrete utopia or an experiment? Thomas More conceived utopia as a place of social harmony and stability. To this end, he not only excluded all potentially disturbing factors such as money, private property or wage labour, but also located utopia on an island which is cut off from the outside world (More, Miller, & Harp, 2014). This definition is different from the GHC' conceptualization of utopia as something that is simultaneously concrete

and at the same time unachievable (Heber et al., 2011). In being in touch with reality, it matches Lefebvre's (2003) conceptualization, as he argues against interpreting utopia as mere fantasy. Contrary to More's vision of utopia as a place of social harmony, the GHC's interpretation of utopia is in touch with what is perceived to be concrete reality, as well as leaves a door open for imagining an alternative future. While the notion of experiment is closer to the idea of a concrete utopia in that its outcome remains undefined, the designation as experiment lacks an orientation towards and a vision of the future. Hence, while locally the project has opened up possibilities for alternative forms of asylum accommodation, national news items suggest that the search for alternatives to the current governance of asylum accommodation are nothing but mere 'fairy-tales'.

It appears therefore as especially puzzling that it was the national and international level from which the GHC gained significant approval in the form of media interest, prizes and visits from politicians. This national and international recognition of the GHC then made headlines in local media reporting, which locally contributed to the GHC's image of being 'unique' in Germany and having nothing in common with 'normal' asylum accommodation. Its 'out-of-the-ordinariness' is symbolized in descriptions of its interior spaces which illustrate two key assumptions: First, the material standards of asylum seekers and hotel guests' rooms are reported to be similar, suggesting a level of equality between asylum seekers and hotel guests which makes *'encounters on eye-level'* possible. More, asylum seekers' rooms are said to contrast with *"the often neglected rooms in asylum centres" (AA, 22.04.2013).* Second, a 'unique mixture' is assumed, where all its residents are physically and symbolically united 'under one roof'. This symbolic unity further contributes to the image of harmonious and equal relations between asylum seekers and other residents, while it also suggests that social distance can be overcome by bringing asylum seekers into close spatial proximity with artists and other 'travellers'.

The media analysis also shows that the GHC had already received national recognition before the first asylum seekers had moved in. This suggests that asylum seekers' lived experiences of the project are considered to be secondary to its unique concept and image. An indication of this is that it was only in 2015, two years after asylum seekers had moved in, that a local news item featured the experiences of an asylum seeker, a Chechen family father living in the GHC and his reasons for seeking asylum. When he is quoted directly, the GHC is described as a 'home', 'paradise' or 'family', supporting the already established utopian image of the project. The lack of diverse representations of asylum seekers' experiences in the media has already been highlighted by authors such as Crawley et al. (2016), whose research suggests that migrant voices are more likely to be included in positive stories in order to support the general narrative, rather

2

than present a new perspective. In this way, the GHC's utopian framing resembles what is called 'degenerate utopias', which are characterized by an exclusion of difference. According to Harvey (2000), the danger of this depiction lies in the fact that degenerate utopias have lost their capacity for societal critique. Imagined as a culturally and ethnically homogeneous place, the social order of these utopias were held in position by hierarchical forms of authority and do not allow for difference or deviation from any norm.

Another striking finding from the media analysis is the assumption that deportations of asylum seekers represent a break or failure of the GHC utopian image: *"The social sculpture is crumbling" (DZ, 06.03.2014)* and *"The perfect success story is experiencing its sad rupture" (AA, 08.04.2015).* According to this interpretation, deportations shatter the image of utopia as a place of social harmony. Yet does the issue of deportation also shatter the GHC's self-description as a concrete utopia? Not necessarily, as utopias that aim for political critique are meant to be 'unsettling' or discomforting (Kraftl, 2007). While national news items did not feature protests of activists against deportation, nor any affected individuals, local news media depicted deportations as a local issue, reporting on the dire consequences this had on particular individuals and families. Therefore, rather than being an abstract, place-less process, local news reporting on deportation fulfils the purpose of a concrete utopia of offering political critique; even more so as deportations in state-run asylum centres remain mostly unreported. Its unsettling effect is captured in the title of a local news item: *"Refugees' fates come close [hautnah]"* (AA, 26.10.2013), the term *'hautnah'* translating literally as 'skin-close'. The GHC local media representation thus bridges the perceived social distance between asylum seekers and local residents, as asylum seekers' representations changed from being a categoric label to being a particular person. The following section analyses to what extent local residents knowledge of the GHC influences familiarization with asylum seekers.

## 2.7 Beyond media representation: The role of direct experience for familiarization with the GHC

In contrast to the GHC' media representation, local residents described their initial reactions as not unanimously positive. Richard, a direct neighbour of the GHC who had bought and renovated a large property several years before the opening of the GHC, reported being afraid that the area could not support another 'special needs group', which he thought would lead to a loss in property value. Max, a long-term resident of the area, was initially sceptical of housing asylum seekers in his neighbourhood, as he drew upon images of a local, large-scale accommodation facility at the edge of town.

At several points in the interview he stressed that he viewed asylum seekers' living circumstances to be the actual source of danger; a conclusion he draws based on his personal experience with local facilities. Contrary to media reporting, Richard and Max evaluated the GHC relative to its position in the built environment as well as to its historical position within local experiences of asylum accommodation, which underlines how local political, socio-economic and historical factors influence attitudes towards asylum accommodation (Bock, 2018; Bygnes, 2019; Hinger, 2016). The respondents' statements below exemplify that media representation alone does not determine how a place such as the GHC is perceived; lived experiences is just as influential for the judgements on spaces and places of otherness (Moores, 2017; Silverstone, 2007).

> *"I don't have a problem with these institutions. But I was afraid that more and more special needs groups [Sondergruppen] collide here. ... So I thought, okay, will this work out? Can I rent out my apartment in this atmosphere?" (Richard, 50, direct neighbour)*

> *"There were examples here in Augsburg, there was a large container camp [...] And I am sure, nobody would have wanted to go there at night. [...] And I'd say, those kinds of accommodations, you could put anybody there, even a perfectly intact German grown up under the best circumstances, I am sure, he'd have a social problem after half a year. [...] And that's why there's a danger." (Max, 58, neighbourhood resident)*

Direct experience proved to be a crucial factor in changing local residents' reactions towards the GHC, as it provided for an additional source of knowledge. Direct sources of knowledge that respondents mentioned included knowing volunteers personally or simply walking past the Grandhotel as part of their daily routines. Direct knowledge can add to and even correct knowledge gained from indirect sources of information such as friends or the media. Anna's statement below exemplifies how her residential proximity to the GHC provided her with direct, lived experience of the area which led her to evaluate the project on the basis of her local knowledge. This finding is similar to Blommaert et al's (2003) observation that spatial proximity to asylum accommodation changes the quality of knowledge, as residents can draw from direct experience rather than indirect information alone. Similarly, Bygnes' (2019) research emphasizes the importance of spatial proximity and direct experience in generating local mood changes.

*"I heard [about opening of the GHC] from acquaintances that don't even live in Augsburg. They must have read an article in the newspaper or heard about it on the radio [...]. And she said, ,did you know, just around your corner asylum seekers will move in, poor you! I think you should sell your house.' [...] But I actually preferred [the GHC] moving into the former elderly care home, because it was empty and ugly for so long... uninhabited. So I didn't see a problem there, while some of my friends said, this will devalue the neighbourhood." (Anna, 57)*

However, the GHC' media representation proved to be a double-edged sword for local residents' evaluation of the project. While most local residents identified a positive influence of national media reporting on local attitudes towards and identification with the GHC, others reported to have been sceptical of the 'overly positive' media reporting and its utopian portrayal of the GHC. For instance, Max thought that the media's desire for a success story masked internal conflicts. Eventually, he changed his opinion as he stated that the GHC's representation as a nationally praised model ensured that problems were dealt with and implied a pre-selection of 'less problematic' asylum seekers. To him, the project's success does not necessarily derive from improved living conditions for asylum seekers, but from public pressure to turn the project into a 'success story'. Max bases his interpretation of the news media on his personal and professional experiences, underlining the importance of direct experience within reactions towards asylum accommodation.

*"At some point I thought it was a positive thing that it was going to be a model project, because more attention will be paid to its social impacts. You don't want a model project to fail, because of... well, some social problems. [...] And by it being a model project, I had the hope that the most problematic asylum cases would not be concentrated there, like in some industrial area in some containers, with many dissatisfied young men that don't know what to do with themselves." (Max, 58, neighbourhood resident)*

An important part of local residents' direct experience was being able to observe the GHC on a daily basis. Several respondents, such as Richard, explained that this contributed to the project being perceived as a 'normal' part of the neighbourhood:

*"Neighbours more or less learned that it [the Grandhotel] works well, [...] it's not chaotic or anything. [...] People see that, well, some people just look different than other Augsburgers and that was it. [...] We also don't experience this hype of it being special. For us, it is completely normal." (Richard, 50, direct neighbour)*

Jutta, a direct neighbour who had moved in shortly before the opening of the GHC, noted that its comparatively small size also made it possible for her to notice the absence of certain individuals, highlighting the importance of recognition in the process of familiarizing with others. As the following quote illustrates, the small scale of GHC makes it possible to go beyond categorical recognition of asylum seekers, that is, recognition based on ethnicity, religion or other group membership. Thereby, small scale asylum accommodation enables individual recognition, meaning being able to place someone by knowing who they are (Lofland, 1973). Differences in individual or categorical recognition might provide an explanation for Lubbers et al's (2006) finding that objections against centres correlates with the size of the centre.

> "We are not confronted with misery, but a well-functioning [project]. With the same people that calling for lunch, the same people repairing bikes, the same children playing outside. […] It is not problematic at all, but perhaps that is deceiving as well. Because there is an underlying problem. But… we don't see it that way." (Jutta, 48, direct neighbour)

## 2.8   Just walk in? Differences in perceived open- and closedness of asylum accommodation

Direct experience is central to the concept of the GHC; its café is not only physically open seven days a week, it also signalizes openness through its material objects, such as a welcome sign and the red carpet at the main entrance. By appealing to the affectual rather than the cognitive element of familiarization, the GHC builds on the idea that familiarization is not only dependent on 'what', but just as much on 'how', 'where' and 'when' we know. By encouraging passers-by to 'walk in!', the GHC ultimately enables local residents to contrast media representation with their own direct experience of the place. Several interviewees appreciated the café as one of the neighbourhoods' few semi-public spaces and held its openness to be its main difference with standard asylum centres. As Jutta explained, asylum seekers may live in spatial proximity to locals, yet this spatial proximity is mediated by differences in open- or closedness of asylum accommodation. Being able to enter an asylum centre influences locals' perceptions of this space, as isolation is experienced as a relational process between individuals or groups. The GHC's openness is therefore not so much a static feature, but can be interpreted as a conscious and ongoing engagement with space and processes of symbolic boundary-making.

*"Yes, it makes a difference [that the Grandhotel has a café]. Because it signals, come in, we are open for everyone, I think that is a really important symbol. Because, I think if you walk past and you see, other people are living there now, that is really different if people have the possibility to go there, to go inside, order a coffee... it makes a difference. It's not so isolated." (Jutta, 48, direct neighbour)*

It is therefore unsurprising that respondents perceived standard asylum accommodation as having higher degrees of closedness, which resulted from their assumptions of privacy or presence of authority in asylum accommodation. Several interviewees argued that their private and institutional character meant it was 'none of their business' to enter asylum accommodation as the state was responsible for care. Silke assumed that it would be easier for her to offer help if she shared a building with asylum seekers. Her statement below suggests that relative closedness of asylum accommodation is just as much a matter of perception and experience as much as it is of security or locked doors; her acknowledgement of 'I wouldn't go in' is an expression of affect, of a feeling of discomfort which prevents her from directly experiencing the inside of such spaces.

*"Because somehow, if asylum seekers are in a centre, you think that, well, someone else is responsible, like the municipality or the state. Whereas in a private flat it's easier to get in contact, because it is just one family. And in a centre, if I'm honest, I wouldn't go in." (Silke, 63, neighbourhood resident)*

Hence, standard asylum accommodation discourages individuals from active engagement with these places. The absence of spatial practice for local residents results in stark contrast between media representation and lived experience, as what is already known about asylum accommodation through the media cannot be evaluated through direct interaction with a place. Borrowing from Ahmed (2000), the space of the asylum centre is 'familiar in its strange(r)ness'; we already 'know' this space, yet we cannot experience *this space* as a *particular* place*.*

However, the possibility of entering the GHC and gaining direct experience did not necessarily change interviewees' overall perceptions of asylum seekers. Frieda, a long-term neighbourhood resident in her early fifties, thought that mixing different kinds of residents meant that asylum seekers are taken care of. She reported to visit the café on a regular basis and holds the GHC to be preferable to standard forms of accommodation, which she associates with violence:

*"Sometimes I go into the [café] and have a coffee, and it is always cheerful, easy-going and mixed. And there is no difference between rich and poor, black or white or yellow, it is mixed like a beautiful colourful bubble. For me, it's only positive. And they also take care that nothing happens there, they protect the people there. [...] And it is certainly not comparable with those wooden barracks, that they trigger violent behaviour, that's obvious." (Frieda, 52, neighbourhood resident)*

While both national and local media depicted the GHC as a place that generates a sense of equality among its different residents and users, interviewees such as Frieda interpreted the GHC' internal mixture as a form of care and control. Other interviewees suggested that the presence of artists, activists and other users reduced the likelihood of violence to occur as to them, mixture increases neighbourhood safety by ensuring social control, thereby *"defusing"* a potentially *"explosive"* situation. Perceptions of the GHC as a place that provides both care and control implicitly draws upon dominant frames of migrants as either victims or criminals (Crawley et al., 2016). This indicates that the possibility of directly experiencing asylum accommodation may dispel initial doubts or fears, dominant frames of asylum seekers are hard to overcome. Still, it could also be argued that a sense of control achieved through residential mixture might be preferable to control achieved through securitization.

Dominant media frames of asylum seekers as criminals or victims may also prevent local residents from entering spaces such as the GHC or from seeking inter-personal contact with asylum seekers. Christa's statement below illustrates that while she considers the GHC's openness a crucial factor in facilitating contact and familiarization, not everyone is willing to engage in contact and familiarization. Similarly, framing asylum seekers as victims may also prevent inter-personal interaction, as contact with asylum seekers is perceived to be a moral responsibility rather than a casual encounter. Higher degrees of openness of asylum accommodation can therefore only provide opportunities for 'meaningful encounters' (Valentine, 2008), their actual occurrence depends not on chance but on choice.

*"I also sent people there, I said, just take a look. They are curious and they said, it was great and some even volunteer there now. [...] It's great that its so open. Because otherwise, people would have no contact at all. [But] I wouldn't recommend it to everyone. [...] And with the asylum seekers, sometimes there is a bit of hostility against them. [...] I once told someone, and he really said to me, 'no, I will not have coffee next to a 'nigger''. And then I thought, oh, you have to be careful, not everybody likes it." (Christa, 49, neighbourhood resident)*

## 2.9   Conclusion

This paper argues that local attitudes towards asylum seekers are shaped by media representation as well as lived experiences. Lefebvre's (1991) distinction between a 'conceived', 'perceived' and 'lived space' provides a valuable framework for understanding how media representation and direct experiences of asylum accommodation intersect and shape attitudes towards asylum seekers. The paper examined the case of the GHC, a prominent example of local innovation in asylum accommodation in Augsburg, Germany. It compares the GHC' representation in national and local news media with local residents' evaluation and their direct experiences of the project. This resulted in three main findings: First, the media analysis revealed a contrast between a utopian frame in national news items, an experiment frame in local news items and the GHC own terminology of being a 'concrete utopia'. While a concrete utopia is both a critique of the present as well as a vision of an alternative politics of asylum accommodation, a 'utopia' frame suggests a place of social harmony and has lost its potential for political critique.

Second, interviews with local residents demonstrated that direct, place-based and affective experiences influence individual attitudes towards asylum accommodation. However, dominant frames of asylum seekers as criminals or victims remained influential and in some cases shaped or even prevented everyday interaction, demonstrating that physical proximity to asylum seekers alone only has a limited effect on attitudes. Third, the relative 'openness' of the GHC encouraged some local residents to enter, engage with and produce its space. However, dominant media frames of asylum seekers can also discourage or prevent local residents from engaging with such spaces, thereby strengthening symbolic boundaries and everyday bordering processes. The findings demonstrate the value of more nuanced and long-term analyses of reactions towards asylum accommodation and the influence of media representation and direct experience within this process.

An important, yet often overlooked factor shaping local residents' reactions is the space of the asylum centre itself, not only as a material or physical object, but as an on-going process or 'spatial practice'. Who is involved in or excluded from this process of spatial production is an expression of political power (see Darling, 2011). Asylum accommodation is actively produced and reproduced in everyday life by media and policy documents, within individuals' minds and behaviour as well as within everyday spaces. Representation, knowledge and lived experience of asylum accommodation are deeply connected to the governance of asylum accommodation and therefore necessitate analyses that think perceived, conceived and lived spaces together.

In short, media representation of innovative projects does not simply reflect reality, it

also shapes and is shaped by reality. The way in which innovative projects are framed, especially in national debate, may influence perceptions on up-scaling local innovation. Framing projects such as the GHC as a 'utopia' or a 'concrete utopia' is significant, as the difference in meaning determines to what extent we perceive such projects as a critique on and an alternative to the current governance of asylum accommodation. By suggesting social harmony, utopian framings not only dismiss possibilities for societal critique, they also overrule serious engagements with local residents' and asylum seekers' voices and lived experiences. Despite the fact that the GHC has inspired projects across Germany, national debates and policy recommendations based on the lessons learned from such projects have been rare. However, improvements in asylum accommodation require existing alternative solutions to enter national media and political discourse.

## 2.10   List of Abbreviations

AA: Augsburger Allgemeine
AfD: Alternative for Germany (right-wing)
CSU: Christian Social Union (center – center-right)
Die Linke: The Left Party
DZ: Die Zeit
FDP: Free Domocratic Party (liberal)
GHC: Grandhotel Cosmopolis
Grüne: Green Party
SPD: Social Democratic Party
WS: Welt am Sonntag

## 2.11   Endnotes

'Migratory background' (Ger: Migrationshintergrund) includes naturalized foreign nationals, ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union and children under 18 of foreign nationals (Augsburg 2017).

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# CHAPTER 3

## Uneven Geographies of Asylum Accommodation: Conceptualizing the Impact of Spatial, Material, and Institutional Differences on (Un)familiarity between Asylum Seekers and Local Residents

## 3.1 Abstract

Asylum accommodation is held to isolate asylum seekers spatially and socially from the majority population in host societies. Little attention has been devoted to variation in asylum accommodation at the level of the everyday. Central to this paper is the argument that variation between localities, as well as variation on the level of the built environment creates 'uneven geographies of asylum accommodation'. The paper theorizes that more 'open' forms of asylum accommodation may foster familiarity between asylum seekers and local residents through the development of closer everyday social relations, and more 'closed' forms of asylum accommodation may enforce feelings of unfamiliarity by strengthening processes of categorization and everyday bordering. In so doing, we propose to differentiate between 'spatial', 'material' and 'institutional' dimensions of openness of asylum accommodation and aim to understand '(un)familiarity' as an expression of people's experiences, knowledge and perceptions of social distance. We further argue that feelings of (un)familiarity are connected to processes of belonging and estrangement.

## 3.2   Introduction

*'We will create the alien nation, not outside our borders, but within our midst. And we will have only ourselves to blame for future generations of distance, distrust and disenchantment.'* (Goodwin-Gill 1997: 16)

The year 2015 was the year of the so-called refugee-crisis. Where this crisis was taking place, was a matter of heated political debate. EU member states saw themselves overwhelmed by 'floods' of people seeking asylum, despite the fact that 86 per cent of the world's refugees are hosted by countries of the Global South (UNHCR 2018). In response to popular fears of being 'swamped' by increasing numbers of asylum seekers, reception regimes were tightened and restrictions imposed. Such approaches are in line with the 'securitization of migration' (Huysmans 2006), which broadly describes two trends: First, the 'reworking and spatial reconfiguration of borders' and second, 'the emergence of new "migration management regimes" intended to deter those fleeing violence and war from reaching safe havens (in the Global North)' (Ehrkamp 2017: 3).

The spatial reconfiguration of borders implies both the externalization of asylum, that is, the location of border control practices *outside* of national space (Hyndman & Mountz 2008), as well as the shift of borders and intensified immigration control *into* everyday spaces (Coutin 2010). These trends have contributed to a global rise in immigration detention and restrictions on mobility (Mountz et al. 2012). The securitization of migration has not only increased migrants' vulnerability, it has also contributed to a growth in "exclusionary practices [that] situate migrants ambiguously as *outside* of national territory even when, physically, they are within" (Coutin, 2010: 201). Practices of confinement are therefore not limited to spaces of immigration detention. Kreichauf (2018: 2) identifies a European trend towards the 'campization' of asylum accommodation, which he describes as a 'process in which the recent tightening of asylum laws and reception regulations have resulted in the emergence and deepening of camp-like characteristics of refugee accommodation in European city-regions'.

However, other scholars have also warned against generalizations of 'refugee camps' and comparisons between asylum accommodation in the Global North and refugee camps in the Global South (Sanyal 2012). As Malkki (2002) points out, refugee camps do not exist in a 'social void', but are always dependent on their socio-spatial context, resulting in high degrees of variation in the Global South. Similarly, EU member states vary considerably in asylum seeker reception conditions (Brekke & Brochmann 2014; Brekke & Vevstad 2007). Moreover, scholars have also examined the local dimension of migration policies, identifying a wide range of practices in the field of local integration policies (Ambrosini & Boccagni 2015; Caponio & Borkert 2010). While it is a necessity

to situate everyday practices within broader geopolitical trends, generalizations such as 'campization' also have a tendency to mask variation in asylum seeker and refugee reception, as these are all sites of territorial struggle between different individuals, groups and collectives.

Next to state-provided asylum accommodation, which is often found to supply asylum seekers with only the bare minimum (Rosenberger & König 2011), civil society responses to such minimal reception conditions have produced a number of housing alternatives which seek to improve living conditions. Examples range from private flat-sharing initiatives, to localities refusing to house asylum seekers in collective accommodation, to 'hotel' like constructions (Grandhotel Cosmopolis 2018; Stalinski 2014; Takecarebnb 2018). These differences in local practices and reactions towards asylum accommodation accentuate the fact that asylum accommodation is far from 'isolated'; rather, the accommodation of asylum seekers signposts how local and contested this issue is. While asylum accommodation may have an 'isolating' effect on its inhabitants, this paper stresses that isolation is produced *within* society, not at its fringes.

The objective of this paper is to point towards two interrelated issues: Firstly, variation in local approaches produce 'uneven geographies' of asylum accommodation, which differ in their spatial, material and institutional 'degrees of open- and closedness'. Secondly, 'uneven geographies' not only impact asylum seekers, but society as a whole, as these can be understood as practices of 'everyday bordering'. Rather than measuring different degrees of integration of asylum seekers, this paper proposes to take a relational perspective and shine a light on how uneven geographies of asylum accommodation may impact everyday social relations between asylum seekers and local residents. The concept of (un)familiarity is proposed as a way to conceptualize the impact on social relations, as it understands feelings of familiarity or unfamiliarity as a relation between people's experiences, knowledge and social distance. The paper further argues that feelings of unfamiliarity are closely intertwined with processes of estrangement and the politics of belonging.

The paper is composed as follows: The second section will briefly outline the relation between national and local differences in asylum accommodation. The third section will introduce the concept of degrees of open- and closedness of asylum accommodation as a way to grasp the 'uneven geographies of asylum accommodation. This section will also distinguish between 'spatial', 'material' and 'institutional' openness of asylum accommodation as different dimensions of variation of asylum accommodation on the level of the built environment and institutional actors and conditions. The fourth section of the paper will introduce (un)familiarity and related processes of belonging and estrangement as a framework for understanding contact and social relations between

asylum seekers and local residents. The paper's conclusion will provide suggestions for further research.

## 3.3 Uneven geographies of asylum accommodation: National and local migration regimes

Asylum reception policies in member states of the European Union display large differences in living standards, despite EU efforts towards the harmonization of reception systems. Not only do these differences prevent the coordination of policies across EU member states, but they also prompt secondary movement by migrants (Brekke & Brochmann 2014). These differences in reception conditions between EU member states are a reflection of different national migration regimes. Tsianos & Karakayali (2010: 375) define 'migration regime' as 'a multitude of actors whose practices relate to each other, without, however, being ordered in the form of a central logic or rationality. Rather, the concept of "regime" implies a space of negotiating practices.' The authors' argue for a theoretical shift from systems of national 'control' to different 'actors' and 'practices', highlighting how different approaches to asylum seeker reception are not products of a 'central logic', but can be seen as 'the result of social conflicts, which end in institutionalized compromises that have to be renewed or abandoned over and over again' (376). Analyses of refugee reception and accommodation thus need to bear in mind variation between migration regimes, as well as the fact that this variation is not an outcome of a 'central logic' but of many local and regional societal conflicts and solutions.

Rather than assuming a top-down relationship between national asylum regimes and everyday social relations, this paper argues for analyses that take account of the specificity of local practices surrounding the production and politics of asylum accommodation and how this specificity affects social relations in the everyday. As emphasized by Agnew (1987), social structures and human practices are interrelated and mutually dependent. This mutual dependency between social structure and human practice is also evident with regard to the legal geographies of asylum. White (2002: 1071) analysed different local and institutional practices of asylum law and found not only that legal practices differed between sites and organizations, but that these differences impacted on the future success or failure of asylum claims. Differences in access to justice hence led to 'uneven geographies of asylum' (1062).

Scholars have also cautioned against essentialist concepts of the state, overlooking the multiplicity of other social agents involved in excluding and subjugating asylum seekers and refugees. Policy making and outcomes are often the effect and not the cause of social and cultural circumstances, as local pressures may be rapidly transformed into

national policy (Gill 2010, 2016). Likewise, Mountz (2010) argues for a closer analysis of the roles of street-level bureaucrats in shaping immigration policy. Undertaking an 'ethnography of the state' in her analysis of immigration bureaucracy in Canada, Mountz highlights not only how policy was made on the spur of the moment, but also how bureaucrats are affected by their own emotions, as well as by media reporting.

In line with analyses of the local dimension of migration policy (Ambrosini & Boccagni 2015; Caponio & Borkert 2010), Hinger et al (2016) introduce the concept of a 'local migration regime' to stress how asylum accommodation is produced as well as contested by different groups of actors. Based on a case study in eastern Germany, the authors demonstrate not only how rules and regulations on asylum accommodation are shaped by a number of actors on the local level, including asylum seekers themselves. Such local differentiation creates a unique 'local migration regime', with actors that 'not only produce interconnected localities, but also play out their different interests and social positions'. A 'local migration regime', the authors conclude, is hence characterized by a certain degree of specificity and diverges from the national migration regime. Taking variation between local migration regimes into account also points towards the importance of comparative analyses of local regimes, as cities have different approaches to migration and diversity (Glick-Schiller 2012). The following section will introduce the concept of spatial, material and institutional degrees of openness to take account of local and place-based variation of asylum accommodation and its relation with everyday bordering practices.

## 3.4 'Spatial', 'material' and 'institutional openness' of asylum accommodation

### 3.4.1 'Spatial' open- and closedness

Previous research in the field of forced migration has established the centrality of space for understanding geographies of asylum (Conlon et al. 2017; Coutin 2010; Gill 2016; Hyndman & Mountz 2008; Mountz 2010; Mountz et al. 2012). The range of spatial tactics state actors employ is diverse, yet more often than not, their goal is "to prevent irregular migrants from accessing the legal rights conferred by territorial presence" (Coutin 2010: 200). Asylum accommodation is one among many spatial tactics of control. Yet, it is also described as a "porous institution" or a "half-open camp" (Kreichauf 2018; Pieper 2008: 351), thereby challenging images of absolute closure or the impenetrability of its borders. Importantly, what distinguishes asylum accommodation from spaces of immigration detention or prison spaces is its legal 'openness'. Here, legal openness is determined by whether or not an individual can 'leave at will or within reasonable confines' (Guild 2005: 3).

This section will expand current legal understandings of openness of asylum accommodation by outlining three additional dimensions – spatial, material and institutional – that shape how asylum accommodation is experienced in everyday life. As captured by the concept of the 'local migration regime', asylum seekers' actual degrees of in- or exclusion on a local level are a consequence of locally specific groups of actors. As a result, local reception and accommodation practices and policies are shaped and enacted differently across space. This geographical diversity in asylum accommodation affects the everyday experiences and social interaction of asylum seekers and the local population. The section draws on the concept of 'territoriality' to argue that variation of asylum accommodation is an outcome of 'territorial' struggle between different groups of actors. The section will further employ the concept of 'everyday bordering' as the key mechanism of territorial control. To further develop the spatial dimension of openness, the following will make use of two foundational understandings of 'space' within geography, namely, space as *relative* and space as produced through social *relations*.

Viewing asylum accommodation through the lens of relative space means taking relative spatial distance or proximity between people, objects or places into account. For instance, the legal designation as 'open' or 'closed' does not allow for an understanding of the degree to which asylum seekers and refugees actually have access to key areas of everyday life. A first step towards understanding the spatiality of asylum accommodation is thus to assess the *accessibility* and *affordances* of the spatial context. Asylum centres that are legally 'open' might in practice contribute to the confinement of their inhabitants due to a spatially remote location or due to limited access to public or other means of transportation (Kwan 2013). Likewise, asylum centres in urban areas might prevent interaction by being located in neighborhoods offering few opportunities to interact in the public realm (Basu & Fiedler 2017).

Variation in terms of place-based characteristics such as history, population composition, economic and political structure also influence the nature of social relations between 'newcomers', such as asylum seekers, and the 'established' population (Platts-fowler & Robinson 2015; Robinson 2010). Although few studies have specifically compared contrasting locations of asylum accommodation (an exception is Pieper 2008), research within the United Kingdom found that asylum seekers were often dispersed to deprived and 'difficult to let' areas, with poor housing quality and high degrees of hostility and resentment towards asylum seekers (Dwyer & Brown 2008; Netto 2011; Phillips 2006). Participants of these studies often expressed feelings of social isolation. This finding was reflected in their preferred housing locations, which revealed that safety from criminal behaviour and racial harassment, as well as opportunities to form social connections are important factors (Netto 2011).

Yet relative spatial location can only partially explain how different groups of actors, including asylum seekers, perform or contest spaces of asylum, and how these spatial practices affect the structure of everyday life. Studies of immigration detention therefore employ the term 'spatial tactics' to refer to "the use of space to control people, objects, and their movement" (Martin & Mitchelson 2009: 459). Conceptualizing asylum accommodation as spaces that both produce and are produced by social relations can shed further light on who determines the location of a centre, but also on the political, social and economic effects these spaces have on society as a whole. A concept that can help clarify the linkages between different degrees of accessibility of asylum accommodation as well as the intentional and unintentional effects of such spaces is 'territoriality' (Sack 1986). Following Sack (1986), this is "the attempt by an individual or group to affect, influence or control people, phenomena, and relationships, by delimiting and asserting control over a geographic area. This area will be called the territory" (19). According to Sack, not all places are territories; transforming a place or area into a territory requires the construction and maintenance of boundaries in order to control access.

Following Sack's (1986) theory of territoriality, boundaries are a tool for establishing control over a territory in order to limit accessibility, as well as a way to communicate both who belongs and who does not. Other scholars emphasize that borders not only demarcate the nation state but can be found in everyday life as "sets of practices and discourses which 'spread' into the whole of society" (Paasi 1999: 670). Moreover, borders are both material and immaterial and are considered to be processes as well as institutions, rather than 'static lines'. Understood as processes, borders and boundaries 'demarcate', they create separation or categorization; understood as institutions, borders are maintained through 'management', permitting "legitimation, signification and domination" and thus a form of ordering (Newman 2006: 148). Borders may have varying degrees of 'porosity'; acting as a 'filter' against possible or perceived threat, borders can restrict mobility for some and not for others, depending on their societal position (Muller 2011). Yet, borders can also be seen as bridge for contact between the self and other (Newman, 2006). Borders and boundaries are both multi-scalar and multi-sited; as such they can range from the individual to the global level and be found in different 'sites', such as spaces of immigration detention and asylum accommodation (Mountz et al 2012).

While the reception of asylum seekers is determined hierarchically by laws and regulations decided upon on the European and national level, this hierarchy is differently implemented on the local level, leading to 'uneven geographies' of asylum seeker reception practices. Different degrees of spatial open- or closedness of asylum accommodation then describe the extent to which boundaries are employed as a means

to territorial control within everyday life. As these boundaries can take material and institutional form, 'material' and 'institutional openness' are nested within the spatial dimension of openness. The following two sections will further specify how asylum accommodation constructs material and institutional boundaries.

### 3.4.2 'Material' open- and closedness

The most common form in which we encounter borders is as physical, material objects, such as walls, fences with barbed wire, check points, or security gates at the airport. This materiality of borders is not only found at the 'edge' of the nation-state, but also within the everyday. As immigration detention has been described as "sites where the enforcement of national borders takes place" (Conlon et al 2017: 8), what then is the role of materiality within spaces of asylum accommodation? In the following, this paper argues that 'material' open- or closedness is the second dimension that needs to be taken into account in analyses of asylum accommodation. It is beyond the scope of this paper to engage in-depth with 'new materialism' as a philosophical influence on geography (but see Anderson & Wylie 2009; Kirsch 2013). Still, this section will bring together scholarship within the field of forced migration and human geography, which explicitly examines the roles of architecture and the built environment in the context of asylum accommodation.

Buildings, including asylum accommodation, are more than their usage. However, few studies so far explicitly engage with the architectural design of asylum accommodation. That this aspect is nevertheless important follows from Diken's (2004: 92) claim that the architectural design of refugee accommodation is a 'materialization of a "fear of touching"'. Scholars within the field of critical geographies of architecture claim that architecture can function as a symbolic 'referent' for social difference or status (Kraftl 2010; Lees 2001). According to Dixon (2001), group membership can be emphasized or played down within particular spatial settings: 'Decategorization is unlikely to occur in an environment where group differences remain visibly encoded within the built form or use of space or within the territorial meanings attributed to particular places' (598). The built environment and its usage thus convey the dominant ideological values and power-relations in place in society, as 'they enable political values to acquire material body, to become a concrete feature of everyday encounters' (600).

The symbolic function of architecture also implicitly explains and expands findings of studies of opposition against asylum accommodation in the Netherlands, which demonstrate that a centre's size influences the degree of opposition, with larger centres invoking higher degrees of opposition (Lubbers et al. 2006). Similarly, Hauge et al. (Hauge et al. 2017) compared centralized and decentralized asylum accommodation in Norway, with decentralized housing being similar or equal to ordinary homes in

the area. The authors find that decentralized housing units are preferable to regular, centralized accommodation, as this provides more opportunities for empowerment and inclusion into the community. Conversely, accommodation that stands in stark contrast to its residential environment, either via aesthetic or technical standards, may act stigmatizing and excluding.

More recent work on the critical geographies of architecture has gone beyond a focus on representation and moved into the 'non-representational' realm of affect and emotion (Adey 2008; Lees & Baxter 2011; Thrift 2004). Buildings can trigger different affective and emotional states such as hope, fear or passivity. What this 'turn' points towards is that the 'meaning' of architecture is not interpreted by everyone in the same way. Rather, what people *think* and *feel* about a building and what they *do* can vary significantly between individuals (Kraftl 2010). An example of this growing line of scholarship is Lees & Baxter's (2011) study of fear in a London council tower block. Studies of asylum accommodation have much to gain from a more explicit focus on both their symbolic function, as well as on how they influence the affective and emotional states of asylum seekers, staff and local residents. In order to understand both the demarcation and management of borders in everyday life, it is thus necessary to integrate a 'material' perspective into analyses of asylum accommodation. The following section will further specify how borders, understood as institutional practices, contribute to varying degrees of openness of asylum accommodation.

### 3.4.3 'Institutional' open- and closedness

What is the connection between the demarcation and management of boundaries and what is referred to as 'institutions'? Two different, yet interrelated meanings can be made out: 'Institutional boundaries' and 'the institution as boundary'. Institutions' as *informal constraints* or *formal sets of rules* (North 1991) structure asylum seekers' social rights, such as access to housing, work, education or health services and therefore constitute practices of everyday bordering (Sainsbury 2012; Sales 2002; Squire 2009). In the second sense of the word, 'institutions' are understood as social establishments, which can also function as spaces of everyday bordering. Asylum accommodation is both situated within broader frameworks of formal rules and informal constraints, as well as a 'social establishment' with different sets of rules governing its inhabitants. Both meanings are therefore interrelated and relevant to understand different degrees of 'institutional openness' of asylum accommodation. As the second section has dealt with the influence of national and local migration regimes, this section will focus on 'the institution as boundary'.

Following Goffman (1961), examples of 'total institutions' can be divided into five categories: (1) Institutions of 'care', such as elderly care homes; (2) institutions of 'care

and control', such as mental asylums; (3) institutions of control, such as prisons; (4) institutions for work-like tasks, such as army barracks; (5) religious institutions, such as monasteries. Scholarship in carceral geography has criticized Goffman's concept of the 'total institution' for its 'totality', thereby suggesting a space that is 'sealed-off' to the outside (Baer & Ravneberg, 2008). Yet, as Schliehe (2016) argues, this criticism does not hold when engaging deeper with Goffman's work on 'Asylums'. Rather, Schliehe argues that the 'total institution' can be a useful starting point for analyses of spaces of 'care and control', due to its focus on everyday social interaction and the role of power and control therein. The importance of comparing between different forms of 'total institutions' is also stressed by Malkki (Malkki 2002: 353): "Refugee camps are devices of care and control in much the same way as are transit centres, internment camps, 'reception centres' run by national immigration officials, and countless other social technologies that discipline space and the movement of people."

Parallels between asylum accommodation and characteristics of 'total institutions' can be drawn in several ways. The first of these are the differences between the 'home world' and 'institutional circumstances', amongst which are lack of privacy, physical contamination or sanctioning from staff (Goffman 1961). Conditions within asylum accommodation have been shown to vary considerably between locations and regions and oftentimes do not exceed the level of basic subsistence (Rosenberger & König 2011). Interrogating discourses of home and institution, van der Horst (2004) compares reception centres in the Netherlands with official discourses on residential care institutions. Despite a shift in official discourses towards evaluating residential care institutions in terms of 'home-like' spaces, official discourses around reception centres lacked any 'home-like' qualities and focused instead on cost efficiency and the provision of food, hygienic conditions and sleeping space. Residents of her case study also expressed a lack of personal space and autonomy and experienced restrictions in living according to cultural customs or cooking their own food.

Regarding the lack of agency and activity in institutions, Valenta & Berg (2010) studied the effect of the provision of organized activities on asylum seekers' empowerment within Norwegian reception centres. Their study shows that restrictive asylum policies, along with insecure futures, negatively affect asylum seekers' participation in the provided activities and in some cases even increased residents' feelings of powerlessness. Likewise, Pozzo & Evers (2015) analysed participation in a youth council in a Dutch asylum centre. Despite an official discourse of participation, youth councils did little in promoting actual participation or empowerment of young asylum seekers. By contrast, the authors conclude that the measures 'did nothing to resolve their issues and feelings of societal exclusion and marginalization and even reproduced and reinforced these' (479).

Studies have shown similarities between the physical and mental implications of living in total institutions or asylum accommodation. Among these are loss of perceived personal safety or self-mortification, which includes a disruption of the boundary of the self and its environment, either via physical or interpersonal contamination (Schliehe, 2016; Goffman, 1961). Ghorashi (2005) compared the situation of Iranian women seeking asylum in the Netherlands, before and after passing restrictions on asylum seeker reception in the 1990s. Without the possibility to engage in meaningful activities, interviewees not only felt trapped within the centre, but were also forced into a state of passivity, with dire consequences on their psychological health. In addition, living in a state of dependency for several years meant that interviewees found it difficult to live an independent life later on. This was not only due to a loss of motivation during years of waiting, but also due to the societal blame interviewees experienced due to these years of passivity; leading to a 'loss of self-image as independent and active people' (Ghorashi 2005: 191).

Spaces bearing characteristics of 'total institutions' not only have implications on their inhabitants, but also on the administrative staff. Gill (2016) analyses indifference and insensitivity towards asylum seekers in different contexts of the UK asylum system. Close ethnographic analysis of an immigration detention centre revealed that indifference towards the suffering of others was the result of several mechanisms within these spaces. As staff was over-exposed to suffering and trauma of detainees, indifference constituted a psychological mechanism of self-care to avoid secondary traumatization (110). Furthermore, over-exposure to suffering was intensified through the enforced mobility of detainees between detention centres. In addition, mistreatment of detainees was further normalized through the inequalities in status between detainees and staff. Gill concludes that immigration detention "achieves [...] a sophisticated use of both the reality and risk of vicarious traumatization to generate an insensitive workforce." (130-1). It is important to stress that indifference to suffering is not a result of malevolent individuals, but a mechanism of psychological self-care related to over-exposure, which might be limited to staff of immigration detention.

There are two other ways in which scholarship on carceral spaces and other institutions can advance understandings of 'institutional open- or closedness' of asylum accommodation. The first is the notion that the boundaries between 'the inside' and 'the outside' of carceral spaces and other institutions is considered porous (Baer & Ravneberg 2008; Leddy-Owen 2015). This permeability refers not only to the mobility of people and objects that pass in and out of such spaces over time, but also to how such spaces influence their residential environment and the wider society as 'sites of estrangement' (Bosworth 2014). The second aspect, (im)mobility, refers to frequent transfers of inhabitants of immigration detention and prison population (Mountz et al,

2012; Martin & Mitchelson, 2009), mirroring systems of asylum seekers dispersal in Europe (Bloch & Schuster 2005).

A comparative view of asylum accommodation, immigration detention and carceral spaces thus illuminates how inhabitants of such spaces are located between fixity and forced mobility. Both the notion of porosity of boundaries as well as forced mobility point towards different degrees and forms of institutional open- or closedness, rather than ideas of 'absolute closure'. Importantly, analyses of 'institutions as borders' point toward the fact of how institutions affect not only asylum seekers', but also different parts of the local society, be this members of staff acting as 'everyday border guards' or the residential environment (Yuval-Davis et al. 2018). The next section will focus on the impact of different degrees of openness of asylum accommodation on social relations between asylum seekers and local residents in spaces of the everyday.

## 3.5  Spaces of everyday bordering and (un)familiarity between asylum seekers and local residents

The previous section outlined ways in which asylum accommodation is an 'everyday bordering' practice for the enforcement of control and the limitation of access to and affordances of the spatial context. Asylum accommodation is a space that makes such bordering practices visible, but importantly, these practices are not confined to asylum accommodation but are performed 'everywhere' and by 'anyone'. The concept of spatial, material and institutional degrees of open- and closedness of asylum accommodation not only clarifies the mechanisms of everyday bordering in the context of geographies of asylum, but also stresses variation of these bordering practices across space. As a result, "everyday 'bordering and ordering' practices connive to create and recreate new social-cultural boundaries and divisions which are also spatial in nature" (Yuval-Davis 2013: 15). As borders are shifted into everyday life, social relations are transformed. This section introduces the concept of (un)familiarity as a way to assess the transformation of social relations between asylum seekers and local residents through processes of everyday bordering.

Basically, 'familiarity' can be defined as having close relations with someone or something (Szytniewski & Spierings 2014). In contrast to notions of 'integration' or 'inclusion', the concept of (un)familiarity is in itself relational in the sense that feelings of closeness or distance are seen to be produced through interaction between people, as a consequence of both personal and collective factors. More, the concept is processual in nature in that it expresses social relations as always in a state of 'becoming', rather than moving towards an end. Emerging from the fields of tourism and border studies, feelings

of (un)familiarity are held to be defined by the dimensions 'experience', 'knowledge' and 'social distance' (Spierings & van der Velde 2008; Szytniewski & Spierings 2014).

'Experience' can relate both to individual and collective experiences of difference. In this sense, city dwellers are held to be more tolerant towards 'different others' than people of rural areas (Wirth 1938), as urban areas provide for more contact experiences and opportunities for 'inter-group' friendships (Dirksmeier 2014). At the same time, places have different histories with minority groups and overall levels of diversity, which then may influence contact on individual level (Piekut & Valentine 2016; Robinson 2010). On the individual level, 'experience' describes both an individual's past experiences with 'difference', which can include personal experiences of being regarded as 'different', as well as experiencing 'different' others. As Valentine & Sadgrove (2012) demonstrate, an individual's positive and negative experiences of difference and personal positioning in different social categories such as age, class or sexuality affects a person's encounters with others. The authors highlight, that individuals may not identify as belonging to only one particular community, but to several, in which an individuals' hierarchical positioning might shift. Given the different social positioning of individuals, Yuval-Davis (2013) therefore argues for an intersectional approach to everyday bordering.

'Knowledge' or 'informational (un)familiarity' is a second crucial dimension regarding the production of potentially close relations. This refers to indirect sources of information, such as family or friends, the media, governmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as to direct sources of information, obtained through personal experience (Szytniewski & Spierings 2014). In relation to everyday interaction between individuals, Lofland (1973) argues for making a distinction between 'personal knowing' and 'categorical knowing'. Personal knowing is based on biographical information, which turns the individual in question into a 'unique historical event' (16). By contrast, knowing another person 'categorically' is knowing her or him only through information based on role and status. The distinction between personal and categoric knowing is particularly salient in relation to asylum seekers. Not only is 'asylum seeker' a particularly value-laden category within the current migration debate, but the use of the category itself is an expression of political power (Goodman & Speer 2007; Lynn & Lea 2003). Recognizing how national discourses and everyday bordering are intertwined helps avoid romanticized ideas of everyday interactions and their potential for reducing prejudice, but it also highlights how national discourses are reshaped and understood differently in various places.

The third dimension of (un)familiarity is feelings of social distance, which reflects the claim that social relations 'always [involve] elements of 'nearness' and 'distance'' (Karakayali 2016: 1). Previous work differentiates between 'affective', 'interactive'

and 'normative' social distance. 'Affective' social distance refers to the idea that people who are similar to us are people we also *feel* close to (Karakayali 2009). As Valentine & Sadgrove (2012: 2060) argue, the creation of intimacy within an encounter may be equally important as spatial proximity in bridging between different social categories. Moreover, emotions can be a way in which 'diverse residents can discover each other as multifaceted and interdependent; as individuals with simultaneously different and potentially shared positions, practices and desires' (Askins 2016: 525). Such understandings then also point to the flexibility of feelings of social distance and the idea that emotions can be a vehicle for forming new perceptions of similarity and difference about each other. 'Interactive' social distance occurs when asylum seekers have to adjust their customs and daily routines in unfamiliar situations and settings. This implies potentially challenging 'cross-cultural code-switching' during encounters with local residents to accommodate different norms and values and comply with what is considered appropriate and acceptable by the 'host society' (Molinsky 2007).

Social distance can be understood as 'normative' when referring to feelings of proximity or distance based on shared norms or values. Formed by social groups, norms and values contribute to distinctions between 'us' and 'them', which then 'specify what kind of relations with what kind of people are 'acceptable'' (Karakayali 2009: 541). A more prominent understanding of normative social distance is the notion of the 'familiar stranger' as someone who is 'spatially close, but socially remote' (Van Houtum & Strüver 2002: 143). As strangeness is produced relationally (Simmel & Wolff 1950), 'it is not necessarily "who" is strange, but what, where and how 'strangeness' occurs' (Jackson et al. 2017: 3). A crucial point is made by Ahmed (2000: 21), who posits the stranger as a figure that is already familiar: 'The figure of the stranger is far from simply being strange; it is a figure that is painfully familiar in that very strange(r)ness.' A stranger, according to Ahmed, is therefore someone we recognize 'as not belonging, as being out of place' (21).

Theories of belonging and non-belonging can enrich our understanding of feelings of (un)familiarity, as they highlight both the *spatial* as well as the *political* dimension of the concept. Belonging is related to the formation of 'the self', which is defined against what it is not and therefore relies on borders for its existence (Ahmed 2000). Belonging creates emotional attachment, senses of safety and being 'at home' (Yuval-Davis et al. 2018: 197). In this sense, belonging is closely related to familiarity – in order to belong, one has to feel familiar with one's spatial and social environment (Blokland & Nast 2014). Recognizing others as 'being out of place' or as not belonging is therefore not only a social, but also a spatial process which is not fixed but dynamic in its nature. Consequently, feelings of belonging do not emerge in a vacuum, but are produced through place-based factors such as personal experiences, social relations, shared

language, economic and legal security. While feelings of familiarity and belonging are closely related, as they are produced by similar factors, the notion of belonging implies both the *spatial* as well as the *political* dimension of feelings of (un)familiarity.

Processes of everyday bordering disrupt feelings of belonging, because they emphasize membership in a particular collectivity, such as nation, class or ethnicity, which are often spatially demarcated (Newman & Paasi 1998; Yuval-Davis et al. 2018). As such, "belonging tends to be naturalized, and becomes articulated and politicized only when it is threatened in some way" (Yuval-Davis et al, 2018: 197). In other words, belonging is a natural part of everyday life until it is put into question through processes of estrangement, which define 'who or what does not belong' (Ahmed 2000: 99). Following Ahmed (2000: 101), "we need to understand the process of negotiation between identity and strangerness as ongoing, and as moving across different spatial formations". Asylum accommodation can then be seen as a spatial tactic that contributes to processes of estrangement, which may not only communicate non-belonging, but possibly also result in generating *indifference* towards others (see Gill 2016).

The 'refugee crisis' is therefore not so much a crisis of *people* arriving in our societies, but, to use the words of Goodwin-Gill, a moral crisis of growing 'distance, distrust and disenchantment'. Is there a way out of this crisis of morality? Both openness and (un)familiarity are concepts that are dynamic in nature, but can higher degrees of openness of asylum accommodation lead to higher degrees in familiarity? In his work on 'geographies of exclusion', Sibley (1995) distinguished between 'strongly classified' and 'weakly classified spaces'. The former are internally homogenous and possess strong boundaries, difference is therefore a threat to the internal order. The latter type of space are spaces of social mixing in which boundaries are porous or broken down. The way out of spatial tactics of control is thus by creating accessible, porous and 'weakly classified' spaces. Amin (2002: 970) suggests that these might be 'spaces of cultural displacement', that is, 'new settings' that momentarily destabilize ideas of the self and the other, 'where engagement with strangers in a common activity disrupts easy labelling of the stranger as enemy and initiates new attachments'. Our role as scholars is thus to devote as much empirical and theoretical attention to spaces that contribute to familiarization and to sites that lead not only to everyday bordering, but also to 'everyday border transgression'.

## 3.6   Conclusion

Asylum accommodation, and especially collective asylum centres, are often conceptualized as 'spaces of exception' or 'total institutions', glossing over national

and local differences in asylum accommodation. Also, these conceptualisations treat asylum centres as isolated from the societies they are situated in. In addition, studies on asylum accommodation tend to focus either on 'the inside' or 'the outside' of such spaces, thereby neglecting to a large extent how social relations on the inside and the outside are constituted *relationally.* This paper provides an overview of different levels of variation in asylum accommodation, arguing that variation in national migration regimes, local variation as well as variation on the level of the built environment need to be taken into account in understanding the effects of asylum accommodation on asylum seekers' everyday lives and the possibilities for encounters with local residents.

In order to comprehend the uneven geographies of asylum accommodation and how asylum centres influence social relations between asylum seekers and local residents, this paper introduced the concept of 'spatial', 'material' and 'social openness' and points towards the local specificity of the spatial location and context, the type of building and social and institutional infrastructure that differentiate asylum centres. Highlighting such differences helps to explain differential experiences and opportunities in the everyday lives of asylum seekers and find entry points for both fostering familiarization processes between asylum seekers and local residents and overcoming detrimental effects of processes of categorization and symbolic borders between 'us' and 'them'.

Research on asylum accommodation should take the variation of asylum accommodation into account and move away from binary divisions of 'asylum seekers' and 'the host society' because it hampers our understanding of the everyday production of material and institutional borders. In this respect, it is vital to take the relational construction of 'strange(r)ness' into account in order to move away from positioning asylum seekers as inherently different to the recognition that their 'difference' or 'unfamiliarity' is produced through concrete encounters in various everyday spaces. In this paper we show how the interplay between experience, knowledge and social distance is crucial for understanding processes of (un)familiarization.

Analyses of asylum accommodation therefore need to recognize that these spaces do not exist 'in isolation', but are characterized by their relative degrees of access to public space, goods and services. They are also a spatial tactic of control that redefine everyday spaces as spaces of everyday bordering. From a relational point of view, asylum centres exist in close physical and symbolic proximity to the familiar spaces of the body, home, neighbourhood, city, region or nation and may disrupt a sense of safety and belonging by placing the border in their midst. It is therefore not only 'the stranger' that invades familiar space, but estrangement through everyday bordering. As Gupta & Ferguson argue (1992: 16), 'if we question a pre-given world of separate and discrete "peoples and cultures", and see instead a difference-producing set of relations, we turn from a

project of juxtaposing pre-existing differences to one of exploring the construction of differences in historical process'. Collective forms of asylum accommodation are one such mechanism of producing difference and reshaping social relations in everyday life. They impose (un)familiarity in a 'categorical' sense upon both asylum seekers and local residents, but at the same time it is within processes of familiarization in everyday spaces that the social construction of the asylum seeker can be challenged and familiarity in a 'personal' and 'human' sense can develop.

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# 3.7  References

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**3**

# CHAPTER 4

## Living in a 'free jail'? Asylum seekers' and local residents' experiences of discomfort with asylum seeker accommodation.

# 4.1  Abstract

This paper shows how asylum seeker accommodation produces a politics of discomfort among both asylum seekers as well as local residents. The paper compares two collective asylum centres located in the city of Augsburg, Germany, one of which is a nationally renowned refugee integration project, the 'Grandhotel Cosmopolis', the other, a state-run asylum centre. Data was obtained through participant observation and semi-structured interviews between September 2016 and November 2017. Drawing on carceral geographies, the paper identifies three mechanisms through which the material and institutional standards of asylum accommodation generate discomfort among and between asylum seekers and local residents, which are self-mortification, depersonalization and role-breakdown. Through the sharing of rooms and facilities, asylum accommodation contributes to asylum seekers' self-mortification, referring to changes in the conceptions and beliefs of oneself. The comparison of the two cases highlights how large asylum centres depersonalize asylum seekers by creating images of a homogenized 'mass' and contribute to role-breakdown, meaning a reduction of individuals' identities performed with regard to work, home or family life. National discourses of asylum seekers as dangerous merged with the space of asylum accommodation, thereby preventing social interaction 'as neighbours' between asylum seekers and local residents. Overall, the paper exposes how a politics of discomfort utilizes affect as a governmental device, thereby turning asylum accommodation into a carceral space by creating social distance and 'moral closure'.

4

## 4.2    Introduction

In 2012, long before the so-called refugee crisis of 2015, the 'Grandhotel Cosmopolis' (GHC)' opened its doors, a grassroots project combining asylum accommodation, a tourist hotel, spaces for artists, a café and a restaurant in the city of Augsburg, Germany. The GHC's playful engagement with notions of comfort and luxury, such as its red carpet at the main entrance, can be interpreted as a political statement against a decades-long process of lowering accommodation standards for asylum seekers in Germany (Müller, 2010). The lowering of minimum accommodation standards mirrors an EU wide system of deterrence policies seeking to lessen Germany's attractiveness as a destination country for future refugees (Glorius & Doomernik, 2020). Two kinds of deterrence policies are applied across the EU: External deterrence policies prevent asylum seekers from entering the country of asylum through legal or physical means such as visa restrictions, air travel restrictions, off-shore processing centres or physical borders including the interception of boats in international waters (FitzGerald, 2019). Internal deterrence measures exclude asylum seekers already within the destination country through restricting access to socio-economic and political rights or through other legal measures such as safe third country agreements facilitating the detention and deportation of asylum seekers (Boswell, 2003).

Asylum accommodation plays a key role in German asylum policy, as it is one of several internal deterrence measures through which restrictions to socio-economic rights are enforced (Muy, 2016). In the decades from 1973 onwards, asylum seekers' material living conditions were purposively downgraded to curb the number of asylum seekers and to counter perceptions on the abuse of asylum which had entered the public debate (Münch, 2014). New restrictions required that social benefits were to be paid in kind, as well as forcing asylum seekers to live in collective asylum accommodation and restricting their right to work (Müller, 2010). In 1993, the 'Asylum Seekers Benefits Act' (ASBA) was introduced, which regulates both accommodation and financial benefits for asylum seekers and effectively separated asylum seekers' welfare provisions from those of the general population (Bosswick, 2000). The requirement to stay in collective facilities was one of several restrictive measures aiming to deter future asylum seekers (Müller, 2010). The ASBA of 1993 and its amendment in 2015 include not only a material reduction in benefits for asylum seekers, but was also an important symbolic measure that sought to appease public outcries over the alleged abuse of asylum (Schammann, 2015).

Despite the global popularity of deterrence policies, there is little evidence that deterrence policies are effective in impacting the decision making of future refugees and migrants. According to Gammeltoft-Hansen and Tan (2017), both internal and external deterrence policies are ineffective and not sustainable; not only do deterrence policies violate

international human rights or refugee law and are extremely costly, on the long-term they also disrupt international solidarity and fail to deter future migrants. More, internal deterrence policies such as restrictions in welfare or substandard housing have been shown to negatively affect the integration and mental health of asylum seekers (Bakker et al.,2016; Ghorashi, 2005). Internal deterrence policies remain popular instruments of migration policy making as they are integral to the securitization of migration, meaning the political and institutional framing of migration and asylum as a source of risk and insecurity (Huysmans, 2006). Deterrence policies continue to be implemented as they serve as a public spectacle demonstrating governmental control on issues of migration (Welch & Schuster, 2005). Following Darling, (2011, p. 269), restrictive governmental measures "are focused upon the production of uncertainty and the perpetuation of a politics of discomfort which acts to reassure and enable the comfort and 'ease' of others". Yet while this public spectacle might be effective on the national level, on a municipal and neighbourhood level the pursuit of a 'politics of discomfort' towards asylum seekers enacted by downgrading accommodation standards may have adverse consequences which create discomfort and insecurity for both asylum seekers and more established residents and ultimately reinforce stigmatization and moral closure.

This paper presents an in-depth investigation of the discomforting effects of asylum accommodation on asylum seekers and local residents living in close proximity to an asylum centre. In contrast to the assumption that asylum seekers' discomfort creates a sense of comfort for local residents, the findings illustrate how the purposive lowering of accommodation standards creates discomfort and moral closure among both asylum seekers and local residents. Drawing on carceral geographies, this paper argues that the material and institutional structures of asylum centres generate discomfort by way of three mechanisms, self-mortification, depersonalization and role-breakdown. The paper proceeds as follows: The second section introduces the theoretical foundations of the paper, connecting work in carceral geographies with recent work on the governance of affect through materiality and architecture. Subsequently, section three introduces the two case studies and section four the methodological approach. Section five discusses the three mechanisms contributing to asylum seekers and local residents discomfort. The paper concludes with a call to address the effects of a politics of discomfort on everyday social relations and the production of asylum accommodation as a carceral space.

## 4.2   The affective politics of asylum accommodation

As mentioned in the introduction, the politics of discomfort is part of the securitization of migration (Huysmans 2006), the rationale behind which is to deter future migrants while simultaneously demonstrating control over asylum seekers and providing

comfort and reassurance to a witnessing public. The identification of a collective threat to national security has the effect of unifying a political community by distinguishing between an 'us' and 'them' (Huysmans 2006). In other words, spreading fear and insecurity about asylum seekers gives rise to a collective 'us'. By consequence, "migration and asylum become a factor in a constitutive political dialectic in which securing unity and identity of a community depends on making this very community insecure" (ibid, p.47). According to Huysmans, a political and media discourse of insecurity is itself not sufficient to sustain the claim that asylum seekers are a source of danger; in order to uphold this claim practices are needed which administer asylum seekers' exclusion in everyday life. Asylum accommodation is thus part of a politics which purposefully manufactures feelings of unease and discomfort in order to legitimize measures of security against immigrants (Bigo, 2002).

### 4.2.1 The carceral qualities of asylum accommodation

This paper draws on carceral geographies to understand how a politics of discomfort works in and through asylum accommodation. While prisons remain a key topic within carceral geographies, the field now considers the prison to be only one version of a carceral space which is imbricated in a wider carceral system. Moran et al (2018) suggest that carceral experiences are both subjective and relational, allowing for an expansion of and comparison between carceral sites and experiences and propose three conditions through which carceral conditions can be understood. First, detriment as "the lived experience of harm", which is associated with "the confiscation of various types of opportunity or potentiality that would otherwise have been available, and whose loss is experienced as detrimental" (ibid, p.677). The second carceral condition is 'intention', referring to an agent who is responsible for incurring detrimental experiences. In the case of asylum policy, intention can be conceptualized as 'deliberate political indifference' towards forced migrants (Davies et al., 2017). The third carceral condition is 'spatiality' which describes "diverse (im)material techniques and technologies (which deliver intent), and the spatial relationships to them" (Moran et al., 2018, p. 679). Asylum accommodation can thus be understood as a carceral space, as its residents experience a certain degree of suffering which is directly related to a political rationale and is delivered through the spatial form of collective asylum seeker accommodation. Although asylum accommodation exhibits differences in the degrees of openness or closedness (Zill et al., 2020), these differences all exist along a 'carceral continuum' varying only in their degrees and experiences of unfreedom (Moran, 2015). The main focus of this paper is on the connection between the first and third carceral condition, that is, on the link between detriment and spatiality within asylum accommodation. Detriment as the lived experience of harm is understood as on the one hand an individual affective experience of discomfort as well as a set of structural governmental policies termed the 'politics of discomfort'. The link between the

spatiality of asylum accommodation, composed of material and institutional structures, and affect is explored in the next subsection.

### 4.2.2 The comfort and discomfort of buildings: Manipulating affect through architecture

The manipulation of affective states of individuals is a key governmental strategy within a politics of discomfort. As demonstrated by work in migration studies, affect may be used by states to control and exclude, as well as a means of resistance against state practices (Di Gregorio & Merolli, 2016) or to create a desired political outcome such as community cohesion (Fortier, 2010). Pile (2010, p.8) summarizes the main characteristics of affect as 'pre-cognitive, trans-personal and non-representational'. First, affect is pre-cognitive in that it occurs before its translation into emotion. Second, affect is also 'non-representational', that is, it cannot be 'made known' or represented. This necessarily presents a challenge to those wishing to study affect. One way around this difficulty is to conceptualize affect in terms of what it *does,* as "the *how"* or "the *motion* of emotion" (original emphasis, Thien 2005, p. 451). A third characteristic of affect is that it is transpersonal, that is, affect is not constrained to one body, but operates between bodies (Pile, 2010). It is this transpersonal capacity of affect which explains how the manipulation of affect can be used as a governmental strategy. Ahmed (2004) explains the transpersonal capacity of affect as functioning like an economy; similar to the notion of capital, affect is produced through its circulation, thereby uniting or dividing people.

Following this understanding of affect, discomfort, unease, fear and insecurity are cognitive, reflexive emotions, while also being associated with pre-cognitive, bodily states. While these terms are often used interchangeably, there is merit in further unpacking the notion of 'discomfort'. In his study of migrant Australians experiences of belonging and racism, Noble (2005, p. 113) conceptualized comfort as 'ontological security', defining it as "the confidence or trust we have in the world around us, both in terms of the things and the people with which we share our lives, and hence which provide stability and a continuity to our identity. This trust is more sensual and affective than it is cognitive, grounded in the routines and spaces of daily existence". This definition links individuals' experiences of comfort to situated environmental experiences; feelings of comfort and security are the result of a trusting relationship between individuals and their environment. Comfort is thus not a passive feeling, but is "the 'fit' we experience in relation to the spaces we inhabit and the practices we perform" (ibid, p.114). The degree to which an individual experiences themselves as 'fitting' into an environment depends both on their own actions and capacity to make themselves 'fit', as well as on other people's recognition of an individual as belonging into this particular environment (Noble, 2005).

Geographies of architecture and its discussion of affect helps understand the transpersonal affective capacities of asylum accommodation and its effects. According to Thrift (2004),

the design of urban spaces is an example of the political engineering of affect, by which is meant that political attitudes are influenced by bodily reactions. Following this line of thinking, Kraftl and Adey (2008) compare two seemingly different spaces, a kindergarten and an airport prayer room in their capacity to facilitate inhabitation. Their analysis shows how the kindergarten is designed in harmony with its natural surroundings by using natural materials or no harsh corners, thereby evoking feelings such as welcome and homeliness in both children and adults. Separated from the main building, the airport prayer room evokes a sense of familiarity and relaxation through particular objects such as candles or wall art and the boundedness of its space. The comparison of the two spaces highlighted that space can be designed to facilitate certain affects such as homeliness or relaxation, which are often informed by particular political assumptions such as about childhood or religiosity. While architectural experience can channel affect and is thus not 'innocent', it is important to stress that the manipulation of affect through architecture does not work in a straightforward manner. How humans experience buildings is not only shaped by affect, but also by other factors such as discourse, rationality, past experiences, emotions and judgements (Rose et al., 2010). This distinction is helpful as it allows for the political manipulation of peoples affective experiences, while recognizing that people are not empty vessels but experience buildings differently based on their own biography or individuality. The following section gives a short introduction to asylum in Germany and a description of the two case studies.

## 4.3   Asylum in Augsburg: Two Case Studies

Asylum seeker reception and accommodation in Germany is characterized by a high variability of reception practices, as well as high amounts of discretion for municipalities (Hinger et al., 2016; Schammann, 2015). Accommodation standards are defined by each of the sixteen federal states, while no regulations are made on state level. Variability in reception practices is a consequence of the division of legal competences between the national level, the sixteen federal states and the local level. Claims to asylum are processed by a national authority, the BAMF, while federal states have the oversight and task of organizing asylum seeker reception and accommodation. Federal states delegate the task of reception and accommodation to local governments, with the exception of the federal state of Bavaria, in which the district governments are responsible for accommodation. Local governments' right to self-governance determines the extent to which a municipality will offer services beyond the nationally mandated level. This division in competences between the national, federal and local level leads to large differences in asylum seeker reception and accommodation, which Schammann (2015, p. 31) describes as a "patchwork of non-voluntary everyday realities".

Accommodation standards on a local level are in part determined by the existence of basic minimum standards within federal state asylum law, as well as by the specific actor constellations within a local migration regime (Hinger et al., 2016; Schammann, 2015). Hence, the lack of minimum standards on a federal state level does not necessarily determine the quality of accommodation on a local level, as local governments may opt to voluntarily implement higher reception and accommodation standards on the basis of local integration policies (Aumüller et al., 2015). According to Wendel (2014), only half of Germany's federal states defined a set of minimum accommodation standards and even fewer introduced control mechanisms to assess their implementation. The state of Bavaria issued a set of non-mandatory minimums standards in 2010 (see table 1), which apply only to accommodation provided directly by the district administrations of Bavaria, yet not for accommodation organized by municipalities. Yet during the 2015 'refugee crisis', many federal states, including Bavaria, suspended their recommended or mandatory minimum standards (Fahn, 2016). It is therefore unsurprising that the German Institute for Human Rights (Engelmann & Rabe, 2017, p. 60) concludes that "the basic human rights of inhabitants of collective asylum centres cannot be systematically ensured".

| | |
|---|---|
| *Minimum space per person* | Min. 7m$^2$ |
| *Number of people per room* | 4 (max 6) |
| *Rooms* | Separated by gender (exception families)<br>Families in separate rooms |
| *Kitchen facilities* | Four hobs per eight people, two ovens per kitchen |
| *Bathroom facilities* | Sink for five to seven people<br>Showers for max 10 people<br>One toilet per 10 people, separated by gender |
| *Other facilities* | *In case local circumstances permit for the following:*<br>Common rooms<br>Outdoor areas<br>Play and homework room for children<br>Room for ill people |
| *Location of accommodation* | *"wherever possible, in or in close proximity to residential environment"* |

**Table 2 Overview Accommodation Standards Bavaria 2010-2015 (Bayerisches Staatsministerium, 2010)**

The city of Augsburg is located in the South-East of Germany in the state of Bavaria and has a population of nearly 300.000 inhabitants. Up to 1250 asylum seekers are accommodated in Augsburg in three different types of temporary accommodation, consisting of 12 state-administered collective asylum centres (Ger. "Gemeinschaftsunterkunft" or 'GU'), 38 municipal decentralized housing units with no more than 50 asylum seekers each and several facilities for unaccompanied minors. In 2018, the majority of asylum seeking persons in Augsburg came from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Nigeria and Somalia; about 65% of these were registered as male, 35% as female (Augsburg, 2019).

The selection of the first case study, the 'Grandhotel Cosmopolis' (GHC) is based on the uniqueness of its concept and its potential to study the effects of higher degrees of spatial, material and institutional openness of asylum accommodation on everyday social interactions (Zill et al., 2020). The selection of the second case study, the 'Gemeinschaftsunterkunft Ottostraße' (GUO) is based on differences in its material and institutional dimensions, accommodating more than twice the number of inhabitants than the GHC. We opted for a comparative case study located within the same city to minimize the contextual differences between the two cases. The GHC (see picture 1) was initiated in 2013 and is one of the first cases of innovation in asylum accommodation in Europe. Located in a former elderly care home built in the 1950s, the building was abandoned in 2007 as it no longer met modern care home standards. In 2012, local artists and activists renovated the building over the course of one year, during which they gave public tours and organized events. The first group of asylum seekers arrived in August 2013 and in October 2013 the GHC opened for hotel guests. The building has 56 rooms for asylum seekers, 12 hotel rooms, 10 hostel rooms and 18 artists' studios (Grandhotel Cosmopolis, 2018). The original plan of mixing asylum seekers' and hotel rooms was opposed by the local district administration who is responsible for the accommodation of asylum seekers, meaning that the floors of asylum seekers and hotel guests are clearly separated and only connected by a common staircase. The second asylum centre, GUO, is located in a former manufacturing plant for sleeves of hot air balloons, dating back to the 1920s (see picture 2). Since then, it was turned into an office building of the same company and later abandoned. In 2012 the building was acquired by the local district administration, who transformed it into an asylum seeker reception facility. The building houses about 160 asylum seekers, including disabled refugees, as it is one of the few that has a barrier-free entrance and bathrooms. Families with children live on the ground floor, families and single traveling women on the first floor and single traveling men on the second floor.

**Picture 1 Grandhotel Cosmopolis 'GHC' (picture by author)**



**Picture 2 Gemeinschaftsunterkunft Ottostraße 'GUO' (picture by author)**

## 4.4  Methods

This research used a combination of ethnographic methods to investigate the perceptions and experiences of comfort and discomfort of living in an asylum centre and in direct vicinity to it. The material presented draws upon fourteen months of qualitative data collected between September 2016 and November 2017, employing participant observation and semi-structured interviews as the main methods for data collection. Specifically, the main researcher volunteered in the café of the GHC, which was a good space to observe daily interactions between members of staff, volunteers, asylum seekers, hotel guests and local residents. In the second case, long hours of participant observation and 'hanging out' proved difficult, as there were no comparable semi-public spaces as in the first case. To compensate for this, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the centre administrator, a social worker of the centre and several representatives of neighbourhood organizations to provide additional insights into the everyday lives of residents living in the centre as well as into the overall character the neighbourhood and its residents. Upon invitation from volunteers of GUO who had been informed about the ongoing research activities, the main researcher joined several homework tutoring sessions which were attended mostly by families with children. These homework sessions were not used to provide primary data, but used as an opportunity to collect secondary data on the general atmosphere and character of interactions within the centre.

There were considerable differences in the process of obtaining access to two case studies; access to the GHC involved presenting the proposed research to the management team of the GHC, to which the first author already had personal ties from previous research. Access to the second case study was more formalized as it involved contacting and gaining approval from the centre administrator. These differences in gaining access also reflected the positionality of the main researcher within the two settings; in the second case, being a researcher was considerably less questioned than in the first case. One of the reasons for this difference was that the GHC can be considered an 'over-researched place', that is, a place that is 'disproportionately targeted' by students, researchers and journalists (Neal et al., 2016). Over-research in the case of the GHC presented a challenge for recruiting interview participants among resident asylum seekers, especially women, as it created 'research fatigue' and distrust towards researchers and journalists (Zill 2021, forthcoming).

As the first author has a long-standing relationship with the GHC which was established before the project gained national media attention, the author entered into dialogue with the management team of the GHC to discuss the conditions under which research was possible and ethically feasible. Together with its management team, the first author

decided to be an active volunteer in the GHC in order to establish a more reciprocal, long-term relationship to minimize the ethical dilemmas associated with 'fly-in-fly-out' research (Mackenzie et al., 2007). Over a period of fourteen months, the main researcher was not only present on an almost daily basis, but also volunteered in the café of the GHC, during a public events or by helping out in project related tasks, such as helping with English translations for social media texts. The researchers' active involvement in the project before, during and after the research period helped build more reciprocal research relations and to 'give back' to a certain extent. Being present on a regular basis also provided the time to further explain the purpose of research to staff and residents and, whenever possible, enter into dialogue about the conducted research. Next to 'giving back', volunteering also facilitated the observation of everyday interactions in order to get a general impression of the research context and helped to introduce the research to potential research participants, many of whom were volunteers themselves or were otherwise present on a regular basis in the semi-public spaces of the GHC. The active involvement of the main researcher over a longer period of time thus permitted to build a sense of familiarity with potential research participants, while at the same time introducing the content and purpose of the research long before an interview took place. In order to stay in dialogue about the research, the main author returned to the GHC as an 'academic-in-residence' between October 2019 and January 2020. During this period, the main author organized a public event at which the findings of the research were presented.

The research opted for a heterogeneous sample in terms of age, gender, country of origin and length of residence in the centre or neighbourhood to allow for a range of experiences and opinions (see table 2). Local residents of both cases were recruited through distributing leaflets in the two neighbourhoods, through snowballing and by directly approaching individuals in the vicinity of both centres, which proved to be most successful way of recruitment. Asylum seekers in the GHC were recruited by directly approaching them in the semi-public spaces of the house, while only few were recruited through snowballing or via gatekeepers who were residents of GHC or had a refugee background themselves. Asylum seekers living in GUO were recruited mostly through gatekeepers, which were members of the neighbourhood support group or via a fellow refugee who was friends with several residents of the centre. Despite efforts to be reflexive on power-relations as well as on questions of positionality in both settings, research with vulnerable groups such as asylum seekers will always remain 'messy' and ethically challenging and bear certain risks due to the relatively precarious position of individuals (Frazier, 2020; Hugman et al., 2011).

A total of thirty-one semi-structured interviews with local residents of both cases were conducted. The interviews were held in German in a location of the participant's

choice and lasted between half an hour and one and a half hours. Several local residents in second case were hesitant or refused to be interviewed about the topic of asylum, demonstrating that asylum constitutes a sensitive and potentially divisive topic among residents. The obtained interviews are nevertheless illustrative of a wide variety of opinions regarding the topic and the complexity of the issue. In addition, thirty interviews with asylum seekers were conducted in a setting of their choice. The majority of interviews with asylum seekers was conducted in either English or German, a translator was used only in few cases. Quotes in the results section are marked either with 'O' meaning 'original' and are taken from interviews conducted in English, while quotes marked with 'T' are translated from German. After gaining consent from participants, all interviews were recorded, transcribed and anonymized. All interviews were analysed together with observations in MAXQDA. The themes structuring the results section, self-mortification, depersonalization and role-breakdown, emerged from the data using a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2014).

| | Case 1: 'Grandhotel Cosmopolis' | Case 2: 'GU Ottostraße' |
|---|---|---|
| **Asylum seekers (Total = 30)** | | |
| *Gender* | 2 female 13 male | 8 female 7 male |
| *Ages* | 21 to 48 | 14 to 43 |
| *Countries of origin* | Afghanistan, Syria, Senegal, Kosovo, Iran, Sierra Leone, Morocco, Tunisia | Syria, Afghanistan, Uganda, Eritrea, Senegal |
| *Length of residence in centre* | Five months to ca 4 years | Six months to ca 2,5 years |
| **Local residents (Total = 31)** | | |
| *Gender* | 6 female 8 male | 9 female 8 male |
| *Ages* | 31 to 65 | 23 to 68 |
| *Countries of origin* | Germany, Austria, Cuba, Montenegro | Germany, Croatia |
| *Length of residence in neighbourhood* | several months to over twenty years | several months to several decades |

**Table 3 Overview Respondents GHC and GUO**

## 4.5   Assaults on 'the self': Discomfort as Self-Mortification

The following three sections demonstrate how asylum accommodation produces a politics of discomfort by manipulating the affective experiences of both asylum seekers and local residents. As Moran et al (2018) argue, detriment, or the experience of suffering is a characteristic of carceral conditions, along with the intent to induce suffering. In the case of asylum accommodation, intent is conceived as the politics of discomfort, part of

which is the mandatory housing of asylum seekers in collective forms of accommodation. The following three sections seek to highlight the precise mechanisms and effects of a politics of discomfort and the subsequent production of carceral conditions within asylum accommodation. This section describes how affective encounters with material and institutional elements of asylum accommodation, such as the over-crowding of rooms, unhygienic living conditions and insufficient safety measures contribute to asylum seekers' self-mortification. According to Goffman (1961, p. 32), physical and symbolic degradations, such as contaminated food, a lack of hygiene or denial of personal possessions can lead to self-mortification within institutional living environments, describing a process in which "the boundary that the individual places between his being and the environment is invaded and the embodiments of self profaned". Consequentially, self-mortification induces changes in individuals' conceptions and beliefs of themselves.

A key characteristic of collective forms of asylum accommodation across Germany is the sharing of kitchen and bathroom facilities. Asylum seekers' perceptions of shared kitchen and bathroom facilities conveyed a sense of affective discomfort as the facilities were often reported to be unclean and unhygienic. The recommended Bavarian standards stipulate that eight people share four stove hobs, with a maximum of two ovens per kitchen; in the case of GHC and GUO, this amounted to about twenty people sharing one kitchen. Similarly, accommodation standards recommend one shower for ten people, with bathrooms separated by gender. For both cases this meant that nearly twenty people shared one bathroom. Emenike, a man in his late twenties, explained the difficulties of having to share unclean facilities, highlighting the connection between physical contamination and affective and emotional experiences :

> *"Most times I just, I feel somehow. You go to the kitchen, you can't even bring your friend to the kitchen, because it's been messed up. Nobody cares, just live the life anyhow. It's not really nice, you cannot live life like that. When I see those things, I feel somehow." (Emenike, GHC, O)*

Emenike's statement clearly demonstrates how his encounter with unhygienic living conditions is an affective experience that leads to certain emotional reactions, such as feeling a sense of shame, expressed through his statement that he does not want his friend to see how he lives. This affective encounter with 'matter out of place' also shapes his perceptions of others, conveying a sense that 'nobody cares'.

A second source of discomfort for asylum seekers living in GHC and GUO were feelings of personal unsafety. The findings indicate that large asylum centres, such as GUO, may be associated with higher degrees of unsafety, particularly for vulnerable groups, such as women and children. Female asylum seekers of both cases experienced feelings of unsafety due to shared bathroom facilities. Both GHC and GUO accommodate members

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of both genders and are therefore termed 'mixed accommodation facilities'. Previous studies have shown that mixed facilities often lead to "structural situations of potential threat for women" (Foroutan et al., 2017, p. 13). Although a separation of floors and bathroom facilities is recommended, several female respondents explained that this separation by gender does not always hold up in practice. According to Aretta, a woman in her late twenties, maintaining hygienic conditions and personal safety for women remained a problem in the GHC:

> *"The only problem we have is with toilet, is too dirty. You know, is a public toilet, and they clean, we don't have secure in the toilet, you know, like, for women. Men also go there to take their shower, and is very bad, because sometimes you might go inside and you saw woman naked. So I think that is the only problem in this floor. We don't have key to lock it. [...] You know we are woman, we need privacy and we also need the place to be clean."*
> *(Aretta, GHC, O)*

Aretta's statement illustrates how insufficient material standards contribute to affective experiences of discomfort, understood here as a form of 'ontological insecurity'. Rationales of securitization, such as the impossibility to lock showers, create conditions of structural unsafety. Asylum accommodation frames asylum seekers as a source of risk, with the consequence that it is not their own but other people's safety that has to be ensured (Huysmans, 2006). Aretta's statement highlights that women and children are unequally targeted by a politics of discomfort, revealing the gendered dimension of the securitization of migration (Gerard & Pickering, 2013).

While affective experiences can lead to certain emotional experiences, an individual's reactions to these affective experiences may not be straightforward. This is the case when an affective experiences trigger the agency of the individual; as Rose et al (2010) stress, buildings only have a limited capacity to manipulate affective experience, as rationality, memory and past experience are just as important in shaping people's actions. The empirical data thus also shows several instances in which respondents challenged affective experiences of discomfort. The fight against unhygienic conditions is evidence of agency on the side of asylum seekers seeking to counter the effects of self-mortification. By taking control over unhygienic conditions, asylum seekers re-establish trust in their environment, which helps to restore a sense of comfort (Noble, 2005). Benesh, a young woman who had lived in GUO for about two years, described the usage of bathroom facilities as a daily battle against discomfort. Her statement vividly illustrates how her fight against contamination was simultaneously a fight to take control over an unclean environment and preserve her physical and psychological boundaries.

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*"I bought a disinfectant, yes, I remember very well, I bought it and I put it into a bag and in this bag I also had toilet paper, those things that you normally use. And then, this was like a weapon, like a strong police weapon and armed with the bag I went in." (Benesh, GUO, T)*

The battle against contamination not only prompted asylum seekers to clean facilities voluntarily, but in the case of GUO, also aligned staff and asylum seekers against institutionalized discomfort, thereby shining a light on the insufficiency of current accommodation standards. These findings are also in line with work stressing that asylum seekers held in spaces of confinement such as detention centres or offshore processing centres are not devoid of agency (Mountz, 2011). Kaamishah, a girl in her early teens and her father Bahirun explained:

*Kaamishah: „The staff is really nice, everybody really [...] There was one family, they did not receive a status, so they cleaned the kitchen. But since they are gone, everyone has to clean for themselves, otherwise the kitchen would explode. So we also help."*

*Bahirun: "We help the staff. One one staff member is alone and nobody cleans, we help them. They are great."*
*(Kaamishah & Bahirun, GUO, T)*

While there is not enough evidence to fully determine how common alliances between members of staff and residents were, several interviewees mentioned the friendliness of staff members, some of whom also helped residents in his free time. These forms of agency and connection are important to take account of, as they demonstrate the limitations of a politics of discomfort to determine the actions of both asylum seekers and members of staff. Both statements illustrate that while the experience of contamination and unhygienic facilities may create affective experiences, how people respond to these experiences may not align with their predetermined intent. Overall, this section demonstrates that experiences of self-mortification can be understood to be an invasion of an individuals' physical and mental boundaries through the creation of living conditions that endanger the physical and mental health of an individual. Living conditions such as in the case of asylum accommodation can be described as another case of deliberate state inaction; as Davies et al (2017) reason, it is not due to a lack of resources that marginalized groups experience inadequate or even dangerous living conditions within the advanced welfare systems of Northern Europe. Rather, insufficient living conditions can be interpreted as a way to exert power and control over asylum seekers' bodies through the denial of sufficient care and attention to public health. Ultimately, the denial of care and sufficient living conditions serves

the wider rationale of internal deterrence policies. As noted in Wendel (2014, p. 53), the Bavarian asylum implementation regulation stated until 2013 that the dispersal and allocation of accommodation should encourage an individuals' willingness to return. While this sentence was removed, deterrence has remained the cornerstone of European migration policy (Gammeltoft-Hansen & Tan, 2017), with state *in*action as one of its key mechanisms. The following section will illustrate how material and institutional structures of asylum accommodation contribute to the depersonalization of its residents.

## 4.6    Creating a mass: Discomfort as depersonalization

This section discusses how the material and institutional structures of asylum accommodation contribute to asylum seekers' depersonalization. Buildings are more than their usage, as architecture can act as a symbolic referent for social difference or status (Kraftl, 2010). Correspondingly, Diken (2004, p. 92) describes asylum accommodation as "materialization of a 'fear of touching'". Similarly, Haselbacher & Rosenberger (2018, p. 263) understand asylum centres as a materialization of "the generalized, sometimes diffuse and abstract national discourse about the dangers and threats of immigration [...] National political debates and topics turn into personal experiences and concerns". Yet asylum centres are also more than a materialization of political and media discourse in the personal sphere, as their material and institutional structures, such as their size or architecture, has certain affective capacities which may reinforce or challenge local residents' discomfort with asylum centres. The comparison of the two cases highlights that the relatively high number of people accommodated in GUO contributes to depersonalization, while the institutional character of both cases shapes perceptions and everyday interaction between asylum seekers and local residents.

National discourses play an important role in shaping attitudes towards asylum seekers (Crawley, McMahon, & Jones, 2016), yet few studies analyse to what extent local residents attitudes are directly related to the affective capacities of asylum accommodation. Respondents of both cases felt that the amount and way of communication by authorities had influenced local residents' attitudes about the centre. According to several interviewees, state authorities failed to inform and include local residents at an early stage. State authorities' manner of communication was critiqued for being slow and indirect in the beginning, which was said to have caused feelings of betrayal, anger and helplessness among local residents. Local residents' exclusion from the centres' planning phase caused feelings of anger and discomfort among local residents, as the possibility to participate in affairs close to home constitutes an important way

through which comfort and a sense of local belonging is achieved (Yarker, 2019). This is illustrated by the statement of Julia, a female neighbourhood resident in her early twenties:

> „We learned about it because at one point there was a Din-A4 sized piece of paper on the building. Other than that, we did not hear about it. They completely kept it a secret, which in the beginning led to huge protests, because they really didn't inform us. They presented the whole issue as accomplished facts to the street, the neighbourhood, and that made a lot of people angry." (Julia, GUO, T)

Previous studies have shown that state and local authorities failure to inform local residents about the opening of asylum seeker accommodation contributes to protest and opposition against asylum accommodation (Aumüller et al., 2015). According to Huysmans (2006), feelings of insecurity stem from being unable to identify who is dangerous and who is not. While not informing local residents about the opening of a centre and its residents may not be motivated by the explicit intent to create insecurity, it nevertheless creates the effect of 'not knowing'. As local residents already have a certain amount of knowledge on asylum seekers gained through national and regional media reporting, a lack of specific information may contribute to an information imbalance between non-local information which is highly informed by stereotypes and local information which is largely based on direct experience (Blommaert et al., 2003). Local residents thus experience discomfort in the sense of ontological insecurity as the upcoming changes in their direct surroundings remain unknown, while the new asylum seeking residents of the neighbourhood are not 'unknown' but 'already known' as strangers (Ahmed, 2000).

Local residents also undertook measures that sought to personalize the centre's residents. During the opening of GUO, a nearby local NGO initiated a support group for the centre, which according to its members played a crucial role in mediating and communicating between asylum seekers, centre staff and local residents. One measure that aimed at personalizing asylum seekers was the issuing of a newspaper by members of the support group. The content of the newspapers ranged from background information on the political situation in asylum seekers' countries of origin, interviews with local police officers and residents of the centre to recipes (see picture 3). According to a social worker, these activities contributed to public acceptance:

> "I really think that this helps reduce fears. I also think, the knowledge that there are other German neighbours that offer help and are in contact with them, that that has a comforting effect for other neighbours."
> (Ina, social worker, GUO, T)

**Picture 3 The neighbourhood newspaper 'Otto2'**

A second aspect which contributed to asylum seekers' depersonalization was their accommodation as 'blocks of people'. Lofland (1973) distinguishes between individual and categorical knowing, that is, having unique, personal knowledge of a person or knowledge based on role or status. While direct neighbours of the GHC claimed they would recognize the GHC' inhabitants 'anywhere' in the city and even claimed to notice asylum seekers' absence (Zill, Spierings, & Van Liempt, 2020), individual recognition in the case of GUO was limited to asylum seekers with distinct characteristics, such as being particularly tall or sitting in a wheelchair. The comparison of the two cases thus indicates that the number of residents per centre influences individual recognition, with larger centres reinforcing processes categorical recognition. Knowing asylum seekers only categorically may have negative effects on everyday interaction by reinforcing processes of stigmatization.

Several local residents of GUO, such as Anita, had difficulties recognizing individual asylum seekers, as to them, large-scale collective accommodation created perceptions of asylum seekers as an undifferentiated mass.

*"In the beginning, before the centre was occupied, the neighbourhood was allowed to view the centre. And we saw that a family lives in one room, I thought that was too small. If they had only half the amount of residents, it would have been different, but like this… I think it creates a mass. […] From the beginning it was too many people for one room." (Anita, GUO, T)*

Anita's statement was echoed by Orisa, a young woman in her late twenties living in GUO, who similarly felt that the high number of residents creates a 'block of people' and that living in one's own apartment would be beneficial to everyday interaction:

*"I would love to have this contact, at the same time they don't, like for [the neighbours] it's hard because it's one block of so many people, like so many new people, so many refugees in this place and that's why maybe they are a little bit, not feeling comfortable about it. And it's different if you would be in an individual apartment, like your own place then it's okay, one or two houses, where people can come and knock on your door." (Orisa, GUO, O)*

Over-crowded living conditions may not only visually homogenize its inhabitants; through the negative effects on mental and physical health on its residents it may also contribute to conflict, which in turn reinforces perceptions of asylum seekers as prone to violence. As Aarash, a man in his late twenties living explained, governmental decisions on accommodation standards are left unquestioned, while asylum seekers are blamed:

*"Asylum centre, different people in one room, for example six people or five, that is so bad. That's stupid, the police will come, all neighbours see them and say, asylum seekers are shit, always fights, always problems. But the government also makes a mistake, to put so many different people in one room, you can't do that." (Aarash, GHC, T)*

In summary, the combination of a lack of specific and contextual information as well as their visual homogenization through high numbers of residents reduced asylum seekers to a 'metaphysical category' behind which the individual was obscured to local residents. Therefore, the politics of discomfort works not only through creating unpleasant experiences for asylum seekers, but has wider implications as its material components, along with the presence of multiple bodies, reinforces existing perceptions about asylum seekers. More, local residents' and asylum seekers' affective discomfort is transpersonal (Ahmed, 2004), as feelings of anxiety, shame or anger circulate between the inside and outside of the centre. Based on our findings, this effect is stronger for centres with higher numbers of residents, as larger centres increase anonymity and stigmatization by reinforcing categorical instead of individual recognition of asylum

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seekers. The overall effect is what Goffman described as 'moral closure', a 'state of mind', thereby creating a carceral spatiality through a mental demarcation of those on the 'inside' and those on the 'outside'. The following section discusses role-breakdown as a third effect of a politics of discomfort.

## 4.7    Normal neighbours? Discomfort as role-breakdown

Next to asylum seekers depersonalization, asylum accommodation also contributes to the effect of 'role-breakdown' or 'civil death', meaning a partial or complete breakdown of roles asylum seekers previously performed with regard to work, home or family life. In this sense, affective discomfort works relationally by aligning individuals with or against each other (Ahmed, 2004). In both case studies, a partial 'role breakdown' was apparent in the sense that most local residents did not regard asylum seekers as their neighbours, nor did many asylum seekers regard local residents as neighbours.

One factor that contributed to role-breakdown in both case studies was asylum seekers' accommodation in what was perceived to be an institutional space characterized by "care and control" (Malkki, 2002, p. 353). This was evident in the fact that local residents of both neighbourhoods perceived asylum seekers as an institutionalized population simultaneously in need of protection as well as of strict governance. This perception inhibited local residents from entering an asylum centre, arguing that they were unsure whether or not entering was allowed. Others held that the centre constituted a private space and that entering would violate asylum seekers' privacy. The following statement by Brigitte, a young woman living in the area, illustrates how a lack of information turns the centre into an ambiguous space, influencing perceptions on what one can or cannot do. Moreover, her hesitation of entering the space 'as a woman' also reveals a sense of fear, in which the affective capacity of asylum accommodation links up with national discourses on the dangers of immigration and especially male asylum seekers (Crawley et al., 2016).

> "I don't even know if one is allowed to [enter the centre]. Should one enter as a private person, as a woman? We wanted to donate clothes, we wanted to bring them there. [...] But we didn't in the end, because we didn't know, are we allowed in, should we do that? There is just not enough... I don't know... information what one can and cannot do". (Brigitte, GUO, T)

Similarly, several respondents among asylum seekers of both centres had experienced local residents' fear of entering asylum accommodation, which they felt inhibited normal neighbourly interactions with local residents. As Emad, a young man in his early twenties described, not only did the limited amount of space and lack of privacy make

it difficult to invite or host guests, local residents fear of entering asylum centres also inhibited social interaction between asylum seekers and local residents:

> *"When you meet someone and they say, where do you live, you can't say, I live in an asylum centre. Even if you say, come, let's go to my place, let's sit down a bit, most people are afraid, they don't want to enter a centre. And besides, you're not alone, there are three other people."*
> *(Emad, GHC, T)*



**Picture 4 A neighbourhood event for asylum seekers and local residents organized on the premises of GUO (picture by author)**

In both case studies, the effects of role-breakdown on social interaction were partially countered by creating temporary and permanent 'spaces of encounter' in and around the two centres (see picture 4). While proximity alone is not sufficient to create 'meaningful encounters' (Valentine, 2008), everyday spaces can still play an important role by enabling 'prosaic negotiations' between people and are the primary sites of negotiating difference (Amin, 2002). Particularly effective are "sites of unnoticeable cultural questioning or transgression", spaces which "[place] people from different backgrounds in new settings where engagement with strangers in a common activity disrupts easy labelling of the stranger as enemy and initiates new attachments" (ibid, p.969f). What this implies is that it is not so much a specific type of space that facilitates meaningful encounter, but a space that encourages individual instead of categorical recognition of people, thereby disrupting processes of stereotyping.

One such space for encounter within GUO were the spaces for homeworking tutoring created by the centre's support group. As Frank, a neighbourhood resident in his late

forties explained, signing up for homework tutoring provided him with the opportunity to get to know the centre's residents:

> "And then I signed up for homework tutoring [for children], out of pragmatic reasons, because I wanted to know, when a center like that opens, I want to know who is inside. And if children or youth cause trouble on the street, I want to be able to say something to them. And this turned out to be true. [...] In this neighbourhood, people really said, okay, if this really happening, then we want to have a say in how it is organized. And that group of people became the support circle which was present from the beginning to support the center." (Frank, GUO, T)

Frank's statement represents a move from 'the outside in', illustrating that "affect does not produce practice in any straightforward way" (Rose et al., 2010, p. 344). Despite the affective capacities 'a centre like that' might have had on him, these did not determine his course of action. His statement also speaks to the idea that a local sense of and belonging is established by being actively involved in shaping ones residential environment (Yarker, 2019). Similarly, Tariq, a young man in his early twenties and former resident of GUO, recounted how he and his family had very little contact with Germans in their first year living in the centre:

> "When we came to Germany, we just saw people outside, they didn't come to us, we didn't go to them. In my home country, the whole village consists of relatives and acquaintances, so you always say hello and invite people. Here this is different, perhaps it's cultural. And as I said, we used to be afraid, and [Germans] were also afraid. They only saw refugees on TV, the crisis and that refugees are dangerous. [...] At some point I started to say hello, some people answered, some didn't. Then I said, I want to sit at the entrance of the centre. I put a few chairs there, I had my schischa. At first, people thought it was strange, but then a few people came to us, talked to us, had tea. That's when I realized that we have to do something. Because we can't just wait for people to come to us." (Tariq, GUO, T)

Tariq's quote is significant in several ways; not only does it illustrate the difficulties of making contact with local residents, but it also shows how national discourses influence everyday interaction, leading to fear of the other on both sides. Eventually, Tariq decided to take action by creating an open, temporary space for encounter in front of the centre. Initially perceived as 'strange', this temporary space provided for meaningful encounters with neighbours through its 'strangeness' and thereby disrupted easy labelling. This action demonstrates not only the agency on the side of

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asylum seekers, it simultaneously shows the lack of spaces for encounter afforded by the current residential environment, with casual interactions constrained to the side-walks or nearby supermarket.

Altogether, the institutional character of asylum accommodation and the lack of spaces for casual contact and encounter contributed to role-breakdown and the possibility of asylum seekers to be perceived as neighbours. Both cases also showcased the agency of local residents and asylum seekers, seeking to 'open' the centre for casual contact and interaction, thereby pushing against the carceral qualities of asylum accommodation. Both case studies demonstrate that the possibility of perceiving and encountering each other 'as neighbours' proves crucial to combat a politics of discomfort and moral closure on an everyday level.

## 4.8   Conclusion

The aim of this article is to show how asylum accommodation produces a national politics of discomfort against asylum seekers and by so doing establishes asylum accommodation as a carceral space. Contrary to assumptions that asylum seekers' discomfort creates a sense of comfort and ease for local residents, the findings of this paper demonstrate that the politics of discomfort affects both asylum seekers as well as local residents. The paper compares asylum seekers' and local residents' experiences of two asylum centres in the city of Augsburg, Germany. While the first centre is a nationally renowned 'integration project', the 'Grandhotel Cosmopolis (GHC), the second centre, the 'Gemeinschaftsunterkunft Ottostraße' (GUO), is a state-administered asylum centre, named after the street it is located in. Building on work in carceral geography, the paper illustrates how the materiality of asylum accommodation has certain affective capacities which have three particular discomforting effects on asylum seekers and local residents, namely self-mortification, depersonalization and role-breakdown. The empirical results demonstrate how national discourses on asylum seekers merge with the space of the asylum centre, influencing local residents' perceptions of asylum seekers and everyday interaction between the two groups and thereby contribute to social distance and moral closure.

Self-mortification, described as the influence of institutional living environments on an individual's sense of self, was triggered by a lack of privacy, fears of contamination and feelings of unsafety. A second effect of a politics of discomfort was the depersonalization of asylum seekers, understood as their objectification, through a lack of specific, localized information on the centre in question and through the collective housing asylum seekers, creating perceptions of a homogenized mass of asylum seekers. The

comparison of the two cases highlighted that depersonalization was stronger for the second case, which exhibited higher degrees of material and institutional closure as it accommodated about three times the number of asylum seekers than the first case and provided for fewer spaces of encounter. The third effect of a politics of discomfort is role-breakdown or the 'civil death' of asylum seekers, as local residents regarded asylum seekers not as neighbours but as an institutionalized population. Overcrowding, the lack of space and the stigma associated with asylum centres impaired both asylum seekers and local residents of both case studies in their capacity to act 'neighbourly' by extending invitations or performing small acts of care which often form the basis for a sense of comfort among neighbours. Overall, asylum accommodation can be framed as a carceral space, not just because of the presence of suffering, but also because higher degrees material and institutional closedness increase social distance and moral closure between asylum seekers and local residents. Despite being legally open spaces, social distance and moral closure form the invisible walls and gates of these 'free jails'. The comparison of the two centres advances understandings of the local effects of asylum accommodation and carceral spaces. This paper illustrated that the politics of discomfort serves only to support the securitization of migration and does not contribute to a sense of safety on an everyday level. Discomfort created feelings of unsafety and estrangement, while measures stimulating comfort provided the ground for familiarization. What then is the purpose of a politics of discomfort and for whom is it enacted? One possible answer is that affective discomfort renders local residents and asylum seekers governable; as "it is those who are familiar that are difficult to govern, not those who are different" (Bosworth, 2014, p. 211). In line with Felder et al (2014), we argue that quasi-carceral spaces, such as asylum accommodation, may lay the groundwork for further violence and imprisonment by contributing to processes of moral closure, indifference or 'violent inaction' (Davies et al., 2017). The decades long process of lowering accommodation standards may thus have paved the way for developments towards more closed forms of accommodation, such as the recent ANKER-centres in Germany (Schader et al., 2018). It is thus of utmost importance to not only analyse carceral spaces in themselves, but also to compare different types of carceral spaces and how they reinforce and legitimize conditions of insecurity and separation in societies.

Finally, this paper argues that while it is crucial to recognize carceral spaces' tendencies towards material, institutional and moral closure, it is equally important to take account of openings, agency and resistances to closure. Both case studies presented in this paper exhibit how asylum seekers and local residents were not purely victims of a politics of discomfort, but actively pushed against it to regain a sense of comfort. Affect mobilized forms of agency to challenge discomfort, as asylum seekers and local residents took control over contaminated facilities or created temporary and more permanent spaces

of encounter inside or near the two centres, thereby providing opportunities for familiarization. These findings are indicative of the wider tensions between national deterrence policies and local migration policymaking (Caponio & Borkert, 2010), but also reveal how these tensions play out in one and the same space, resulting in different degrees of comfort and discomfort existing alongside each other. A stronger focus on how a politics of discomfort is produced, experienced as well as resisted by all parts of society could enrich understandings of the affective politics of asylum and help devise policies that contribute to a real sense of security.

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**4**

# CHAPTER 5

"In the city, you can just go anywhere, you can make a friend": Exploring asylum seekers' access to urban arrival infrastructures.

This chapter is currently under review at an international journal.

## 5.1 Abstract

Asylum seekers' experiences of living in asylum accommodation are often analyzed in isolation from the reception location and its residents. This paper approaches asylum accommodation from a relational perspective by exploring which types of arrival infrastructures offer asylum seekers opportunities for familiarization with the reception location and its inhabitants and to what extent asylum seekers have access to these infrastructures. Drawing on two qualitative case studies including thirty semi-structured interviews with asylum seekers, three different types of arrival infrastructures emerged as relevant to familiarization; infrastructures for information, for language learning and for social connection. A time-geographical analysis shows how asylum seekers are differentially positioned towards accessing informational, language-learning and social infrastructures due the intersection of spatial, institutional and personal constraints. Not specifically designed for the purpose of facilitating arrival, public and semi-public spaces proved to be indispensable to asylum seekers' informational and social infrastructures. The paper concludes by highlighting how state-provided, formal infrastructures often undermined the process of familiarization, thereby contributing to asylum seekers' differential inclusion, while informal, citizen-provided infrastructures were crucial in supporting asylum seekers' needs during the period of arrival.

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## 5.2   Introduction

Studies on asylum seeker and refugee reception increasingly emphasize the importance of the local level in determining asylum seekers and refugees' living conditions and future opportunities (Glorius & Doomernik, 2020). As national policies are implemented at the local level, localities often have considerable influence on the conditions of reception and accommodation (Caponio & Borkert, 2010). Differences between reception locations are consequential as asylum seekers often have little choice of residential location due to national dispersal policies operating in many European countries (Stewart, 2011). Recently, migration scholars have turned to the concept of arrival infrastructures to better capture the influence of the local context, as it shifts the focus from neighborhood based studies to constellations of technologies, institutions, places and actors which facilitate or hinder processes of migration and arrival (Xiang & Lindquist, 2014; Meeus, Arnaut, & van Heur, 2019). There are currently three dominant perspectives on the notion of arrival within migration and refugee studies: First, arrival is understood to be a multi-level governmental process associated with specific actors, policies and practices (Werner et al., 2018; Steigemann & Misselwitz, 2020). Second, arrival is conceptualized from the perspective of the established population as the arrival of newcomers in a specific locality (Glorius, 2017). Lastly, the notion of arrival is tied to a geographical area ranging from a classic 'arrival neighborhood' of the Chicago School to the more recent 'Arrival City' (Saunders, 2011).

Although these perspectives on arrival contribute important insights on how the presence of newcomers affects a given locality and the political, social and cultural processes that entails, this focus obscures what it means to arrive from the perspective of those arriving, which types of arrival infrastructures are crucial during the period of arrival and to what extent asylum seekers have access to these. Therefore, this paper approaches arrival as a period of familiarization with the local context and its inhabitants; a period in which in-depth knowledge and direct experience with the reception location and its inhabitants proves crucial to asylum seekers' future trajectories. Based on the empirical findings, the article focuses on infrastructures for information, language learning and social connection and how these facilitate or hinder familiarization with the place of arrival. Next to the focus on familiarization, the second contribution of this article is to apply a relational perspective to asylum accommodation and arrival infrastructures, thereby moving beyond the container-like perspective that dominates studies in this field. It is argued that the degree to which asylum seekers can arrive and familiarize with the reception location and its inhabitants depends not only on the presence but foremost on the accessibility of different kinds of arrival infrastructures, as well as on how asylum seekers become part of and shape different spaces through their spatial practice. Accessibility is conceptualized not simply as locational proximity,

but as personal, institutional and spatial constraints, drawing upon Hägerstrand's (1970) time-geographical notion of space-time constraints.

Empirically, this paper builds on thirty interviews with asylum seekers living in two inner-city asylum centers in the city of Augsburg, Germany. The following section lays out the theoretical framework of the article, consisting of an introduction to time geography and its connection with arrival infrastructures. The next two sections give a short introduction to reception and accommodation in Augsburg and the methods employed in the research. The results section is structured according to the three types of arrival infrastructures found to be of relevance to interviewees, namely infrastructures of information, infrastructures for language learning and infrastructures for social connection. The paper concludes by reflecting on the commonalities between the different infrastructures and discussing the analytical potential of a relational approach asylum accommodation.

## 5.3   Accessing arrival infrastructures: Opportunities for familiarization?

The aim of this paper is twofold: First, to contribute to the debate on arrival infrastructures by focusing on the relationality between asylum accommodation and arrival infrastructures. This is approached through the concept of infrastructure, which makes visible the interaction of human and non-human elements conditioning migrant mobility and settlement (Xiang & Lindquist, 2014). Second, by arguing that the accessibility of arrival infrastructures plays a key role in the process of familiarization with the reception location. Moving beyond a container-like view on accommodation, the accessibility of arrival infrastructures is explored by drawing upon time geography and more specifically the notion of space-time constraints (Hägerstrand, 1970).

### 5.3.1   The infrastructures of arrival

Arrival, for asylum seekers and refugees, is not a question of simply 'being there', but is associated with long periods of waiting and uncertainty until a decision on their asylum application has been reached (Conlon, 2011). Contrary to associations of waiting with passivity and a lack of agency, this article argues that the period of arrival is also an active period during which familiarization with the reception location and its residents is key to asylum seekers' future trajectories (Brun, 2015). Familiarization occurs through both individual agency and structural factors, influencing both asylum seekers' knowledge of a place and their everyday experiences of the reception location. Being or feeling familiar or unfamiliar with someone or someplace describes a relation characterized by closeness or distance and is acquired through both knowledge

and experience (Szytniewski & Spierings, 2014). Knowledge or 'informational (un) familiarity' is established through indirect sources of information, such as on- and offline social connections, social media, news networks, governmental or non-governmental sources of information. Feelings of familiarity are also created through direct, personal experience with different people and places (authors 2020). Everyday encounters with known and unknown others in public and semi-public spaces can also create a sense of public familiarity which Blokland and Nast (2014) link to a sense of belonging. As places also have different collective histories of migration, this may also influence asylum seekers' individual experiences of difference in the reception location (authors 2020).

The concept of arrival infrastructures focuses on the material and immaterial elements that enable newcomers to settle in a specific place, even if only for a temporary period. Meeus et al (2019, 1) conceptualize these as "those parts of the urban fabric within which newcomers become entangled on arrival, and where their future local or translocal social mobilities are produced as much as negotiated". Using the lens of 'infrastructure' has the advantage of moving beyond the traditional focus on the neighborhood as a space of arrival to include a larger area (Felder, Stavo-Debauge, Pattaroni, Trossat, & Drevon, 2020). Moreover, Star (1999, 380) highlights that infrastructure "is a fundamentally relational concept, becoming real infrastructure in relation to organized practices". In other words, the properties of infrastructures emerge only in interaction between 'people and things', they are hence not inherent to the things themselves but depend on the human element for their functioning (Tonkiss, 2013). The concept of infrastructure makes it possible to inquire how and to what extent different types of urban infrastructures intersect in facilitating arrival, rather than focusing on the actions or experiences of one particular group of actors, thereby moving beyond a sole focus on ethnicity (Dahinden, 2016).

Next to its relationality, Star (1999, p.381f) outlines several other characteristics of 'infrastructures': First, infrastructures are *embedded* "into and inside of other structures, social arrangements, and technologies". Second, infrastructures have a certain *reach* or *scope*, they are not one time but recurring events. Third, infrastructures are '*learned as part of membership',* meaning that new members first have to familiarize themselves with its usage. Fourth, infrastructures are *'built on an installed base'*, from which they obtain both strengths and limitations. Lastly, infrastructures *'become visible upon breakdown'*, meaning that infrastructures usually function without being noticed, but become visible when they stop working. Recent studies also highlight the ambiguity of arrival infrastructures, referring to the tensions between state-provided, municipal and grassroots provided infrastructures (Gill, 2018; Felder et al., 2020). This ambiguity makes it necessary to identify *who* is part of it and who it excludes, *where*

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and *when* it is or is not, *for whom* it functions and *how* it works, meaning which socio-material practices are part of it. As the notion of infrastructures invokes the question of who or what is part of it or for whom it functions, infrastructure always implies the question of accessibility, as "urban inequalities are expressed in differential access to infrastructural systems and goods" (Tonkiss, 2013). In other words, how waiting and arrival is experienced is highly dependent on the resources, technologies and spaces available to those who wait.

### 5.3.2   Accessing arrival infrastructures

Accessibility as a concept is historically linked to discussions on the relation between transportation, mobility and social exclusion and is often equated with spatial proximity or distance to transportation opportunities (Cass, Shove, & Urry, 2005; Lucas, 2012). Farrington and Farrington (2005) define accessibility as "*the ability* of people to reach and engage in opportunities and activities", arguing that the spatial dimension of the concept is a starting point for understanding the occurrence of injustice or inequality. This paper loosely draws on time geography as way to further conceptualize the accessibility of arrival infrastructures, as well as to argue for further time-geographical analyses of asylum seekers' everyday lives. Originally developed by Thorsten Hägerstrand in Sweden in the 1970s, its central idea is that time is key to understanding individuals' activities and everyday movements through space (Hägerstrand, 1970). Since then, time geography has seen a wide range of applications, most prominently in urban and regional planning and transportation research (Neutens, Schwanen, & Witlox, 2011; Ellegård, 2018).

According to Scholten et al (2012), time geography "gives the possibility to visualize constraints, dominant projects and individual reach by creating images of the everyday struggles between activities, decision-making, hindrances and intervening policies from an individual perspective and at a local geographical level." At the core of time geography is the idea that every individual is always located not only at one particular location, but also at a point in time. During a day, week, and even a lifetime, an individual describes a path, made up of his or her particular space-time movements. The path concept helps visualize the space-time movements of individuals, both human and non-human, up until the present moment (Hägerstrand, 1970; Ellegård, 2018). All movements are undertaken because individuals are seeking to fulfil future goals; in order to fulfil these goals, individuals devise *projects* made up of planned activities (Ellegård, 2018). Asylum seekers space-time paths are built around the goal of being granted asylum, along with other goals such as caring for children, learning the host language or building and maintaining a social network. Asylum seekers' ability to successfully carry out these projects is inhibited by personal, institutional and spatial constraints.

Hägerstrand (1970) defined three types of constraints, *capability* constraints, *authority* constraints and *coupling* constraints. Capability or capacity constraints refer to an individual's physiological and mental restrictions, such as eating or sleeping. Authority or steering constraints refer to relations of power in a society, that is, the institutional and societal context consisting of laws, regulations and norms. The concept of coupling constraints is fundamental to time geography, as these "stem from people's opportunities and the need to couple and de-couple" (Ellegård, 2018, 44). In other words, coupling constraints "define where, when, and for how long, the individual has to join other individuals, tools, and materials in order to produce, consume, and transact" (Hägerstrand, 1970, 14), meaning that individuals can only be in one place at a time, thereby limiting their options of being in other places during that time period. This paper employs Hägerstrands' three types of constraints in analyzing the accessibility of arrival infrastructures, referring to these as personal (capability), institutional (authority) and spatial (coupling) constraints. As Kwan (2013) highlights, time geography and specifically the concept of space-time constraints provide a framework for conceptualizing accessibility beyond locational proximity. In this sense, the accessibility of arrival infrastructures can be understood not simply as the spatial distance between asylum accommodation and the wider urban arrival infrastructures, but as asylum seekers' ability to reach and engage with these infrastructures given certain personal, institutional and spatial constraints.

The time-geographical approach is not without critique, and it is worth engaging more closely with this critique in order to understand both the merits as well as the shortcomings of this approach for analyses of arrival infrastructures. More so, as time geography has not yet been systematically applied to study asylum seekers' and refugees' everyday lives. Early critics have claimed that time geography neglects human emotions and experiences, is masculinist and does not take power-relations into account (Ellegård, 2018). While the critique of time geography being oblivious to human subjectivity is not entirely unfounded, one could argue that it is to some extent beside the point, as it is precisely the strength of this approach to provide a system that helps visualize differences in individuals' time-space paths by treating individuals as corporeal entities moving through space. The point is not to stop there, but to incorporate human experiences and emotions into time geographical analyses (Kwan, 2008; Dijst, 2019). Similarly, Scholten et al (2012, 585) argue that time geographical approaches are well suited to uncover gendered differences in household mobility and care-related tasks, stressing that "time geography could be used as a tool to analyze the possibilities and restrictions of carrying out everyday life projects". The next section will give a brief overview of Germany's asylum system, as well as present the local context of the two case studies, the city of Augsburg, Germany.

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## 5.4 Seeking asylum in Germany, arriving in Augsburg

Claims to asylum are processed on national level by the federal office of migration and refugees (BAMF); individuals arriving in Germany seeking to apply for asylum are directed to a local branch of the BAMF. After their application for asylum has been registered, asylum seekers are dispersed to a first reception facility in one of the sixteen federal states where they receive a so-called 'certificate of arrival' with their personal data (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2021). Until 2018, asylum seekers were dispersed to a second reception facility after a mandatory stay in a first reception facility of about three months. Since 2018, first reception and secondary accommodation are combined in so-called 'ANKER' facilities, which seek to accelerate procedures and increase efficiency in the 'voluntary' return and deportation of migrants (Münch, 2021). The dispersal of asylum seekers follows a quota system, the 'Königssteiner Schlüssel', based on the number of inhabitants of the state and its tax revenues. While the national government is responsible for granting asylum, the sixteen federal states are tasked with the reception and accommodation of asylum seekers. The federal level is characterized by a high variability in reception practices, as federal states operate different federal policies, support structures and minimum accommodation standards (Wendel, 2014; Hess & Elle, 2017).

Living conditions of asylum seekers in Germany have progressively worsened since the 1980s, as political measures had been taken which aimed at the deterrence of asylum seekers by reducing their living standards. The 'Asylum Seekers Benefits Act' (ASBA) of 1993 further restricted benefits asylum seekers receive as well as introduced benefits in kind, the denial of a working permit, residential obligations, the safe-third-country principle and the mandatory stay in collective accommodation facilities. These measures effectively separated asylum seekers from the rest of the population in terms of welfare (Müller, 2010). During the late 2000s, restrictions on asylum seekers were loosened to some extent. In contrast to the 1990s, asylum accommodation was to a greater extent located in inner-city and residential areas instead of very isolated areas, creating a higher visibility of refugees (Hinger, 2016).

Until 2015, asylum seekers were barred from accessing integration measures, only individuals who were granted a status had access to state-provided language and integration courses as well as to forms of employment. The so-called 'asylum procedure acceleration act' (APAA) of 2015 created a categorical division between asylum seekers with a 'good prospect of staying' and those with 'poor prospects of staying', based on the likelihood of being granted asylum. Those with good prospects were granted early access to integration schemes and the labor market, while asylum procedures and deportations were accelerated for those with poor prospects (Schultz, 2020). While the terms for

integration are still controlled on a national level, the role of municipalities in Germany regarding the integration of asylum seekers and refugees has become more pronounced in recent decades (Bommes, 2018). Passing the APAA in 2015 gave municipalities more financial leeway, as some state-provided integration measures such as integration and language courses are now made accessible to those asylum seekers with good prospects of staying. While the integration of asylum seekers was often treated in a pragmatic and unofficial manner, municipalities are now officially required to play an active role in the integration of asylum seekers and refugees (Aumüller, 2018).

The location of this case study is Augsburg, a middle-sized city in of nearly 300.000 inhabitants in the federal state of Bavaria, South Germany. Up to 1256 asylum seekers are accommodated in Augsburg in three types of temporary collective accommodation, consisting of 12 state-administered collective asylum centers (Ger. "Gemeinschaftsunterkunft" or 'GU'), 38 municipal decentralized housing units with no more than 50 asylum seekers each and several facilities for unaccompanied minors. In 2018, the majority of asylum seeking persons in Augsburg came from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Nigeria and Somalia; about 65% of these were registered as male, 35% as female (Stadt Augsburg, 2019). Two collective asylum centers were selected as case studies for this research, which were both located in the inner-city of Augsburg (see figure 1 and 2). The first case study, the Grandhotel Cosmopolis (GHC), is an experimental form of asylum seeker accommodation combining housing for asylum seekers, hotel rooms for tourists, a restaurant, café and event spaces. Located in a former elderly care home, it opened its doors in 2012 and is the longest running project of its kind (Grandhotel Cosmopolis, 2019). It offers space for 56 asylum seekers and has 12 hotel and 10 hostel rooms (Grandhotel Cosmopolis, 2018). The case study was selected based on the uniqueness of its concept, as it offers the possibility to study the effects of higher degrees of spatial, material and institutional openness on familiarization (authors 2020). The second case study, the 'Gemeinschaftsunterkunft Ottostraße' (GUO), is a state-run asylum center located in a former manufacturing plant and was selected for its different material and institutional dimensions, accommodating about twice the number of inhabitants as the GHC. The researcher opted for a comparative case study located in the same city in order to minimize the contextual differences (authors 2021).

## 5.5   Methods

The aim of this research was to understand asylum seekers' everyday experiences of arrival in an urban reception context and how differential access to arrival infrastructures shapes familiarization during the process of arrival. The research was conducted between September 2016 and November 2017 in Augsburg, Germany, and employed

a combination of ethnographic methods, namely participant observation, semi-structured and walk-along interviews, to gain in-depth insights into asylum seekers' perceptions and experiences of arrival infrastructures. In the first case, the researcher volunteered in the café of the GHC, as this was a good space to observe everyday interactions between asylum seekers and local residents. Participant observation was more difficult in the second case, as there were few spaces to 'hang out'; to compensate, the researcher conducted interviews with the center administrator and representatives of neighborhood organizations.

The process of obtaining access to the two asylum centers differed, as access to the GHC, a nationally renowned 'integration project', proved more challenging than the process of obtaining access to the more 'conventional' case of GUO (author 2021). Differences in access reflect the different character of the two settings, as the GHC can be considered an 'over-researched place' (Neal, Mohan, Cochrane, & Bennett, 2016), which is a popular destination not only for tourists, but also for researchers and artists that seek out asylum seekers and refugees for the purpose of a involvement in project. Access to the GHC was obtained through presenting a research proposal to the management team of the GHC to which the author had personal ties through previous research. In the second case, access was obtained in a more formal manner by contacting and gaining approval from the center administrator. Over-research in the case of the GHC presented a challenge for recruiting interview participants among resident asylum seekers, especially women, as it creates 'research fatigue' and distrust towards researchers and journalists (author 2021).

The research opted for a heterogeneous sample in terms of age, gender, status, country of origin and length of residence in the center to allow for a range of experiences and opinions regarding access and barriers to urban arrival infrastructures. For instance, differences in status highlight how institutional constraints shape access to formal arrival infrastructure, such as language classes, while differences in gender illustrate barriers to access resulting from care obligations. Asylum seekers in the GHC were recruited by directly approaching them in the semi-public spaces of the house, while only few were recruited through snowballing or gatekeepers. Asylum seekers living in GUO were recruited mostly through gatekeepers, which were members of the neighborhood support group or via a fellow refugee. Although differences in participant recruitment may affect the sample of interviewees, this effect was partially compensated for by participating in a homework tutoring class taking place in GUO as this facilitated additional contacts with several families living in GUO.

Thirty semi-structured interviews with asylum seekers were conducted, five of which as walk-along interviews in (semi)-public spaces of the city. Rather than pre-determining

which arrival infrastructures were of relevance to asylum seekers, the semi-structured approach of the interviews allowed for new insights to emerge in a bottom-up manner. The interviews with asylum seekers took place in a setting of their choice, the majority of which in either English or German, a translator was used only in few cases. Quotes in the results section are marked either with 'O' meaning 'original' and are taken from interviews conducted in English, while quotes marked with 'T' are translated from German. After gaining consent from participants, all interviews were recorded, transcribed and anonymized. All interviews were analyzed together with observations in MAXQDA.

## 5.6 Arrival Infrastructures: Providing Opportunities for Information, Language Learning and Social Connection

The following three sections depict three different subsets of arrival infrastructures of particular importance to the interviewees and how access to informational, language-learning and social infrastructures is limited through intersecting spatial, institutional and personal constraints. The sections also draw on asylum seekers past experiences of living in more rural asylum centers, as these proved to be an important point of comparison in assessing their current accommodation.

### 5.6.1  Infrastructures for information

Being able to access information regarding legal services, education, health or employment is crucial for establishing a sense of familiarity with the local context and its residents during the period of arrival (Hanhörster & Wessendorf, 2020). More, having access to information on legal services may be a decisive factor on the outcome of an application to asylum (Burridge & Gill, 2017). The empirical data collected illustrates how asylum seekers' access to information is constrained in two important ways: First, through their ability to obtain internet access either within their accommodation or in public spaces and second, through the spatial and social proximity of accommodation to diverse social networks.

#### 5.6.1.1  Information via digital infrastructures

A right to internet access in asylum accommodation is not included in German asylum policy, it merely grants an amount of about 35 Euros for the purpose of communication. In practice, this is not sufficient, as it only allows for expensive mobile data packages and cannot replace access to high-speed internet (Biselli, 2015; Bayerischer Flüchtlingsrat, 2021). In the two asylum centers that were part of this study, as in other asylum centers of the district of Swabia, internet was not provided for by the district administration. In GUO, internet was financed by a local refugee organization and set up by volunteers

based in the neighborhood surrounding the center. The district administration agreed upon the provision of internet in the center under the condition that they did not have to pay for the expenses. In the GHC, the physical infrastructure for cable internet was set up by volunteers in the first year of the project in early 2013, yet at that time the district administration did not grant permission for it to be used, as this would set the GHC apart from other asylum centers of the district. Subsequently, wireless internet was provided throughout the building by the GHC' non-profit organization for its day and hotel guests, with it being accessible to its asylum seeking residents as well. The capacity of refugee and citizen-led organizations to negotiate with municipal officials and district governments to provide internet in asylum accommodation or circumvent institutional constraints altogether was an important factor mediating asylum seekers' access to digital infrastructures.

Given asylum seekers' constraints regarding internet access within asylum accommodation, free wireless internet provision in public and semi-public spaces of the city became an important part of asylum seekers' digital infrastructure, helping them to overcome the institutional constraints present within their accommodation. Several respondents mentioned going to public places and squares such as 'Königsplatz' and semi-public places such as fast-food restaurants or shopping malls in Augsburg that offered free internet. This corresponds with Star's (1999) observation that infrastructure is embedded in other infrastructures and may not always be visible to non-users. However, similar to findings by Cancellieri and Ostanel (Cancellieri & Ostanel, 2015), this created a situation of 'hypervisibility' of asylum seekers in public places of the city, a situation in which "the level of visibility of [migrants] bodies as well as of their unconventional uses of the urban space challenge a 'spatial order' which is essentially taken for granted as the 'right way'". While these spaces thus provide a temporary remedy for a lack of access to digital infrastructures, they also expose asylum seekers to the danger of police controls, as the following quote by Amadou from Senegal shows:

> "Because [the shopping mall] is really nice, there is a square, it has Wifi. You can connect, watch youtube or go there with friends. But Königsplatz or Rathausplatz I don't like so much, there are many broken people, they behave like shit. And sometimes you are controlled by the police, I don't like that." (Amadou, GHC, T)

Asylum seekers face several, often interlinking constraints when seeking internet access. Not only is the digital infrastructure of their accommodation often lacking or insufficient due to institutional constraints, access to wireless internet in public spaces is often also conditioned by another form of institutional constraint, namely the fear of police control.

### 5.6.1.2  Information via social networks

A second source of localized information is through social networks, which are considered an integral part of any migration experience (Strang & Ager, 2010). An important difference between asylum seekers and other types of migrants is that in many European countries asylum seekers have limited choice regarding their residential location. Although the principle of family reunification is still upheld in most European countries, meaning that asylum seekers can apply for housing close to or with family members, those without family ties are dispersed on a no-choice basis to locations in which they have few pre-existing social contacts (van Liempt & Miellet, 2021). Moving asylum seekers away from larger social and support networks increases the importance of building new localized social networks in their dispersal location and securing the means to digital connectivity (Adam et al., 2019). Next to the presence of two welfare organizations in or in direct vicinity to GHC and GUO, both centers were connected to grassroots volunteer organizations. Interviewees such as Abrik from Syria explained while it was initially difficult to know where to find help, information soon 'came to them' through volunteers and social workers that were connected to the center:

> *"If you just walk on the street, talk to nobody, you won't receive any information. But there, information came to us. And I met many people there that have continued to help me up to this day. [...] Some refugees say, it's great, we get help, others say, we don't get enough information. C'mon, people, if you don't ask, then you won't get information. Just ask." (Abrik, GUO, T)*

Abrik's account demonstrates how information found its way into the center through local volunteers, whereby volunteers become part of the informational infrastructure, demonstrating the relationality of infrastructures as combinations of 'people and things'. This example illustrates the importance of asylum centers being materially and institutionally open to local residents, as how open or closed a center is perceived to be by local residents may affect the amount and quality of support a center receives and thereby asylum seekers' capacity to establish social connections with local residents (authors 2021). In other words, the degrees of openness of an asylum center can impact social interaction between asylum seekers and more established residents (authors 2021). Abrik's account also highlights the role of personal agency in seeking out information, confirming that infrastructures are learnt and require a certain degree of agency of individuals. More, infrastructures of information were indeed socio-technical arrangements, as volunteers not only helped set up digital infrastructures, but were themselves an important part of a 'lively' informational infrastructure by helping bring information into the center.

The interviews also reflected the importance of the spatial location of accommodation; not only did respondents of both case studies value the spatial proximity to volunteers and social workers, being accommodated in an urban area significantly improved their access to important services such as the foreigners' office, social services and refugee-related organizations. Other respondents mentioned that the ethnic and religious diversity of the city meant that they built social connections with established residents more easily than in other places they had previously stayed in. Respondents' previous experiences with more rural locations also highlighted that very remote locations proved to be a challenge to familiarization, especially for single female migrants. Nur, an Afghan woman in her mid-thirties recounted how she had been dispersed to a small, privately run asylum center located in a village of only two hundred inhabitants. She compared her stay there to a prison-like situation, in which she experienced different kinds of physical and mental abuse by both residents and members of staff. Being cut off from access to specialized refugee services including translators, she became dependent on a man that exploited and abused her in exchange for help:

> *"The difference between the GHC and the previous center is unbelievable, because, once, in Afghanistan, I watched a documentary about Guantanamo, and I found this image in [this village]. I thought, okay, this is Europe, Germany and there are human rights here, but in [this village], it was so horrible, it was like a prison, a strong prison. [...] I was the only woman there. [...] When I first came, I didn't know the language, so I couldn't organize my own affairs, I needed people that knew my language and eventually I found an Afghan man, he helped me a few times, but demanded that I sleep with him in return." (Nur, GHC, T)*

Nur's case illustrates the gendered dimension of access to arrival infrastructures and how a lack of access to key arrival infrastructures especially for women may not only reinforce feelings of imprisonment, but may also contribute to abuse and exploitation. Where asylum seekers are dispersed to is thus of crucial importance, as more rural locations not only offer fewer opportunities in terms of education, employment or legal services, but may also be poorly connected to more urban areas due to insufficient or inaccessible public transportation options. In short, asylum centers' degrees of spatial openness influence asylum seekers' capacities to access relevant goods and services, as well as their opportunities to build new social networks (authors 2020). The next section discusses a second subset of arrival infrastructures, namely infrastructures for language learning.

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### 6.6.2  Infrastructures for language learning

Despite the importance of language proficiency for future employment and integration (Hou & Beiser, 2006), access to formal language training in Germany, also known as 'integration classes', is restricted to refugees and asylum seekers with a high likelihood of being granted leave to remain (Schultz, 2020). Legal status and country of origin hence form two important institutional constraints obstructing asylum seekers' access to formal language learning opportunities. Among the thirty interviewees, less than half attended an official integration course, the other half came from countries that were not considered to have a good 'prospect of staying', such as Afghanistan, Nigeria or Senegal, and were therefore not granted permission to attend an integration course. In addition, several of these interviewees had their application to asylum rejected and were living in Germany with an insecure status. Despite these institutional constraints, most interviewees without access to formal language courses had taken or were currently taking a language course offered by a non-profit organization. Moussa, a Senegalese man in his mid-twenties, had received a negative decision on his asylum application. Despite this, he continued attending language classes as he considered this his only opportunity to learn German:

> *"When I came to Germany, only here I learned German, in Tür an Tür. But one and a half hours is not enough. In other schools, courses are four or eight hours. [...] I come [to the café] when I have homework to do, every Wednesday I come here at three, there are people that help with homework, good people" (Moussa, GUO, T)*

An infrastructural perspective on language learning also highlights how other urban public and semi-public spaces contributed to asylum seekers' language learning opportunities without being recognized as such. Not all everyday settings lent themselves equally to practice German; several interviewees mentioned the difficulties of making contact with locals, especially in public spaces interviewees felt inhibited making contact due to previously experienced prejudice. For a majority of interviewees, attending a language course was in itself not sufficient to feel comfortable communicating in German in everyday settings. Fear of making mistakes or being misunderstood limited interviewees in approaching people. Everyday language use can then also be viewed as an infrastructure that is 'learned as part of a membership'; new members need to familiarize themselves with its usage in real-life settings. Halima, a Syrian refugee in her late twenties, lived in GUO together with her husband and her five year old son. Although she attended a German course, she explained that it is very difficult for her to talk to people in German, as she was afraid of being misunderstood:

*It's the language, mainly and if I would know German, I would be able to talk to people and share my ideas. There is one woman, I meet her in the supermarket sometimes and she always talks to me. Especially when [my son] is with me, but I do not have the courage to speak, I am afraid not to understand her. (Halima, GUO, T)*

In order to overcome the fear of making mistakes and feel comfortable speaking German, many interviewees emphasized the importance of spaces in which they could practice German in an informal manner. Especially since 2015, language cafés and other informal settings have been created by citizens, non-governmental institutions and charities across Germany (Neis et al., 2018). In Augsburg, interviewees mentioned two such spaces, the cafés of the GHC and of the nearby NGO 'Tür an Tür'. The café of the GHC was not only a popular space among younger asylum seekers, but also a space to volunteer, as interviewees considered it to be a space to both practice one's German and meet new people. As Abrik points out, asylum centers are spaces in which many languages are spoken, yet offer little opportunity to practice German. Upon arrival, he established close contact with several volunteers connected to his asylum center, who referred him to the nearby GHC as a place to learn German:

*"I asked [the volunteers], I want to learn German, but in an asylum center, you can't learn one word of German. And then they said to me, come with us, we'll show you a hotel. So we came here [to the GHC] and I said, yes, I want to work here." (Abrik, GHC, T)*

Similarly, Miremba, a Ugandan woman in her late twenties, described how volunteering in the café of the local refugee NGO 'Tür an Tür' not only helped to improve her language skills, but also helped her expand her social network:

*In 'Tür an Tür', I made friends there, and I was actually one of the people who helped with, volunteered, the first time they open up the café, they needed people to serve and it was nice, yeah, having made a language course there also, I got to know fellow students, also the teachers, so yeah, I got to know some, quite a lot of people. (Miremba, GUO, O)*

Voluntary work, as other forms of work, require more than the co-presence of strangers and under certain conditions can facilitate a form of close collaboration, a 'community of practice' (Star, 1999), contributing to a form of togetherness and social inclusion. It is hence not so much the space itself, but the form of learned interaction among 'familiar strangers' that takes place within these spaces that creates an informal infrastructure of language learning.

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The benefits of being accommodated in an urban area with easy access to informal language classes come into sharp relief when considering the experiences of interviewees who were originally dispersed to a more remote location. Isaad, a young Afghan man in his early twenties, explained how he came to Germany as an unaccompanied minor and wanted to attend informal language classes as he was barred from accessing state-provided language courses. Although his asylum center was located in a nearby town with good public transportation, his limited allowance of 40 Euros per month was not enough to cover transportation costs, forcing him to walk to Augsburg in order to attend classes:

> *"Three years after [arrival] I couldn't really speak German, because I didn't have much contact to Germans. I was always with the other Afghan guys. Now you're allowed to attend a German course, but back then that wasn't the case. [...] I first met Germans in Café Tür an Tür. They offered a German course, not very long, one month or so, once or twice a week. We didn't have a bike or a ticket [for public transportation] so we lost interest in attending the course... We wanted to take the streetcar but we didn't want to risk getting fined, so we had to get up very early and walk all the way, it took us one and a half hours." (Isaad, GHC, T)*

Isaad's experience illustrates the intersection of all three types of constraints; while institutional constraints barred him from accessing formal language classes, they also hindered him from using public transportation by limiting his financial means. Although the spatial location of the center cannot be considered spatially remote in terms of the availability of public transportation, it was remote for Isaad as he was constrained by his body's physical ability to reach language classes by foot, further distancing him and his peers from language learning opportunities.

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Personal constraints such as care obligations also influenced female asylum seekers' ability to access to language courses, often intersecting with legal status and country of origin. Similar to the findings of Bernhard and Bernhard (2021), unmarried, female interviewees without care obligations were more likely to attend a German course and often had a larger social network through forms of voluntary work or religious activities and a higher language proficiency than female married interviewees with care obligations. Hence, spatial proximity to language learning infrastructures is not a guarantee for accessibility, as personal constraints prevented access and isolated female interviewees from language learning opportunities. The next section considers the importance of social infrastructures for coping with waiting and uncertainty.

### 5.6.3 Infrastructures for social connection

Latham and Layton (Latham & Layton, 2019) define social infrastructures as "the networks of spaces, facilities, institutions, and groups that create affordances for social connection", stressing that social infrastructures are vital to supporting physical and mental health and overall wellbeing. Interviewees who had stayed in both urban and rural asylum centers held that urban locations offered more possibilities for social connection, ranging from co-presence and single encounters in public and semi-public spaces to friendship and care relations. Cities like Augsburg not only offered different public and semi-public places to go to, but also a number of cultural, religious or physical activities which provided temporary relief from thinking about an uncertain future:

> "When I have a lot of stress, I go to the city, when I see people, going for a walk, my stress will be less… but if you are there where everybody is in their house, you don't see anyone, just woods or corn or so…it's too boring. But in the city, when you can't do anything, you can go to the cinema, you can go to a quiet café, you can do many things." (Mamadou, GHC, T)

> "In the city, you can just go anywhere, you can make a friend." (Abeke, GHC, O)

The previous two quotes not only point out differences between urban and rural reception locations, but more importantly the relationality between asylum accommodation and the wider urban infrastructure. In other words, many interviewees appeared to define the quality and experience of living in asylum accommodation by the opportunities offered by the wider urban infrastructure. Public spaces, such as Königsplatz, provided for opportunities of co-presence, that is, mingling with and simply being among strangers in public. For Abeke from Nigeria, this helped her cope with her current situation and provided opportunities for socializing:

> "Sometimes I go out to Königsplatz, I love to sit there and talk to friends. At least with time, everything is getting better, no? It's like a meeting point, completely in the center of the town. So, you meet there, you can discuss, you feel free there, you feel free in Königsplatz or City Galerie. […] Because… each time I want to think about the situation of life, if I go there I will see people passing, see some kind of people playing, then I will feel at home. I say wow, this is nice, then your thoughts will come out from where you think you know, you have to focus on what you are seeing." (Abeke, GHC, O)

Abeke's statement shows the importance of open public spaces for dealing with uncertainty by providing distraction and creating a sense of temporary freedom and

belonging. By providing for many different types of activities and forms of socializing, public spaces like Königsplatz create 'situated surplus' (Amin, 2008). Next to public spaces, semi-public, commercial spaces also provided for moments of temporary distraction, especially in cold weather. Fred from Kongo explained that he goes to a local shopping mall in order to escape the boredom of the asylum center:

> *When it's cold, I go there, go inside and watch people. Just watch people. Sometimes in the weekend there are lots of people in City Galerie. I'm bored at home, I want to see people, I go there. I go to city Galerie, Saturday, when I see many people, that feels like – I like that. (Fred, GHC, T)*

Abeke's and Fred's experience of 'blending in' with the crowd contrasted with feelings of 'hypervisibility' other interviewees experienced in public spaces of more rural locations. Given relatively fewer spaces to go to in these locations, interviewees like Ikemba from Nigeria not only felt observed but also inhibited his movement:

> *"In small town, it's very very different, because you don't move very well, if you have to move, you don't see anybody around, everywhere it's quiet, you understand, so you feel somehow, or you go to the garden, like the park, you sit down there, they start looking everywhere, you know most times, there are some old people, they look at you, just be looking at you, wow, I say they are cameras (laughs)." (Ikemba, GHC, O)*

Hypervisibility may act as a double-edged sword with regard to access to arrival infrastructures. On the one hand, the hypervisibility of asylum seekers may reinforce already existing prejudice. On the other hand, hypervisibility in combination with lower levels of anonymity in small and medium sized towns may also contribute to building support structures and facilitate contact between asylum seekers and established residents, as several studies of rural reception locations indicate (Adam et al 2019). Therefore, categorizing more rural reception as per se detrimental to accessing arrival infrastructures can be misleading, given the heterogeneity of rural reception practices.

## 5.7   Conclusion

This paper set out to analyze which types of arrival infrastructures were relevant for asylum seekers during the period of applying for asylum and to what extent asylum seekers had access to these. By focusing on accessibility the paper analyses what it means to arrive from the perspective of those arriving, taking a relational perspective on asylum accommodation: Much like a house that is connected to a sewage system

or electricity grid, asylum accommodation is analyzed in its connection or proximity to different arrival infrastructures. Based on thirty interviews with asylum seekers and refugees living in two inner-city asylum centers in Augsburg, Germany, the paper identified three subsets of arrival infrastructures which helped asylum seekers familiarize with the reception location and its residents during a period of uncertainty. These three subsets are infrastructures for information, language learning and social connection; subsets which are simultaneously part of other urban infrastructures and thus not exclusive to arrival. Bringing these three subsets of arrival infrastructures together in one paper made it possible compare them in their infrastructural workings, showing where they overlap or break down.

The period of arrival, of applying and waiting for asylum, is just as much spatial as it is temporal. In other words, the degree to which individuals can arrive and familiarize with the reception location depends not only on the individual, but also on the spatio-temporal accessibility of arrival infrastructures present. Not specifically designed for the purpose of facilitating arrival, public squares such as 'Königsplatz' proved to be crucial parts of asylum seekers' informational and social infrastructures, offering free internet access, a space for socializing and exchanging information. Public squares and semi-public spaces such as shopping malls also provided opportunities for co-presence, thereby creating a temporary sense of freedom and belonging among asylum seekers. The isolating tendencies of asylum accommodation are therefore not inherent to this form of accommodation, but are produced through different kinds of spatial, institutional and personal constraints shaping asylum seekers' space-time paths during arrival. The two case studies here demonstrate the difference it can make when asylum centers, as one part of state-provided arrival infrastructures, are connected to other types of infrastructures that provide the opportunities to familiarize with the local context.

The infrastructural perspective adopted in this paper highlighted the inherent ambiguity within arrival infrastructures. Volunteers and civil society organizations played a crucial role in building and maintaining informational and language-learning infrastructures despite and often against institutional barriers. For instance, the insufficient provision of internet access within asylum accommodation formed an institutional barrier to arrival and created a dependency on volunteer organizations and NGOs to fill the gaps. By providing resources denied by state policy, volunteers and NGOs challenged dominant interpretations and policies of arrival, highlighting the need for digital connectivity for asylum seekers (Gill, 2018; Mayblin & James, 2019). The ambiguity within infrastructures illustrated that state-provided, formal infrastructures often did not support but undermine the process of arrival, thereby contributing to asylum seekers' differential inclusion (Cuttitta, 2016). The tensions between the

provisions of formal and informal, citizen-provided infrastructures also demonstrated the increased importance of these non-state provided infrastructures during the period of arrival, providing services which previously were associated with welfare provision by the state.

While it is too simple to reduce the ambiguity within arrival infrastructures to state versus non-state actors, the disconnections between asylum accommodation and other parts of arrival infrastructures do reveal different ideologies and understandings of what constitutes arrival. These different ideologies are a product of European and national deterrence policies resulting in everyday bordering processes and revolve around the questions of who is permitted to arrive (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, & Cassidy, 2018). The ambiguity within and between different arrival infrastructures and their disconnection with asylum accommodation is symptomatic for policies of deterrence which seek to make the period of arrival appear as unattractive as possible in order to further deter asylum seekers from remaining in the host country. Deterrence policies which are targeting asylum seekers that are already in the country hence work against the future integration of asylum seekers by depriving asylum seekers of services necessary to 'arrive'.

In summary, asylum seekers can only make use of the opportunities provided by arrival infrastructures if these are accessible to them. To define accessibility in terms of personal, institutional and spatial constraints is to recognize that asylum seekers, unlike citizens, are subjected to a growing set of national and European restrictions seeking to deter migrants (FitzGerald, 2019). While this paper does not draw on time geography in a very extensive manner, it does seek to argue that a time geographical framework provides tools to analyze more closely differences in the accessibility of arrival infrastructures based on the unique intersection of personal, institutional and spatial constraints for every individual seeking asylum. Similar to earlier debates on residential segregation, the remoteness of asylum accommodation cannot be determined on the basis of spatial proximity alone, but is a product of the relationality between arrival infrastructures and different degrees of spatial, institutional and personal constraints in asylum seekers' everyday lives. Focusing on local 'opportunity infra-structures' which build human capability regardless of legal status also makes it possible to combine previously separated debates on precarity and how differences in the accessibility of opportunity infra-structures produce specific forms of social and spatial marginalization.

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# 5.8  References

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# CHAPTER 6

## Confessions of an 'academic tourist': Reflections on accessibility, trust and research ethics in the 'Grandhotel Cosmopolis'.

# 6.1    Abstract

Difficulties of reaching 'hard to reach' groups have resulted in problems of over-research of certain communities and places. Despite the often negative consequences of over-research, the ethical and methodological implications remain under-examined, particularly for the field of migration studies. In this chapter, several ethical issues are addressed regarding the positionality of the researcher within an over-researched place, the Grandhotel Cosmopolis in Augsburg, Germany. An alternative form of asylum accommodation which combines housing for asylum seekers with a hotel for tourists, a café and event spaces, the project found itself a popular destination for journalists and researchers during the so-called refugee crisis of 2015. The chapter addresses how over-research influenced questions of accessibility, gatekeeping and trust during fieldwork, but also the researcher's positionality in the field. The chapter introduces the notion of 'academic tourism' as a form of temporary and extractive research within over-researched places and presents emotional reflexivity and knowledge co-production as strategies to reduce its negative effects. The chapter contends that over-research is not merely a methodological, but foremost an ethical question that demands increased awareness.

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## 6.2 Introduction

This chapter discusses the challenges and consequences of over-research in the context of asylum seeker accommodation by examining the case of the Grandhotel Cosmopolis (GHC) in Augsburg, Germany. The project is an asylum seeker centre as well as a tourist hotel and describes itself as a "concrete utopia – realising a cosmopolitan everyday culture without limits where refugees, travellers, guests, artists and neighbours meet and are welcome" (Grandhotel Cosmopolis 2014). The project received multiple prizes and attracted scores of journalists, artists and student researchers since its opening in 2013. The chapter critically examines fieldwork undertaken at the height of the 'refugee crisis' in Europe between September 2016 and July 2017, as part of a PhD project. During the so-called refugee crisis, 'doing something with refugees' became fashionable in the fields of journalism, research, and political art. 'Hot topics' such as the 'refugee crisis' may result in 'over-research', meaning an excessive research focus on certain communities, projects, and places (Neal *et al.* 2016). The chapter argues that over-research is strongly related to temporary forms of research engagements pursuing 'hot topics' in places that are comparatively easy to access. The case study of the GHC highlights that over-research might not only produce research fatigue, but that the consequences of over-research on social relations between academia and local organizations and groups may be far greater and require both an individual as well as collective effort to address the issue.

Over-research is particularly prominent in the field of refugee and migration studies, especially after the so-called refugee crisis in Europe in 2015. Despite the fact that research in the field of migration and refugee studies is often undertaken with the best of intentions, researchers do not always consider how the research process affects participants or whether these projects accord with their most pressing needs (Hugman et al., 2011; Jacobsen & Landau, 2003). Following the high demand for knowledge on migration and refugees by both media and policy makers, the 'refugee crisis' gave birth to a 'refugee crisis industry' of which researchers are not only an important part, but are increasingly complicit with (Cabot 2019, Rozakou 2019, Stierl 2020). Being dependent upon humanitarian infrastructure in order to gain access to the field, 'hot spots' have emerged for studying the plight of refugees, such as refugee camps in Jordan (Pascucci 2017), Lebanon (Sukarieh and Tannock 2012) or the infamous 'Moria' camp on Lesvos (Rozakou 2019). According to Cabot (2019) funding structures promote a form of 'crisis chasing', which reinforces mechanisms of over-research and conveys researchers a sense of status and authority by having studied a prominent hotspot. Likewise, Sukarieh & Tannock (2019) argue that a 'refugee research industry' is benefitting from the institutions and actors it is critiquing through its dependency on state funding and research agendas.

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In the field of migration and refugee studies, over-research has several negative consequences for both research participants and the research process. In their study of the Shatila Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon, Sukarieh & Tannock (2012) describe how previous research projects and documentary films had turned 'particularly promising' individuals into 'stars' which had negative long-term consequences for them and the larger community. Over-research in Shatila also led to co-dependencies between NGOs and camp residents, created an overly negative place image and led to the commodification of research within the refugee camp. Relatedly, Pascucci (2017) found a kind of 'research savviness' on the side of participants in over-researched settings, which includes being well-informed about the research process and having higher expectations of research and its outcomes. Over-research also has negative consequences for the outcomes of research, one of which is called the 'streetlight effect'; a metaphor for how researchers tend to look for answers in places 'where the looking is good', rather than where the actual answers may be (Hendrix 2017). Similarly, over-research in the case of the Moria refugee camp contributed to its inaccessibility for researchers and journalists, while the high amount of knowledge produced on the topic mostly only served to reinforce its dystopian image "of a place of destitution, abandonment and violence" (Rozakou 2019, p. 79).

After a short description of the Grandhotel Cosmopolis, the second section discusses the notion of academic tourism and its influence on accessibility and positionality of the researcher. The third section describes how over-research affected relations of trust between the researcher and research participants in the GHC. Before concluding, the fourth section discusses strategies such as practicing engaged reflexivity and knowledge co-production for addressing over-research.

## 6.2   The Grandhotel Cosmopolis

The Grandhotel Cosmopolis is a hotel, asylum seeker centre, café, restaurant, artist and event space located in the inner-city of Augsburg, Germany. From 2011 onwards, the former elderly care home was transformed by artists and activists into a project that calls itself a 'concrete utopia' (GHC 2016). The GHC is an art project inspired by the German artist Joseph Beuys and his concept of a 'social sculpture'; it is a 'societal artwork' in which "everyone is welcome to participate" (Heber *et al.* 2011, Grandhotel Cosmopolis 2014, 2016). The first group of asylum seekers arrived in July 2013, in October 2013 the project opened for hotel guests. The building has six floors (see figure 1), with a café/bar and hostel area on the ground floor, space for artists on the ground to third floor, rooms for sixty asylum seekers including shared kitchens and bathrooms on the first to third floor, twelve hotel rooms on the fourth and fifth floor, a seminar room on the sixth

floor. Public events are hosted in the café or in its restaurant located in the basement. The building is owned by the Protestant welfare organization 'Diakonie', which rents the building to two parties: The non-profit association 'Grandhotel Cosmopolis e.V.' and the local district administration of Bavarian Swabia, who are responsible for housing asylum seekers. As described in an interview with the head of the welfare organization, the local district administration had already prior to the idea of a 'grandhotel' expressed their interest in renting the building. By agreeing to the concept of an integrated hotel and asylum seeker centre, the number of asylum seekers to be accommodated in the building was reduced, which improved the overall quality of living for asylum seekers as it put less pressure on general facilities.

The project attracted significant local, regional and national media attention, especially during the time of the so-called 'refugee crisis' in 2015 and won several regional and national prizes, such as the national 'Land of Ideas' competition (Grandhotel Cosmopolis 2016). A search in the news databank LexisNexis brings up over 100 results in German speaking news media alone. Most major national newspapers, such as the weekly newspaper 'Die Zeit' and German national TV stations have reported on the project (Grandhotel Cosmopolis 2019). Its popularity also attracted a significant number of bachelor, master and PhD students from all across Germany who wrote their thesis on the project, resulting in several publications (Costa Carneiro 2016, Marschall 2018). In contrast to other alternative accommodation centres such as Plan Einstein in Utrecht (Oliver *et al.* 2018), the GHC did not have a team of researchers responsible for a coordinated scientific assessment of the project and were relatively unprepared for the amount of media attention they received. The following section reflects on how over-research further complicated the process of gaining access to the GHC and how it challenged pre-conceived ideas on positionality in the field.

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## 6.3    Playing the tourist: Over-research as a consequence of 'academic tourism'?

The aim of the research project was to study how differences in the spatial, material and institutional openness of asylum accommodation influenced contact and encounter between asylum seekers and neighbourhood residents (Zill *et al.* 2019). To this end, I had planned to conduct semi-structured interviews with both neighbourhood residents and asylum seekers living in the GHC, in combination with participatory observation. Having previous research experience in the GHC for my master's thesis, gaining access for me was easier as I benefitted from staying in contact with several members of the GHC. Researchers new to the project had taken a different approach; being denied initial access, one student researcher had booked a hotel room in the GHC and gained

access 'as a tourist':

> *"Due to a lack of personal contacts and possible gatekeepers, contact was established via email, to which the response followed that there was not sufficient time to answer the request; in addition, it was stated that a participatory approach was central to the project. [...] Following the understanding that 'the ways into the field are as diverse as fieldwork itself', the researcher booked a room in the hotel and spent a week on site." (Fischer 2016, p. 53).*

To be clear, the intent here is not to point fingers; rather, this excerpt reflects the common viewpoint that there are multiple ways of gaining access which all have their advantages and disadvantages and are therefore equally valid approaches (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). In other words, the strategies through which researchers obtain access may differ, yet their right to gain access is seldomly questioned in itself; as Bosworth and Kellezi (2016, p. 239) note, "if it is discussed at all, is often cast as a one off arrangement, granted or withheld". Taken individually, gaining access 'as a tourist' may not have immediate negative effects on the research setting. The collective impact however of multiple researchers seeking to obtain without the explicit permission of an organization may work to undermine trust between the researcher and the organization. In the GHC, previous encounters with student researchers, as well as the high number of requests by journalists, had led to distrust between its members and researchers and journalists, which contributed to a higher social closedness of the setting. This social closedness, that is, the increasing difficulty of being granted access was supported by the viewpoint that a person is not a product that can be handed over for the purposes of data extraction, as stated repeatedly by several activists, the GHC 'is not a zoo for viewing refugees'. These statements echo more general critiques on the refugee research industry and the complicity of researchers with the processes and institutions they are critiquing (Cabot 2019, Sukarieh and Tannock 2019).

The extractive tendencies of academic research may be felt more strongly in places of over-research. Despite gaining access by securing the official approval to undertake research in the GHC, I was confronted early on with accusations of representing the 'university mentality' and with the implications of not conforming to unwritten codes of conduct. While I had agreed to do voluntary work, such as helping in the bar or hotel, along with providing translations, I was initially perceived as not active enough by one of the founders of the project, who accused me of 'playing the tourist':

*I started talking to Sarah about what she was doing, she asked what I was doing. We talked a bit about fieldwork and interviewing. Then Christian came and asked what I was doing, he claimed I was 'playing the tourist'. That I didn't know what I was doing and that he did not appreciate that. He said he does not like the University mentality, they just want to take things. The people in the Grandhotel were the ones doing something and what good is all that theory. [...] A part of me did feel attacked, and another part learned to not care and just take a note of it as a field observation. But I continued to feel tense, also not welcome and underappreciated to a certain extent.1 (Fieldnotes, 25.10.2016)*

In the GHC, over-research had contributed to an image of academic research as only serving its own interests and eroding societal trust in the university. 'Playing the tourist' is then a reference to a form of temporary and superficial engagement, similar to what Mackenzie et al. (2007) have described as "fly in, fly out" research. The excerpt is helpful starting point for reflecting on what is means to *'play the tourist'* in over-researched settings.  First, 'playing the tourist' can be interpreted here as a kind of performance, as taking on a certain kind of role or habitus in this particular setting. Yet this performance is not necessarily a conscious act; rather, the researcher is just as much produced by power relations within a setting. Following Gregson and Rose (2000, p. 441), "performance - what individual subjects do, say, 'act out' - is subsumed within, and must always be connected to, performativity, to the citational practices which reproduce and subvert discourse, and which at the same time enable and discipline subjects and their performances". Therefore, the first time I undertook research, I followed the GHC's rule to 'be active' and became a volunteer, resisting my researcher role. The second time, I felt pressured by time and project requirements to perform as 'the researcher'. In both cases, I reproduced one of the specific subject positions known to me. In the second case, my positionality akin to that of a tourist, which can be conceived as *'the academic tourist'*.

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Academic research is itself a kind of performance, despite the widely held belief within academia that researchers are "intentional, knowing, anterior subjects; able to interpret and represent a vast range of other social practices for academic audiences to interpret in turn, yet being themselves somehow immune from the same process; in other words, outwith academic power's script" (Gregson and Rose 2000, p. 447). The academic tourist then is a particular way of performing research activity, one that resembles the tourist performance several in the ways. Urry and Larsen (2011) outline several distinct characteristics generally associated with tourism, which can be employed to further define the notion of *academic tourism*.

First, academic tourism involves "movement of people to, and their stay in, various destinations" which are "outside the normal places of residence and work. Periods of residence elsewhere are of short-term and temporary nature" (Urry and Larsen 2011, p. 4). In contrast to tourism however, academic tourism may also target places which are close to university or in other ways easily accessible. What still applies however is its characteristic to move somewhere and return, to be part of a setting for a short period of time, constituting a form of *temporary* engagement. As postcolonial and indigenous scholarship reminds us, going abroad, preferably to countries of the Global South, to undertake fieldwork is and always has been a privilege accorded to universities of the Global North (Bhambra 2013, Smith 2013). These uneven privileges have their history in the formation of disciplines themselves and their involvement in colonialist enterprises; following Tilley (2017, p. 27), "the systemic extraction of raw commodities from (formerly) colonised countries finds its analogue in academics' piratic practices of 'raw' data extraction for processing into refined intellectual property, to be published at prices which exclude the original contributing 'knowers'".

Second, academic tourism likewise involves a selection of certain kind of places which are hyped or are associated with certain desires, pleasures or fantasies and are in some way 'out of the ordinary' (Urry and Larsen 2011, p. 4). The images of these places may similarly be projected via the media, but also through academic publications and policy briefings. Of particular interest to academics studying marginalized communities are thus places with images of danger or precarity, from the classic 'ghetto' to modern day favelas, border zones and refugee camps (Pascucci 2017, Rozakou 2019). Interestingly, significant overlaps are emerging between academic and conventional forms of tourism through the development of volunteer tourism or war-zone tourism (Mostafanezhad 2013, Mahrouse 2016). Third, the academic tourist gaze is also built upon practices of signification; whereas tourists might look for signs of what they regard as typical local behaviour, the academic tourist is also searching for people, cases or materials that are informed by a particular idea or theory. Schlosser (2014, p. 203) is critical of an academic gaze informed by empiricist epistemology, which takes for granted a hierarchical relationship between theory, method and the field. Instead, he argues for a reflexive research practice in which the field informs theory and researchers of what is "unknown, unknowable, or situationally contingent."

Lastly, similar to the effects of mass tourism, academic tourism may contribute to "new socialised forms of provision [...] to cope with the mass character of the gaze of tourists" (Urry and Larsen 2011, p. 4), as has already been shown for refugee camps in Lebanon (Sukarieh and Tannock 2012, 2019). The next section will discuss relations of trust with asylum seekers, along with the possible effects of temporary research engagements.

## 6.4   Trust is like a crocodile: Over-research and project-based contact with asylum seekers

Over-research contributed to changes in norms and rules of conduct in the GHC, such as being critical of the practice of referral of an asylum seeker by a gatekeeper for the purpose of an interview. Therefore, the more 'conventional' approach of using gatekeepers proved nearly impossible. In order to gain social access, it was necessary to participate and be active within the GHC. Yet being a young, white, German woman volunteering in the project made me, for most interviewees, part of the group of 'activists'. As Karim[2], an asylum seeking resident and long-term volunteer in the GHC explained, some resident asylum seekers were afraid that supporting the goals of the activists might have a negative impact on their asylum procedure. Consequently, being perceived as an activist meant that I potentially received a similar level of mistrust, as demonstrated by the excerpt below. Karim refuses to act as a gatekeeper for gaining access to other prospective respondents, as trust is not established by momentary smile or friendly facade, but has to be established over longer periods of time. Over-research may exacerbate feelings of distrust towards researchers, in particular with 'hard-to-reach' groups such as asylum seekers and refugees which have become a 'hot topic' for research and policy interventions (Stierl 2020).

> *'There is a lack of trust between the refugees and the activists and they need to do things to re-establish their trust. You need to build things together, work together to establish trust, do activities, cook together. But one problem is that the refugees are dependent on the system, as they want to enter normal society and leave the centre. So they distrust the activists, because they are against the system, some of them think that too much involvement with the activists might hurt their future chances. Some of them might even think that they are connected to the police, as they come from places where the system worked like that, so they are distrustful'. […] Later I asked him if he knew anyone I could talk to. He said, what good would it do for him to introduce me to someone? Trust is like a crocodile – [pulling his face into a broad smile] I need to talk to people to gain their trust. (Fieldnotes, 26.05.2017)*

Not only does over-research increase levels of distrust by heightening experiences of lack of impact and temporariness of research, but it may in turn affect what is being said and what is left silent, influencing the quality of data gathered. Over-research contributes to already existing difficulties in establishing trust and rapport when studying refugees or irregular migrants (Hynes 2003, Níraghallaigh 2014). As Hynes (2003) highlights, all stages of being a refugee are characterized by mistrust. This

high degree of mistrust within the different stages of the refugee experience does not automatically mean that research with refugees is impossible; rather, researchers need to be aware of the potentiality of mistrust. Therefore, "we need to choose whether we research *for, on* or *with* refugees" (Hynes 2003, p. 14). During my interviews with resident asylum seekers, I felt a level of discomfort I could not explain. I confided in Ahmed[2], a resident asylum seeker whom I trusted and spent a lot of time with. His reply, presented in the field note excerpt below, indicates that over-research also affects the kind of data researchers gather. Research, in the eyes of participants, becomes less a way of translating experiences than an end in itself within the 'refugee research industry' (Sukarieh & Tannock 2019). By consequence, researchers' conversations with respondents may "separate from heart and truth":

> *I told him about my struggles in talking to people, he said, 'you can talk a lot to people but they will not talk to you with their heart, don't you feel that? They have conversations that are separate from heart and truth'. 'Yes, I do' I said, that is where the discomfort comes from. 'Also they see me as someone from the team'. 'How could they not? We cannot escape our positions'. (Fieldnotes, 17.05.2017)*

Researchers finding themselves in situations of over-research need to take unequal power-relations between themselves and their research participants into account and how they intentionally or unintentionally exploit these power-relations. In order to 'collect data', researchers are trained to develop rapport with research participants, to show empathy when they feel none or to 'fake friendship' with people they would under other circumstances not have considered 'friends' (Oakley 1981). Over the course of research, participants may develop expectations of friendship, especially those that do not have a large social support system. Despite the fact that formal consent is obtained, in practice, participants' contextual realities may limit them in their capacity to provide consent (Thompson 2002). This is already problematic under 'normal' circumstances yet becomes a profound ethical dilemma in situations of over-research, especially in situations where vulnerable groups such as asylum seekers and refugees are involved (Mackenzie *et al.* 2007). Amooz, a young, male asylum seeker from Afghanistan and volunteer in the GHC explained that he disliked the pretence involved when refugees are approached on the basis of a project. He argued that while he appreciated help, it should be based in real interest in friendship and an understanding of mutuality. This is captured in his wish to be invited into someone's home, to establish 'real' relationships:

> *"For example, when somebody wants to help refugees voluntarily, that's okay. Helping, accompanying, but not because of a shitty project, because they want to finish a project. And then they say, bye. They don't want to*

*know you. [...] Project is finished, they leave. [...] It's also okay if they do a project. But not come to you because of the project, to say hello. It would be cool if also when there is no project, that he says hello. For example, taking me to his home and live together without a project, hey, how are you."3 (Interview with Amooz)*

In summary, over-research of vulnerable groups such as asylum seekers may lead to considerable ethical difficulties regarding the establishment of trust and rapport. It is crucial not to frame research participants as victims of researchers, as they choose to participate due to certain expectations emerging from this encounter, such as help with translations, emotional or other kinds of support (Mackenzie *et al.* 2007). More importantly, however, over-research in the form of high numbers of researchers with a temporary stay may worsen feelings of loss and cause considerable emotional harm to individuals with limited or fragile social networks. The next section will return to the notion of academic tourism and reflect on different strategies to process and approach over-research.

## 6.5 From academic tourist to academic-in-residence: Strategies to address the consequences of over-research

Over-research is first and foremost a question of research integrity, yet one that still has to be recognized as such. According to Kaiser (2014, p. 341), research integrity is defined as a situation in which "its practitioners behave in accordance with the accepted rules of good conduct within that system". The problem regarding over-research is that as of yet, there are no ethical and methodological standards in place for defining 'good conduct' in situations of over-research. We need to differentiate here between our individual and our collective responsibilities towards research integrity. This section addresses the question of individual responsibility based on insights gained from a post-fieldwork engagement as an 'academic-in-residence' in the GHC.

### 6.5.1 Adopting a practice of engaged reflexivity: Acknowledging the academic tourist in me

In order to gain an understanding of the dynamics and implications of over-researched situations, what we as individual researchers should reflect upon is our relations with others, as our subject positions are constituted by these everyday interactions. Research, in this understanding, is "a process of constitutive negotiation" (Rose 1997, p. 316). In my struggle to uphold my performance as 'the researcher', I felt a sense of discomfort I could not explain. It is the awareness of, and will to, engage with this discomfort which prompted me to recognize the specific inter-personal dynamics characteristic to over-

researched places. A first step in addressing our individual responsibilities towards over-research is then to practice reflexivity and 'engaged self-critique' (Cabot 2019). As feminist geographers have argued, reflexivity has its challenges and limitations. Particularly problematic is the notion of 'transparent reflexivity', which assumes that as researchers we are capable of fully grasping the landscapes of power in which we are operating and our positionality within them (Rose 1997). Despite these challenges however, there are different kinds of reflexive practice which nevertheless constitute helpful tools for detecting and understanding situations of over-research.

Researchers in over-researched settings are often faced with research fatigue, which is expressed as apathy or indifference towards engagement in research projects (Clark 2008). Researchers' ability to determine when a situation is 'over'-researched therefore necessitates that individual researchers actively engage with the emotional landscapes of the places and cases they are studying. Being reflexive of our own emotions thus constitutes one of the tools to detect and understand the inter-personal dynamics of over-research (Davidson *et al.* 2007). Frequently, emotions are associated with a failure in 'neutrality' and 'objectivity', with possible consequences for one's future career (Widdowfield 2000).

However, researchers not engaging with emotional experiences during fieldwork in the worst case run the risk of doing emotional harm to both themselves and their research participants and at best are neglecting a potentially enlightening field of knowledge. This is built on the understanding that emotions are relational; as Widdowfield (2000, p. 200) states, "not only does the researcher affect the research process but they are themselves affected by this process". Emotional reflexivity is therefore key to detecting and understanding over-researched settings, as research fatigue and distrust are not always openly voiced, but may surface in the behaviour of those we engage with during the research process. In the words of respondent Ahmed, research is often undertaken 'separate from heart and truth'. Pracising emotional reflexivity and understanding how our own emotions are tied up with those of others may thus help to detect and understand the emotional landscapes of over-researched settings and how these may influence the data collected.

Practically speaking, writing down and reflecting upon the feelings which we think we should not feel and certainly do not publicly want to acknowledge is a first step towards detecting and understanding of situations of over-research. The above fieldnote excerpts and interview quotes exhibit the relational nature of feelings trespassing between the activists, asylum seekers and myself, such as feeling underappreciated and unwelcome when confronted with the accusation of 'playing the tourist'. One way of learning from the emotional landscapes of over-researched settings is then to not only pay attention

to how one feels, but also to our own moral judgements about those feelings. Emotions tend to be noticed when they run up against so-called 'feeling rules' (Young and Lee 1996) of how and what one 'ought' to feel during fieldwork. As Bondi (2007, p. 236) notes, "the co-construction of data in interpersonal relationships requires both researchers and those with whom they interact to deploy a wide range of skills to which emotional life is integral". Consequently, Bondi (2007) argues that researchers should have support structures to analyse feelings within their research community, as feelings can be easily misinterpreted (Bondi 2007). Moreover, given the relational nature of emotions, neglecting our emotional life may affect our ability to do research, as well as influence the way we relate to research participants. The following section discusses the possibilities and limits of 'relating differently' with over-researched settings.

### 6.5.2    Relating differently: From collecting data to collective data?

In the following, two other accusations regarding 'academic tourism' are addressed: First, the extractive manner of research 'taking things' and second, the usefulness of theoretical abstraction or 'what good is all that theory'. Along with discomfort I felt a sense of failure, which arose out of the conviction that a different way of relating with the field was necessary in order to uphold research integrity. As described in section three, as an academic tourist I was seen to embody a 'university mentality' of 'just taking things'. This is a critique of the extractive character of research, which is often felt more strongly in situations of over-research and echoes criticism levied against mass or 'over-tourism' (Seraphin *et al.* 2018). Feminist and postcolonial scholars in particular have criticized the extractive nature of research, especially when knowledge is expropriated from the global south and fed into the knowledge circuits of the global north (Jazeel and McFarlane 2010, Halvorsen 2018). In the case of 'over-tourism', general recommendations are to find a form of management that either restricts or bans tourism altogether or to develop a form of sustainable tourism for each particular location (Borg *et al.* 1996, Russo 2002). In order to address the extractive nature of research and develop more sustainable research practices, it is necessary to not only *think about* but also *practice* a form research which takes its *collective* impact into account.

Honestly addressing over-research and academic tourism requires not only different methodologies, but also a critical interrogation of our research ethics. We should be highly critical of 'easy fixes' to over-research that address methodology alone, such as calls for more participatory approaches. As Pain and Francis (2003, p. 53) remind us, "the term 'participatory' should be avoided when the primary intention is traditional 'extractive' research for the purposes of gathering information". A change of methods is therefore not sufficient to address over-research, as this problem concerns not only the way we select research topics and field sites, but also which kinds of relations we want to engage in and sustain with the people and communities we study.

Responsible academic research for over-researched places then requires honesty about our own intentions of doing research towards both ourselves, our research participants and the academic community. In order not *only to take*, but also *to give*, we need to engage with the possibilities and limitations of reciprocity. It means not to shy away from asking, why and for whom we are doing this research and who will *truly* benefit from it. As outlined above, a relational form of reflexivity is part of this, along with a serious engagement with the politics of knowledge production (Jazeel and McFarlane 2010, Routledge and Derickson 2015). Wherever possible, this means resisting institutional pressures towards academic tourism, characterized by short-term forms of research engagements and the temptations of hot topics, as these may result in over-research, as exemplified by research on refugee camps (Sukarieh and Tannock 2012, 2019).

*Giving back*, that is, engaging in reciprocal relations is influenced by our ontological and epistemological assumptions towards our research subjects. Ontologically, this means to question who we see as producers of knowledge and whether knowledge is created *on* or *with* our research subjects. Scholar-activists have claimed that social movements are often the basis for theoretical innovations and shape academic knowledge production in profound ways. Social movements should therefore be seen as "knowledge producers in their own right", rather than mere "objects of knowledge" (Chesters 2012, p. 153). Any efforts of researchers to position themselves at a distance or as 'an observer' may have a negative impact not only on relations of trust, as outlined above, but also on reciprocity. The GHC produces practical, inter-subjective knowledge through establishing an alternative form of asylum accommodation. Its members have been invited to speak in forums and conferences all across Germany on this topic, while the academic debate on alternative forms of accommodation has followed much later. Creating knowledge together *with* projects such as the GHC requires an awareness of the specific questions of and a close connection with the local level. While this might not always be possible, joint knowledge production together with the subjects of our research might lead our research to be more current – not being attracted to a topic when it's already 'hot', and to be there before it becomes 'hot'. Engaging in joint knowledge production could also help avoid research fatigue, even in places which receive a lot of research attention, as research fatigue is caused by not being in tune with the questions and issues 'on the ground' and by insufficiently striving towards reciprocal relationships with the subjects of our research.

Addressing over-research requires moving from 'collecting data to collective data', meaning a more responsible form of knowledge production which includes accountability towards the local context in which our research is situated. In order to learn how to 'relate differently' and to 'give back', I returned to the GHC towards the end of my research project in order become an 'academic-in-residence'. Between the months

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October 2019 and January 2020, I rented a desk in the GHC with some leftover research funding, dividing my time between finishing up my academic writing and helping out with whatever was needed in the everyday running of the project. In November 2019, I organized a public event in which I and two other speakers presented their academic findings related to innovative forms of asylum accommodation. These four months gave me a glimpse of what it means to 'relate differently' and how academic knowledge can be made useful in an activist context.

Knowledge co-production is not necessarily about a particular method, but about making knowledge production more transparent, accessible and open to forms of responsible learning (Jazeel and McFarlane 2007). As an 'academic-in-residence', I found myself inserting theoretical insights, concepts and findings of my own work into everyday conversations. Not in the form of a lecture, but in dialogue as a way to give a name to on-going structures and processes. Some of these 'theory snippets' echoed back when they proved useful for clarifying problems at hand, teaching me which theoretical lenses might constitute tools for social change. More than any particular method, it was my daily presence and my long-term engagement with the GHC that created the conditions and relationships for dialogue. Moving towards joint forms of knowledge production does not meant to do away with abstraction; instead we need to inquire "how knowledge produced through research might be of use to multiple others without re-inscribing the interests of the privileged; and how such knowledge might be actively tied to a material politics of social change" (Routledge and Derickson 2015, p. 393). While there are different strategies for how this can be achieved, theory and knowledge production can be made useful when it is accountable to its context and produced in dialogue. In an increasingly complex world, it is not only our privilege but our task to make the process and products of abstraction publicly available.

## 6.6 Addressing academic tourism: A question of research ethics in over-researched places.

This chapter discussed the challenges of over-research in the context of migration and refugee research by examining fieldwork undertaken in an innovative form of asylum seeker accommodation, the Grandhotel Cosmopolis in Augsburg, Germany. During the 'refugee crisis', this project attracted scores of journalists, students and researchers, which led to over-research and research fatigue among its inhabitants and members of staff. Over-research also led to challenging interpersonal dynamics, such as difficulties in gaining access to research participants due to a lack of trust and increased the social closedness of the setting. Social closedness resulted from the contention that 'refugees are not a product' for research, thus, closedness emerged to prevent the

commodification of research and refugees. In addition, commodified social relations in the form of 'project-based' contact may take advantage of individuals in marginalized positions with limited social support systems and lead to feelings of loss. The case is illustrative of larger dynamics within academic knowledge production, such as 'crisis chasing', motivated by funding structures and public pressures to research 'hot topics' (Cabot 2019).

Over-researched places should not be seen as exceptions to the norm, but rather as a magnifying glass for the norm. As researchers, we bear responsibility not only for our individual, but also for our collective performances and their consequences. Over-research and research fatigue are not marginal phenomena, but may constitute one of the greatest challenges social science scholars have to face in the upcoming decade. Given the growth in students numbers in higher education and in research projects across the globe, an intensification of over-research is to be expected. It is crucial then, that we do not shy away from interrogating uncomfortable or disorienting moments, such as being accused of 'academic tourism'. Reflecting, rather than shying away from our own emotions, may constitute a first step in acknowledging that 'something is not quite as it should be'. Beyond the individual research encounter, over-research may influence the relationship between university and society; changes in this relationship are already mirrored in increasing pressures of societal impact assessments (Pain *et al.* 2011). Similarly, under-research may also be undesirable, as the places, cases or communities are neither represented within our findings, nor can they be considered in policy making (Omata 2019).

What can researchers do to address over-research? In short, the credo is 'beware and be aware'; beware of 'hot topic' research, famous or hyped places, cases or communities, of your own 'good intentions' and your desire to set yourself apart. Beware also of 'easy fixes' to over-research, such as calls for more participatory methods, as these do not necessarily change the extractive character of research itself. Over-research is first and foremost not a question of methodology, but of research ethics. At its core lies the question of how we choose to relate towards our research subjects and objects. Over-research therefore demands both an individual and a collective response; it requires individual awareness and a collective effort to engage with and address inequalities in the current system of academic knowledge production.

Still, every collective shift starts with individual awareness: Be aware that researchers have come before you and will come after you. Be aware of the places, cases or communities that are flying under the radar, for they also have stories to tell. Be aware that social movements, collectives and communities are also producers of knowledge and that they too are 'experts'. Be aware that while the products of academic knowledge

may not be of interest to all, this does not mean that the process of abstraction and search for explanations of complex realities may still interest 'non-academics'. Be aware that your status as an academic comes with both privileges and duties; especially academics of the Global North are afforded privileged access to resources and education. It is our duty to reflect on this privilege and use it not only towards contributions to theory and knowledge, but also to engage in a co-production of knowledge whenever and wherever feasible. Lastly, be aware of your own emotions and use them to critically interrogate the individual and collective dynamics of knowledge production. Being honest with ourselves and our research participants about the limitations of our research might seem daunting, but just as well might establish a solid foundation for re-energizing the relationship between academia and society.

## 6.7 Notes

All fieldnotes were originally written in English.
[2] Pseudonym. All respondents were anonymized for the purpose of research.
[3] Translated from German.

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# CHAPTER | 7

## Conclusion

## 7.1   Introduction

The aim of this thesis was to understand how spatial, material and institutional differences in asylum accommodation influence familiarization between asylum seekers and local residents[4] and between asylum seekers and the reception location. The inspiration for this question was the 'Grandhotel Cosmopolis' in Augsburg. Opening its doors in 2012, it is among the first of its kind, combining asylum seeker accommodation with a tourist hotel, café, and restaurant in the historic centre of Augsburg, Germany. Among images of large scale asylum accommodation in former military barracks or containers, the Grandhotel Cosmopolis stood out: With its red carpet at the entrance it signals passers-by to 'walk-in!', drawing upon the idea of the 'grand hotels' during the turn of the 20th century. The project begs the question what difference it makes for everyday contact and interaction between asylum seekers and local residents when asylum accommodation is more 'open'. That is, when asylum accommodation is not a "materialization of a 'fear of touching'" (Diken, 2004, 92). While the Grandhotel is among the most widely known examples of its kind in Germany, there are a range of temporary and more permanent examples of alternative ways to accommodate asylum seekers in Germany and across Europe, including flat-sharing initiatives, squatted housing or in independent flats.

One of the reasons the Grandhotel Cosmopolis drew so much media attention was that the idea of accommodating asylum seekers in a 'grandhotel' was so far away from the current system of accommodating asylum seekers. Since the 1970s onwards, asylum seekers' material living conditions were purposefully downgraded to curb the number of asylum seekers and counter perceptions on the abuse of asylum which were and still are dominating the political debate (U. Münch, 2014). These substandard living conditions are only one of several deterrence strategies aiming to reduce the number of asylum seekers both within and at Europe's borders (FitzGerald, 2019). Particularly in the 1990s, but also since 2015, media images of attacks against asylum accommodation made the news, nationally as well as locally; images which entered a collective unconscious and influenced perceptions on asylum seekers and asylum accommodation. It is therefore unsurprising that national news media depicted the Grandhotel Cosmopolis as the complete opposite of 'standard' asylum accommodation, namely as a harmonious, utopian place offering 'comfort' instead of the usual 'discomfort' (see chapter two and four).

Particularly since the so-called refugee crisis of 2015, a number of studies have

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4    It has to be noted that asylum seekers are of course also 'local residents'. In the thesis, 'local residents' is used to refer to what is also called 'more established residents', meaning those that have already lived in a certain location for a longer period of time or are permanent residents.

emerged on the effects of asylum accommodation on asylum seekers' mental and physical health, their socio-spatial isolation in accommodation and the consequences this has on their future trajectories (Ghorashi, 2005; Fontanari, 2015; Bakker et al., 2016). A separate but related line of inquiry is the study of objections against asylum accommodation, which mainly focus on local residents' and news media's opinions and framings of asylum accommodation and asylum seekers (Grillo, 2005; Hubbard, 2005). What is still insufficiently understood is the relation between asylum accommodation, built environment and local context, meaning the wider urban or rural area an asylum seeker is dispersed to. The focus of this thesis lies on the process of familiarization between asylum seekers, local residents and the reception location and the role that more 'open' or more 'closed' asylum accommodation plays in enabling or disabling familiarization. Practically speaking, how does a project like the Grandhotel Cosmopolis shape everyday contact and interaction between asylum seekers' and local residents', being not only open for people to 'walk-in' but also located in the middle of the city? And does a more 'open' asylum centre like the Grandhotel Cosmopolis lead to more meaningful and sustained contact and interaction between asylum seekers and local residents in contrast to more 'closed' asylum centres?

Previous research defines the openness of asylum accommodation only along the legal dimension, with 'legally open' meaning able 'to leave at free will or within reasonable confines' (Guild, 2005). Yet a sole focus on the legal dimension of openness, that is, whether or not an individual is able to leave at free will, is often insufficient to describe the lived realities of asylum seekers living in accommodation which often isolates asylum seekers materially or spatially from the wider reception location. The cornerstone of this research is introducing the notion of degrees of 'open- and closedness' of asylum accommodation, questioning which spatial, material and institutional characteristics contribute to asylum centres being perceived and experienced as more 'open' or more 'closed' and how higher degrees of open- or closedness influence everyday contact and interaction between asylum seekers and local residents. This research applies a 'relational' perspective to asylum accommodation by drawing on two foundational geographical understandings of 'space', namely space as *relative* and space as produced through *social relations*. Space as relative means taking spatial distance and proximity between people, objects or places into account and therefore to assess the accessibility and opportunities of the spatial context. Next to relative space, space can also be conceptualized as producing and being produced through social relations, meaning that it is not spatial proximity to people and places alone that determines openness, but also the everyday actions and spatial practices of people to control or demarcate spaces to keep Others out, or on the contrary to connect and build bridges. In short, spatial open- or closeness seeks to capture both the *where* and the *how* of asylum accommodation.

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In addition to a distinct spatial location, asylum accommodation also has a set of unique material and institutional characteristics which produce different degrees of open- or closedness. As explained in the third chapter, the dimensions of material and institutional open- or closedness are nested within the dimension of spatial openness, since the material and institutional characteristics of asylum accommodation are the vehicles through which symbolic boundaries in everyday spaces are constructed or challenged. Material openness refers to the architectural design and built form of asylum accommodation, as this may contribute to asylum seekers' categorization through its symbolic or affective functions. Institutional openness refers to both national and regional rules and regulations that work in and through asylum accommodation, as well as to its status as an 'institutional' living environment similar to asylums, prisons or other kinds of spaces of 'care and control'. Rather than 'absolute closure' suggested by concepts such as the 'camp', the notion of spatial, material and institutional degrees of open- and closedness emphasizes the porosity of everyday boundaries and how spatial, material and institutional dimensions of asylum accommodation reinforce or reduce *perceived closedness.*

Central to this thesis is the hypothesis that different perceptions and experiences of openness or closedness of asylum accommodation influence feelings of (un)familiarity and the process of familiarization between asylum seekers and local residents. As explained in the second chapter, being or feeling familiar or unfamiliar with someone or something describes a relation characterized by closeness or distance and is a product of both direct experience and knowledge. Feelings of closeness or distance between people or between people and places are a consequence of both personal agency and structural factors shaping an individual's knowledge and experience of someone or something. Importantly, familiarity is a prerequisite for feelings of belonging, of feeling 'at home'; a sense of belonging cannot be established without becoming familiar with people and places first. As belonging depends on generating a sense of familiarity, feelings of non-belonging can emerge by interfering with a person's capacity to familiarize with people and places. Variations in the spatial, material and institutional openness of asylum accommodation affect the process of familiarization between asylum seekers and local residents as well as between asylum seekers and places of reception, with consequences for feelings of belonging and for who is deemed to belong. This research follows an ethnographic qualitative case study approach, comparing two collective asylum centres in the city of Augsburg, Germany. The first case study is the Grandhotel Cosmopolis (hereafter 'GHC') mentioned above, the second case study is representative of the 'conventional' approach of state-provided asylum accommodation and is also located in the city of Augsburg in close proximity to the GHC. A comparative case study located within the same city was chosen to minimize the contextual differences between the two cases. The GHC was chosen due to the possibility of studying

the effects of higher degrees of openness of asylum accommodation on everyday social interactions. The second case study, the 'Gemeinschaftsunterkunft Ottostraße' (hereafter 'GUO'), a former manufacturing plant and office building, was selected for its differences in material and institutional characteristics, accommodating about twice the number of inhabitants than the smaller GHC. The effects of these differences are explored in chapter four, which compares the two centres and how they contribute to experiences of comfort and discomfort among asylum seekers and local residents. The following section gives an overview of the chapters of this thesis.

## 7.2   Summary of the chapters

The *first chapter* gives a general introduction to the thesis, its main research question and methodological approach. It also provides a brief overview of the debates and concepts central to this thesis, namely spatial, material and institutional degrees of openness and familiarization with its three key dimensions of experience, knowledge and social distance.

The *second chapter* takes the reader into the heart of the research, the Grandhotel Cosmopolis (hereafter GHC). The chapter compares local residents' lived experiences with the media portrayal of the Grandhotel, by drawing upon Lefebvre's spatial triad of perceived, conceived and lived space. A media analysis compares national and local news media portrayal on the GHC, showing how national media framed the GHC as a utopian space, while local media used the experiment frame more frequently. By contrast, local residents' direct experiences with the GHC proved influential for generating a sense of safety, as its openness permitted local residents to gain direct experience with a space that is often perceived as closed and unsafe. The chapter concludes by suggesting that the GHC relative openness produces a space which allows for contact and familiarization while not overruling dominant stereotypes of asylum seekers.

The *third chapter* lays out the theoretical framework of the thesis based on its central claim that spatial, material and institutional differences in asylum accommodation impact familiarization between asylum seekers and local residents. It introduces the notion of degrees of spatial, material and institutional open- and closedness in order to take account of the variation in asylum accommodation and its effects on asylum seekers' experiences. Calling for a relational analysis of asylum accommodation, the chapter argues that more 'open' forms of asylum accommodation may foster familiarization between asylum seekers and local residents, while more 'closed' forms of accommodation may strengthen processes of estrangement and categorization.

The **fourth chapter** juxtaposes both case studies, showing how asylum accommodation produces a politics of discomfort for both asylum seekers and local residents. The comparison between the GHC and the second case study, the 'Gemeinschaftsunterkunft Ottostraße' (GUO) highlighted how asylum accommodation produces discomfort not just among asylum seekers, but also local residents. Drawing on carceral geographies, the chapter identifies three mechanisms through which discomfort is produced through material and institutional characteristics of asylum accommodation, which are self-mortification, depersonalization and role-breakdown. The findings illustrate how a politics of discomfort contributes to processes of estrangement and moral closure between asylum seekers and local residents, but also how both asylum seekers and local residents actively worked against discomfort by creating opportunities for familiarization.

The **fifth chapter** delves deeper into the notion of spatial openness of asylum accommodation by focusing on asylum seekers' access to arrival infrastructures, more specifically, those parts of the urban context that enable asylum seekers to familiarize with the reception location and its residents. Drawing on time geography, the chapter identifies three types of arrival infrastructures crucial for familiarization during the period of arrival, these are infrastructures for information, language learning and social connection. Accessibility to these three types of arrival infrastructures is mediated by personal, institutional and spatial constraints. The results show how state-provided, formal infrastructures often undermine the process of familiarization, while informal, citizen-provided infrastructures prove crucial in supporting asylum seekers' needs during arrival and often help offset the negative effects of asylum accommodation.

The **sixth chapter** addresses ethical issues regarding over-research in the field of migration studies by focusing on the case of the GHC. The chapter discusses how over-research influenced accessibility, gatekeeping and trust, as well as the positionality of the researcher in the field. It argues that over-research is produced by, as well as reproduces, a specific form of academic engagement termed 'academic tourism'. The notion of academic tourism is taken from a field encounter between myself and an activist who inferred I was 'playing the tourist'. The chapter employs the notion of academic tourism to describe a form of academic engagement which is temporary, pre-dominantly extractive in nature and found in hyped, 'hot' or otherwise out-of-the-ordinary type of places (Neal et al., 2016). The chapter also demonstrates how over-research in settings such as the GHC contributes to distrust between asylum seekers and researchers and further heightens the ethical difficulties of research with vulnerable groups such as asylum seekers. Lastly, the chapter discusses strategies to deal with and avoid over-research by adopting a practice of engaged reflexivity and of finding ways to relate differently with the subjects of research.

# 7.3  Answering the main research question

The following subsection addresses the main research question of this thesis which is '*What are the effects of variations in the spatial, material and institutional dimensions of openness of asylum centres on the process of familiarization between asylum seekers and local residents?*'. The main research question is answered by first focusing on how spatial openness affects familiarization, while the next subsection specifies how material and institutional openness influence familiarization.

### 7.3.1  Spatial openness and familiarization

Following the definition of degrees of openness, this subsection will summarize the findings based on the three different understandings of spatial openness: First, spatial openness as differences between more urban and more rural settings, second, spatial openness as differences between neighbourhoods and lastly, spatial openness as accessibility to arrival infrastructures. Spatial openness as produced through social relations is tied to material and institutional openness and is discussed in the following subsection. Regarding the 'where' of asylum accommodation, that is, its spatial location, interviews with asylum seekers suggested a clear difference between being accommodated in a predominantly urban or rural location. Simply put, being accommodated in 'the middle of nowhere' is radically different from being accommodated in a city like Augsburg. While it was not the focal point of this research to compare urban with rural asylum accommodation, many interviewees had been accommodated in more rural centres before being transferred to either the GHC or GUO. Their experiences shed light on the question of how urban asylum accommodation is experienced and provides a basis for further research. In particular, several respondents explained that an urban location means being spatially proximate to migration and refugee related services, immigration and welfare offices as well as specialized supermarkets and other goods and services. This is especially relevant given asylum seekers' limited means of transportation. Nevertheless, interviews also highlight a great heterogeneity among rural accommodation, this is therefore suggested as a recommendation for future research.

Variation in the spatial openness of asylum accommodation also includes differences between neighbourhoods, neighbourhood composition and the built environment. As presented in the second and fourth chapter, the built environment of asylum accommodation shapes everyday interaction between asylum seekers and local residents through the type and amount of contact zones it provides. For instance, the GHC was located in a quiet inner-city neighbourhood with few cars and small streets. This meant that children living in the GHC often played on the street in front of it, turning it into a contact zone between local residents and asylum seeking children and adults

living in the GHC, thereby enabling individual recognition between asylum seekers and local residents. Direct neighbours of the GHC were able to observe its workings on a daily basis and gain a sense of 'normalcy' through this form of direct experience. The second case study, GUO, was also located in a residential area, yet its streets were wider, with more cars passing through. Street-level contact of asylum seekers living in GUO and local residents was limited to the narrow sidewalks of the area, offering limited possibilities for more meaningful encounters and providing only for categorical recognition of its asylum seeking residents. What can be learned from the comparison of the two case studies is that the built environment of asylum accommodation influences everyday interaction and familiarization between asylum seekers and local residents through the amount and type of contact zones it provides.

Lastly, next to an urban or rural location and its built environment, spatial openness can also be defined as degrees of accessibility to everyday goods and services and to opportunities for familiarization. In this sense, spatial openness is defined as the ease with which asylum seekers can access those infrastructures providing opportunities for familiarization with the reception location and its residents during the period of arrival. This is the focus of chapter five, which draws on the concept of 'arrival infrastructures' as those material and immaterial parts of urban areas with which asylum seekers come into contact upon arrival and which shape their initial opportunities and future trajectories. The key finding of chapter five is that asylum seekers' access to these opportunities varies significantly between individuals, even if they are residing in the same accommodation. Rather, access to opportunities for familiarization is different for every individual seeking asylum and depends on the presence or absence of three types of constraints, which are personal, institutional and spatial in nature. Personal factors, such as gender, age, family status or mental or physical well-being can limit asylum seekers' access to arrival infrastructures. For instance, female asylum seekers performing care work for children or other family members described having difficulties attending German language classes, even when classes were nearby and otherwise accessible to them.

Similarly, institutional factors in the form of national and regional regulations can restrict access to arrival infrastructures. For example, internet access is not included within state-based minimum accommodation standards, meaning that asylum seekers' access to information within accommodation is restricted. Likewise, national regulations restrict asylum seekers with an insecure legal status or from a so-called 'safe' country of origin from accessing state-provided language classes. In both examples, asylum seekers' access to public and semi-public spaces of the urban context was influential in partially overcoming these institutional constraints; interviewees stated the importance of nearby public squares in offering free Wi-Fi, as well as of German

language classes and homework sessions provided by a local NGO. The interviews also showed that accessibility to arrival infrastructures could be especially difficult when all three types of constraints combined, as in the case of female interviewees with an uncertain legal status formerly accommodated in very remote locations with limited public transportation who sought access to refugee related services or language classes. Not surprisingly, interviewees compared these experiences to 'prison-like' situations. In this sense, spatial openness of accommodation is not uniform; rather, it is the combination of personal, institutional and spatial constraints which can explain differences in asylum seekers' ability to access arrival infrastructures.

### 7.3.2   The effects of material and institutional open- and closedness on familiarization

Does the material form of asylum accommodation and its institutional characteristics contribute to the 'creation of an alien nation within our midst'? One of the ways through which the material and institutional dimension influenced direct experience between asylum seekers and local residents is through the size of the centre and number of inhabitants. These two factors do not necessarily have to be taken together, as a large centre could also house few inhabitants. The findings for the two case studies in this research however were very clear in that the relatively smaller GHC with around fifty resident asylum seekers was experienced differently by local residents than GUO, which in some years accommodated almost three times this number of residents. Direct neighbours of the GHC claimed to recognize individual asylum seekers and even notice the absence of some, meaning that the small scale nature of the accommodation made individual instead of only categorical recognition between local residents and asylum seekers possible. In short, local residents and resident asylum seekers were able recognize each other as individuals. By contrast, direct neighbours of GUO reported only to recognize those with particular characteristics, such as sitting in a wheelchair or being particularly tall, and felt that the high number of inhabitants of the centre created an indifferentiable mass of people, visibly homogenizing asylum seekers as a group.

A second key finding was how the type and amount of communication by the centre administration and representatives of the district administration influenced how local residents responded to the opening of both GHC and GUO. Again, the GHC differed from GUO in this respect, as early communication by the project's founders along with different sources of information eased early tensions. Local residents of the GHC were informed through a variety of sources, not only through people directly involved in the project, but also through the newspaper and other written sources of information. This differed from how the opening of GUO was perceived by local residents, as respondents emphasized the lack of information they were initially provided with. Comparing the two cases highlights how the variation in the amount, type and sources of information about the opening asylum centres influences how a centre is received by

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local residents. What is crucial to recognize is that a lack of specific information leaves residents to draw upon general knowledge they have of asylum accommodation. As asylum seekers are not 'unfamiliar', but 'already familiar' through national discourse, a lack of specific information creates an information imbalance between a 'too much' of national discourse and a 'too little' of specific information on the centre opening in their neighbourhood, thereby contributing to feelings of insecurity. The case of GUO is also interesting as the lack of specific information was later countered through efforts of a local support initiative, issuing a 'neighbourhood newspaper', showing how specific and personalized information created a sense of comfort through which familiarization was possible.

Both cases also demonstrate the effect of collective 'institutionalized' living environments on heightening feelings of discomfort and inhibiting familiarization. What was surprising was that both GUO and the GHC were perceived as a form of institutional living which was under the authority of others. In the case of GUO authority was perceived to lie with the state, in GHC it was the artists and activists which were perceived to be 'in charge', providing protection for as well as a form of social control of asylum seekers. In this sense, local residents viewed both centres as offering 'care and control'. Despite the goal of the GHC to provide an environment in which all its residents were perceived as equal, local residents' perceptions of resident asylum seekers as in need of 'care and control' drew upon dominant stereotypes as victims or criminals. Being artists and activists instead of state-bureaucrats and welfare officials, the GHC just provided a different kind of 'care and control'. For local residents of GUO, the presence of authority meant that someone else was responsible, which inhibited daily interactions 'as neighbours'. Its institutional character also prevented local residents from entering the building, even when the intention was to provide help or donate clothes. Similarly, asylum seekers living in GUO felt inhibited in inviting guests or reported that local residents feared entering asylum accommodation. The institutional character of asylum accommodation hence, increased feelings of social distance by strengthening stereotypes of asylum seekers and asserted their difference.

Lastly, the comparison between the GHC and GUO also reveals that actual degrees of openness and closedness are not only a result of these two dimensions, but also of the agency of local residents and asylum seekers. Feelings of comfort played an important role in both cases in providing the basis for familiarization, and comfort was actively brought about through the agency of asylum seekers, local residents, volunteers and NGOs. Comfort took the form of both having the opportunity to directly experience asylum accommodation in its particularity, to get to know the space, as well as to gain specific information on it. Experience and knowledge then were both influential dimensions in contributing to familiarization, though stereotypes often remained

in place. The GHC demonstrated that despite the fact that it often could not change dominant stereotypes about asylum seekers, the possibility of entering and its material and institutional openness helped provide a sense of comfort for local residents and increased feelings of neighbourhood safety. Overall, the findings show how feelings of comfort provide the basis for familiarization, which is facilitated through forms of direct and indirect knowledge and experience, while discomfort is produced through depersonalization and a denial of direct experience and knowledge.

## 7.4 Contributions to theory

The aim of this thesis was to shine a light onto what happens not only 'in' but 'in-between' asylum accommodation, its residents and the residents surrounding it and how asylum accommodation in its spatial, material and institutional workings has certain effects on everyday societal relations between people seeking asylum and more established residents of a city. The starting point of this thesis was the assumption that these two groups are not inherently different, but are *made different*, through a range of political mechanisms such as mandatory collective forms of asylum accommodation and through media discourse. These 'difference producing mechanisms' not only influence but change everyday life and interaction between individuals seeking asylum and more established residents of a reception location, with potentially harmful consequences not just for asylum seekers but for society as a whole. This thesis sought to bring more clarity as to how asylum seekers' difference is produced on an everyday level, in everyday neighbourhoods, in and through spatial, material and institutional mechanisms. As Gupta and Ferguson argue (1992: 16), 'if we question a pre-given world of separate and discrete 'peoples and cultures', and see instead a difference-producing set of relations, we turn from a project of juxtaposing pre-existing differences to one of exploring the construction of differences in historical process'. The findings of this thesis suggest that asylum accommodation, especially in its collective form, is in most cases less spectacular than the kilometres of barbed wire at Europe's borders, but as I suggest in this thesis, it is similarly destructive in terms of its societal impact. The contribution of this thesis is summarized in the following four subsections.

### 7.4.1 Moving out of the 'container': A call for more relational analyses of asylum seeker accommodation

Although containers had been temporarily sold out during the height of the 'refugee crisis', the popularity of containers as temporary housing for asylum seekers does not make it any more recommendable as an analytical perspective. On the contrary, this thesis argues that analyses can gain a lot from a relational understanding of space, meaning that space produces and is produced by social relations. Taking a more relational approach to

asylum accommodation does not mean to disregard insights gained on the socially and spatially isolating tendencies of asylum accommodation, it simply means to acknowledge that isolation is always spatially and socially particular. Rather than focusing either on what is happening on 'the inside' or 'the outside' of asylum accommodation, a series of relationships comes into view which enter into the production and reproduction of asylum accommodation in everyday life. By adopting this perspective, the thesis is able to shed light on a diverse set of relationships which influence how asylum accommodation is perceived, conceived and lived in everyday life.

Approached from a relational standpoint, each chapter of this thesis focuses on a *different set of relationships*; the third chapter, which presents the theoretical foundation of this thesis, argues that the variation in asylum accommodation across space and in its spatial, material and institutional characteristics leads to differences in the degrees of open- and closedness of accommodation which subsequently influences familiarization between asylum seekers and local residents. The underlying relationship is thus one in which space shapes social relations, here between asylum seekers and local residents. We return to this relationship in the fourth chapter, which presents the results of the empirical analysis, showing how asylum accommodation, through its material and institutional characteristics such as overcrowding, number of inhabitants or the presence of authority contributed to moral closure and estrangement between asylum seekers and local residents. Spatial differences were also relevant in chapter five, which illustrates how asylum seekers experienced differences in accessing arrival infrastructures as a result of personal, institutional and spatial constraints. The second chapter demonstrates how it is not only the materiality of a space that shapes social relations, but also how spaces are conceived and imagined; media images and national discourses on asylum seekers are tied to the space of the asylum centre, turning them into spaces that are always 'already familiar'.

However, it was not only space that influenced social relations, the thesis also showed how individuals and groups of individuals actively changed and challenged how asylum accommodation was constructed, perceived and used. Local residents and asylum seekers were not simply passive victims of asylum accommodation, they also actively changed this space in both its material and institutional dimensions. The GHC is one of the most prominent examples of this, as the group of artists and activists that originally devised its concept challenged conventional forms of asylum accommodation in not only its built form and appearance, but also in its image and daily usage. An asylum centre that was also a café and tourist hotel and invited passers-by to 'walk-in!' was simply unheard of. As the first chapter shows, local residents are not only at the receiving end of this process, but by entering and engaging with this space they also contribute to its daily spatial production. Surprisingly, this was also true for the second

case which received less media attention; both asylum seekers and local residents resisted, changed and challenged the discomforting effects of this space by trying to maintain hygienic conditions, by providing information on the centre or by creating permanent or temporary spaces for encounter on the inside and outside of the centre. In short, degrees of open- or closedness are always a product of both the space itself in its spatial, material and institutional dimensions, as well as the relationships that enter into the production and reproduction of this space on an everyday basis.

### 7.4.2 Introducing the notion of 'degrees of spatial, material and institutional open- and closedness'

Geography matters, also and particularly for asylum seekers, as the reception location they are dispersed to can have significant influence on their future trajectories. The contribution this thesis seeks to make is to highlight variation of asylum accommodation on many scales, not simply on national or federal level, but also on a local level and the level of the built environment. Current analyses rightly point out underlying policies and political ideologies behind the manner by which asylum seekers are held 'outside or at our borders', such as the growing securitization of migration, which then also shapes practices of reception and accommodation. Yet by identifying common trends, analyses of asylum accommodation to some extent also fall into the trap of over-generalizing these spaces and the effects they have on the people they accommodate. In contrast to legally closed spaces, such as detention centres and prison spaces, asylum accommodation is ambiguous in its 'openness'. Legally, it is open when an individual accommodated there can leave 'at will or within reasonable confines'. Yet this does not adequately capture to what extent asylum seekers and local residents actually experience asylum accommodation as 'open'. The notion of degrees of spatial, material and institutional open- and closedness offers a way to go beyond the legal definition of 'open' asylum accommodation in order to recognize and better grasp asylum seekers lived experiences of these spaces.

The proposed notion distinguishes between three key dimensions of variation which are spatial, material and institutional in nature, and the extent to which this variation results in open- or closedness. Thereby, the proposed notion is an attempt to offer future analyses a tool through which to better grasp the relationality between asylum accommodation and the local context and how variation herein may have effects on everyday interaction and asylum seekers future trajectories. While this thesis focused primarily on the effects of open- or closedness on familiarization, differences in open- and closedness are also likely to impact other factors related to the future integration of asylum seekers. As differences in open- or closedness also have effects on moral closure and estrangement, the notion can also be helpful in analyses seeking to explain differences in local residents' reactions to asylum seekers and asylum accommodation. An important addition to the notion

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is introduced in the second chapter of the thesis, 'perceived openness', describing the extent to which asylum accommodation is perceived as open- or closed as a result of its spatial, material and institutional characteristics. Drawing on carceral geography, chapter four illustrates asylum seekers' perceptions of closedness of asylum accommodation as a result of its material and institutional characteristics, described by a respondent as "living in a 'free jail'". The proposed notion of spatial, material and institutional degrees of open- and closedness then can be applied in a double sense: As an overall assessment of the openness of accommodation comprised of a set of spatial, material and institutional characteristics, as well as an individual perception and experience resulting from a set of spatial, material or institutional factors.

### 7.4.3 Beyond 'integration': Reframing arrival as a period of familiarization for all

The thesis explores the multiple ways through which asylum accommodation influences the process of familiarization between asylum seekers and local residents. While a focus on (un)familiarity and familiarization is common in tourism and border studies, the concept has so far rarely been mobilized in the field of migration studies. As the third chapter explains, (un)familiarity describes a feeling of closeness or distance between someone or something and can be employed to assess the transformation of societal relations as a result of everyday bordering practices. Applying the concept of (un)familiarity rather than more common concepts such as integration or inclusion was advantageous for several reasons. First, (un)familiarity is a concept that is itself relational, as closeness or distance is produced in-between people and defined by the dimensions of experience, knowledge and social distance. Second, the inherent relationality of the concept makes it possible to apply it equally to both newcomers and more established residents, thereby proposing an alternative to concepts such as integration which are stated to be relational but nevertheless are often applied to capture the experiences of migrants only (Phillimore, 2020). Familiarization with a reception location is a process that starts upon the arrival of newcomers and includes local residents, yet unlike integration its emphasis is less on end state or goal. Thereby, asylum seekers' future trajectories are held open, rather than assuming a one-way directionality, as critiqued by Meeus et al (Meeus, Arnaut, & van Heur, 2019). Lastly, the concept of familiarization combines both knowledge and experience, which are often separated in analyses focusing either on the effects of national discourse or on everyday contact and encounter. As this thesis purports to show, both knowledge and experience shape everyday societal relations; by employing familiarization as a concept, both dimensions can be usefully combined in analyses.

### 7.4.4 Spotlighting 'academic tourism' and the consequences of over-research

This thesis also takes up another kind of relationship, that between researchers and the research setting. The main contribution of the last chapter is a call to reflect on the ethics

and methodology of knowledge production in over-researched settings. The chapter illuminates a relationship which is often taken for granted, and perhaps therefore often unquestioned. By focusing on the problem of over-research in the setting of the GHC, the chapter shows how over-research not only influences the relationship between the researcher and its research subjects, it also seeks to highlight how a focus on 'hot' topics or 'hyped' places creates an overexposure of some places to research, while others are under-examined. The chapter introduces the notion of 'academic tourism' as a temporary and superficial form of research engagement with popular or hyped places. Academic tourism contributes to landscapes of over- and under-researched spaces, places and groups, with consequences not only for research subjects, but also for methodology and results of research. While the chapter does not offer an easy solution to the problem of over-research, it does seek to raise awareness of its consequences and suggests individual strategies through which researchers can be more reflexive of the emotional dynamics of over-research and possible collective strategies for over-researched settings. Shining a light on the dynamics of over-research in the case of the GHC, this thesis seeks to raise awareness among researchers about this issue in order to stimulate future research practices that are not only more reciprocal, but also more attentive to the geographical distribution of research.

## 7.5 Limitations of study and recommendations for future research

The aim of this thesis was to investigate how spatial, material and institutional degrees of open- and closedness influence the process of familiarization between asylum seekers and local residents. To do so, certain choices were made regarding the design of this research, which necessarily resulted in deciding against other possible research strategies. The following subsection discusses the limitations of the research in its current form and proposes several recommendations for future research which follow directly from these limitations.

First, the research opted for a qualitative case study approach, comparing two inner-city collective asylum centres in the city of Augsburg, Germany. The first case study, the GHC, was chosen due to the uniqueness of its concept, which made it possible to study the perceptions and experiences of local residents towards a more 'open' centre. The second case study, GUO, was chosen due to its relatively larger size and built form and its location in an inner-city neighbourhood, which helped to minimize contextual differences. However, a third case study, meaning a more rural centre would have enriched the results even further, providing a more direct contrast to the inner-city locations of the first two cases. While doing so would have been beyond the scope of this

research, future research could include more rural cases of asylum accommodation into studies of familiarization between asylum seekers, local residents and the reception location. Studying the influence of dispersal to a more urban or more rural location on familiarization and asylum seekers' future opportunities is especially relevant, as the location asylum seekers are dispersed to can determine to what extent asylum seekers have access to the key areas of everyday life, including legal services. As the fifth chapter showed, access to opportunities is not simply a matter of spatial proximity, what also needs to be considered is how asylum seekers differ in the personal, institutional and spatial constraints they experience on an everyday level. This means that the effects of dispersal to more rural locations need to be considered together with an individuals' unique combination of personal, institutional and spatial constraints. One potential theoretical and methodological avenue to explore in this context is time geography, preferably in combination with a reciprocal and participatory approach to research.

A second influential choice of the present study was its ethnographic approach, with semi-structured interviews and participant observation as the main research methods. Semi-structured interviews were opted for as this method is particularly well-suited to investigate the perceptions and experiences of individuals. Still, this method also has its drawbacks, not only due to the selective nature of memory, but also because of the potential issue of selection bias when recruiting participants. The topic of migration and asylum remains a controversial societal topic which affected the recruitment of participants; in the second case, snowballing possible respondents proved difficult, as residents of the neighbourhood reported that they knew of fellow residents who did not want to be interviewed on the topic of asylum. It is hence likely to assume that residents with strong anti-asylum seeker or anti-asylum accommodation sentiments are not included in this study. To partially compensate for this, semi-structured interviews were held with the centre administrator, a social worker of the centre and several representatives of neighbourhood organizations. These interviews gave additional insight into the overall character of the neighbourhood, everyday interaction between asylum seekers and local residents and the opinions, events and atmosphere during the opening period of the centre.

Another potentially fruitful route to consider in the study of the 'unevenness of asylum accommodation' is to combine insights of existing qualitative approaches with a more quantitative or mixed-methods approach. The insightfulness of combining qualitative with quantitative insights was demonstrated in chapter five, which explains how large asylum centres inhibit individual recognition between asylum seekers and local residents and visibly homogenize asylum seekers, thereby creating discomfort for both asylum seekers and local residents. This finding corroborates results of the quantitative study by Lubbers et al (2006) who found that large asylum centres correspond with higher rates of objections. Moreover, quantitative and mixed methods approaches could make visible

the extent to which different locations of asylum accommodation lead to differences in accessibility of arrival infrastructures and future opportunities for asylum seekers. Still, including 'hard to reach' groups, in particular those with views deemed 'societally unacceptable', remains a difficult undertaking for both qualitative or quantitative studies.

Over-research in the case of the GHC also influenced the research process and data collection, as described at length in chapter six. Devoting a chapter to over-research was not within the original proposal of this research, yet proved to be crucial to understanding places like the GHC, its internal dynamics and its relations with academia. In brief, over-research had an impact on my positionality as a researcher, on how I was perceived by both resident asylum seekers, volunteers and activists present in the project and on developing relations of trust. In the beginning of my fieldwork in the GHC, it was inferred that I was 'playing the tourist'; simply taking from and not contributing to the project. The large amount of student researchers and journalists interested in the project had shaped expectations towards these groups and created expectations of a more reciprocal exchange. Their expectations shaped my own response to how I spent time 'in the field', trying to 'give back' in small ways, such as through volunteering at the bar, helping with homework or translating texts. Future research would hence benefit from closer attention to not only the quality of relationships with research subjects, but also from a stronger awareness of which places are chosen for research purposes, as well as of which kind of research certain places attract.

While the accusation of 'academic tourism' had caught me by surprise, I am grateful for being alerted to this wide-spread issue, as I believe the 'academic tourist' intends to stay. Over-research is a phenomenon which is often spoken about in a side-note, while having coffee at a conference. Yet the issue deserves more research attention, as over-research can have serious consequences on both the process and outcome of research and can lead to research bias. It is far from known how widespread the issue is with regard to particular places, such as the GHC, but also particular neighbourhoods and even whole cities and regions. More reciprocal strategies are needed as to how to work differently with over-researched places and cases, as well as ways through which the results of existing research can be employed and shared more efficiently. The other side of the coin is under-research, that is, places, cases and regions that have not been the focal point of research, yet provide not only valuable insights but also valuable collaborations between research and society. Although not the main focus point of this thesis, I do suggest to devote more research attention to the consequences of over-and under-researched places, academic tourism and the individual and collective strategies that are effective in addressing these issues.

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## 7.6 Policy recommendations and societal relevance

The current system of receiving and accommodating asylum seekers reflects the approach taken towards asylum seekers in most European member states, namely an approach focused on the deterrence of asylum seekers, be it at Europe's borders or those already living within European member states (FitzGerald, 2019). Germany's system of asylum accommodation reflects this approach towards deterrence in the mandatory collective accommodation of asylum seekers, as well as the lack of minimum standards in asylum accommodation in many federal states. The stated aim of such approaches is to reduce the number of people seeking asylum in European countries, as well as to demonstrate state control over migration related issues. More recently, this policy was taken to a more extreme level through the introduction of the so-called 'Anker' centres in Germany, centres which aim to accelerate the process of claiming asylum yet which have proven to isolate asylum seekers even further from society (S. Münch, 2022).

The focus of this thesis was to understand how asylum accommodation influences familiarization between asylum seekers and local residents. Findings demonstrate that the deterrence mechanism which is built into the current system of asylum accommodation has negative effects on both asylum seekers and local residents. Not only does mandatory collective asylum accommodation have negative effects on asylum seekers mental and physical health, but it also contributes to processes of stereotyping and framing asylum seekers as different, thereby leading to disconnection and estrangement asylum seekers and local residents. Overall, the findings of this research can be summarized in a general conclusion and three key recommendations which seek to support local policy makers in their current and future efforts of developing alternatives to the current practice of mandatory collective asylum accommodation and support the process of familiarization between asylum seekers and local residents.

> **General conclusion:**
> Higher degrees of spatial, material and institutional closedness of asylum accommodation contribute to estrangement between asylum seekers and local residents, while higher degrees of openness provide opportunities for familiarization. Using spatially, materially and institutionally 'closed' forms of asylum accommodation as a deterrence mechanism frustrates the policy goal of integrating asylum seekers and refugees by limiting knowledge exchange and direct experience and increasing social distance between asylum seekers, local residents and the wider reception location.

**Recommendation 1: 'Location matters.'**

> *Include conditions for the spatial location of asylum accommodation into minimum accommodation standards.*

Where asylum seekers are dispersed to has significant influence on their arrival period and their future trajectories. The spatial location and built environment of asylum accommodation are therefore key factors determining asylum seekers access to the opportunities necessary to 'arrive' and familiarize with the reception location and its residents. It is recommended that minimum conditions for asylum accommodation include an assessment of the spatial location of accommodation and the overall accessibility of goods and services and the availability of opportunities relevant to asylum seekers during the period of arrival. Urban locations of asylum accommodation offer greater accessibility to migration and welfare related services in contrast to more rural locations, as well as to a variety of cultural, social or religious activities and spaces (van Liempt & Miellet, 2021). The findings of this research demonstrated that when asylum accommodation is located in a more urban area, this can help overcome some of the negative effects of accommodation itself. For instance, public and semi-public spaces were important parts of asylum seekers 'informational infrastructure' as these spaces offered free wireless internet, whereas internet in asylum accommodation is often restricted or non-existent. Public squares and semi-public spaces, such as shopping malls or cafés, also provided for momentary distraction and helped asylum seekers cope with difficulties during the period of arrival. The quality of accommodation is therefore determined not just by the building and its material standards, but most importantly by its spatial location and proximity to the reception location.

**Recommendation 2: 'Size of accommodation matters'**

> *Avoid accommodating asylum seekers in large-scale collective accommodation, as these frame asylum seekers as 'different' and hinder familiarization with local residents. Small scale, independent housing units are preferable to mandatory and collective forms of asylum accommodation.*

It does not require locking doors and closing gates for asylum centres to be perceived as 'closed'. The strongest, most insurmountable boundaries are symbolic boundaries, with its bricks and mortar consisting of stereotypes and images of Otherness. Contrary to what is commonly assumed, large scale and low quality accommodation of asylum seekers does not create 'comfort' for local residents; purposefully downgrading accommodation standards to deter asylum seekers also contributes to discomfort on the side of local residents. This thesis shows how collective forms of asylum accommodation contribute to processes of stereotyping asylum seekers and thereby inhibit familiarization between asylum seekers and local residents. Several factors pertaining to the material and institutional structures of asylum accommodation were influential in this process. One of the most important factors to consider is that asylum

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seekers as a category are not 'unfamiliar' but 'already familiar' due to the pervasiveness of stereotypes about asylum seekers as either victims or criminals in both national and local media (Crawley et al., 2016). The findings of this thesis show that these stereotypes are hard to overcome and that collective forms of asylum accommodation tend to reinforce these stereotypes. Objections and resentment against asylum accommodation increase when local authorities fail to inform local residents during the process of planning, opening and daily operations of asylum accommodation. This is because asylum seekers are not unknown but 'already known' through the media; not providing sufficient information or opportunities for direct contact to local residents makes it difficult for them to disprove stereotypes about asylum seekers.

A second factor contributing to stereotyping is institutionalized forms of accommodation where asylum seekers appeared to be subjected to both 'care and control' by the state. Surprisingly, this perception was also true for the GHC; here, local residents perceived asylum seekers to be taken care of and controlled by the employees and volunteers of the project. Importantly, this also meant that local residents did not perceive asylum seekers as 'neighbours', but as an institutionalized population under the authority of others. This perception was shared by resident asylum seekers, who felt held back in their ability to invite people into the centre and perform other 'neighbourly' acts. A third factor which contributed to marking asylum seekers as 'different' was the size of the accommodation. The comparison between the smaller centre , accommodating about fifty resident asylum seekers, with the larger centre, accommodating about 150 asylum seekers, highlighted that the latter turned resident asylum seekers into an 'undifferentiable mass' of people, as local residents had difficulties recognizing individual inhabitants of the centre. Similarly, resident asylum seekers also felt that being accommodated in large-scale accommodation turned them into a visual 'block' of people and limited the possibility of interaction with neighbours. The findings therefore clearly demonstrate that large-scale and collective forms of asylum accommodation create discomfort for both asylum seekers and local residents and reduce the opportunities for familiarization.

**Recommendation 3: 'No integration without familiarization.'**
> *Encourage familiarization by providing opportunities for direct contact and for exchanging knowledge and information*

After arrival follows a process of familiarization with the place a person has travelled to. Regardless of whether this person intends to stay or leave, or whether circumstances urge them to move on, arrival means to get to know one's surroundings, find out where basic goods can be bought, how to use public transportation or where to obtain reliable information. Yet arrival is not the same for everyone, particularly for asylum seekers. As this thesis demonstrates, familiarization between asylum seekers, local residents and the

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reception location is influenced not only by the spatial location of accommodation, but also by the material and institutional characteristics of accommodation. Familiarization is not something that only applies to asylum seekers, but it is a process that takes place between people and places and means establishing a close relationship with someone or something. To be able to familiarize with someone or some place, direct experience and knowledge are key. This holds for both asylum seekers and local residents, meaning that it is not only asylum seekers that benefit from opportunities to familiarize with the reception location and its residents, but also local residents whose sense of comfort and safety is increased by being able to familiarize with asylum seekers and asylum accommodation of their neighbourhood. Discouraging familiarization not only has negative consequences for asylum seekers, but also for local residents, as it increases estrangement and depersonalization of asylum seekers, thereby creating feelings of unsafety and discomfort among asylum seekers and local residents. Overall then, providing opportunities for familiarization is not only beneficial to newcomers but to society as a whole.

How can policy makers support the process of familiarization for asylum seekers and local residents? As stated above, familiarization consists of gaining direct experience and knowledge of someone or some place. Familiarization is supported by investing and maintaining those already existing public and semi-public spaces which enable interaction across difference that go beyond the fleeting contact of sidewalks. These are spaces in which asylum seekers and local residents can learn to recognize each other as individuals and encourage more 'meaningful encounters' (Valentine, 2013). For instance, the built environment of the second case, GUO, offered only few contact zones between asylum seekers and local residents, limiting contact to narrow sidewalks or the supermarket in a neighbourhood with comparatively heavy car traffic. In the case of the GHC, the neighbouring streets enabled daily contact between asylum seekers and local residents, as they were quiet and closed-off enough for children to play on, creating a 'contact zone' between children living in the centre, their parents and direct neighbours of the project and facilitating individual recognition. Individual recognition is crucial, as interviews showed that the combination of a larger centre with few opportunities for contact and interaction in the built environment of a centre contributes to asylum seekers' depersonalization and creates the impression of a 'homogeneous mass' of asylum seekers.

Creating spaces which are purposefully designed to facilitate contact between asylum seekers and local residents is equally important. In the case of the GHC, both asylum seekers and local residents benefitted from its more 'open' character, which included a café, restaurant and event space and was open seven days a week. For asylum seekers, this meant easier access to information, a place to meet people as well as an invaluable

opportunity to practice speaking German. Local residents valued the opportunity to be able to enter and experience the GHC, as this reduced fears and contributed to the overall acceptance of the project. While the second case was not as 'open' to the public as the GHC, it also demonstrated the value of 'designed' spaces inside and in close proximity to the centre which facilitated interaction between asylum seekers and local residents. An example of such a space was the café of a nearby NGO, in which regular homework sessions took place. The main purpose of spaces which are specifically designed to facilitate interaction between asylum seekers and local residents is not to change the minds of those with anti-asylum seeker sentiments, but to provide spaces for interaction for those who are seeking it. In other words, while it is hard to change dominant stereotypes about asylum seekers by 'engineering' interaction, it is possible to make sure that those who are seeking interaction have the space and opportunities to do so.

The second factor important for familiarization between asylum seekers, local residents and the reception location is 'knowledge'. For asylum seekers, this means access to sources of information about the reception location, including internet access. It is therefore crucial that internet access is defined a minimum accommodation standard. For local residents, specific knowledge about the centre and its residents is important, given that asylum seekers are not 'unknown' but 'already known' through stereotypes circulating in media and national discourse. What this research has shown is that specific, localized information on a centre and its residents is important to counter what is already known and to provide a sense of comfort and safety for local residents. Local residents' 'knowledge needs' can be met through providing them early on with specific information, as well as through providing opportunities to get involved, such as through language cafés or neighbourhood events. Important to note is how information is also gained through third parties, that is, when people are not directly involved but gain knowledge through friends and acquaintances in contact with asylum seekers. It is only through such opportunities for direct experience and knowledge that a sense of comfort can be established for asylum seekers and local residents.

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# APPENDICES &

## Nederlandse samenvatting
## Curriculum Vitae

# Nederlandse samenvatting

### Inleiding

> *'We will create the alien nation, not outside our borders, but within our midst. And we will have only ourselves to blame for future generations of distance, distrust and disenchantment.'*
> (Goodwin-Gill 1997: 16)

Asielopvang - er zijn weinig onderwerpen die zo veel felle publieke reacties oproepen. Hoewel de meeste lezers van dit proefschrift nooit een centrum van binnen hebben gezien, zullen de meesten er toch een beeld bij hebben. Een beeld dat vaak geassocieerd wordt met protest tegen opvang, met overvolle accommodaties, slechte omstandigheden, met onveiligheid en zelfs aanslagen. Het voorafgaande citaat van Goodwin-Gill geeft de conclusie weer die hij ruim twintig jaar geleden trok in een analyse van het Europese asiel- en migratiebeleid. Gezien de steeds fellere en gepolariseerde publieke en politieke reacties omtrent het Europese migratiebeleid in het algemeen en de opvang van asielzoekers in het bijzonder, lijkt zijn conclusie van toen een accurate voorspelling van de hedendaagse problematiek.

De lage standaarden van asielopvang in veel Europese landen zijn onderdeel van een Europees vluchtelingenbeleid dat beoogt migratie te beperken door middel van een reeks verschillende maatregelen met een afschrikwekkende werking. De verwachting is dat naast lage standaarden in opvang, ook beperkingen in rechten tot werk, onderwijs en bewegingsvrijheid zullen voorkomen dat migranten Europese bodem betreden of zich daar permanent vestigen. In tegenstelling tot de populariteit van zulke restrictieve maatregelen onder rechtse en populistische partijen in verschillende Europese landen toont wetenschappelijk onderzoek aan dat restricties die een afschrikwerkende werking beogen niet alleen weinig effect hebben op de aantallen van asielaanvragen, maar ook een negatieve uitwerking hebben op de integratie van vluchtelingen op de lange duur. De restricties die asielzoekers tijdens hun procedure in hun dagelijkse leven ervaren blijken negatieve consequenties te hebben voor hun fysieke en mentale welzijn waardoor hun vermogen om te integreren tegengewerkt wordt. Naast de negatieve gevolgen op de integratie van asielzoekers is het ook denkbaar dat deze 'politiek van ongemak' ook negatieve gevolgen voor de samenleving in zijn geheel heeft. Had Goodwin-Gill dus gelijk toen hij voorspelde dat restrictief beleid '*distance, distrust* en *disenchantment*' zou veroorzaken?

De focus van het debat op Europees en nationaal beleid – zowel maatschappelijk als wetenschappelijk – overschaduwt de diversiteit van het vluchtelingenbeleid en de implementatie daarvan op regionale en lokale schaal. Recent wetenschappelijk

onderzoek over de rol van gemeenten bij de implementatie van vluchtelingenbeleid geeft een genuanceerder beeld wat de opvang van vluchtelingen betreft. Naast het restrictieve beleid ontstaat er op lokaal niveau namelijk ook innovatief beleid wat naar een inclusievere vorm van asielopvang streeft. Een voorbeeld hiervan is het project 'Plan Einstein' in Utrecht, een alternatieve vorm van asielopvang welke huisvesting voor asielzoekers combineerde met huisvesting voor Nederlandse jongeren. Het project streefde naar de ontwikkeling van 'future proof skills' door taal en business cursussen te organiseren voor zowel asielzoekers als ook buurtbewoners. De tegenstrijdige Europese en nationale bewegingen richting restrictiever vluchtelingenbeleid aan de ene kant en het vaak meer pragmatischere, inclusievere vluchtelingen beleid op lokaal niveau wijzen ons vooral op grote zowel ruimtelijke als ook materiële en institutionele verschillen in asielopvang. Welke lessen kunnen we trekken uit inclusievere vormen van asielzoeker opvang en wat zijn de consequenties van ruimtelijke, materiële en institutionele verschillen in opvang voor zowel asielzoekers als ook de samenleving?

**Probleemstelling**

In dit onderzoek staan de ruimtelijke, materiële en institutionele verschillen in asielopvang en de effecten op de vertrouwdheid tussen asielzoekers en buurtbewoners centraal. Een centraal uitgangspunt binnen dit onderzoek is dat verschillen in deze drie dimensies invloed hebben op de zogenaamde 'openheid' of 'geslotenheid' van asielopvang. Er wordt in dit onderzoek een verschil gemaakt tussen de juridische definitie van openheid als de mogelijkheid om opvang "op vrije wil of binnen redelijke beperkingen te kunnen verlaten" en de daadwerkelijke dagelijkse ervaring van open- of geslotenheid van opvang door asielzoekers zelf. Deze tweede zicht op openheid – de dagelijkse ervaring van open- of geslotenheid – staat centraal in dit onderzoek. Er wordt onderscheid gemaakt tussen 'ruimtelijke', 'materiële' en 'institutionele open- of geslotenheid'. Zo kan een asiel accommodatie die juridisch gezien als 'open' geldt toch als gesloten worden ervaren bijvoorbeeld door een afgelegen ligging, of door een gebrek aan toegang tot openbaar vervoer. Ook zou een centrale ligging van een juridisch gezien open accommodatie alsnog als gesloten kunnen worden ervaren als deze door materiële elementen zoals prikkeldraad, hoge muren of een verwaarloosde verschijning een visuele barrière vormt met de rest van de omgeving.

In het publieke debat en in de wetenschappelijke literatuur worden de termen 'integratie' en 'inclusie' gebruikt om het arriveren en onderdeel worden van een zogenaamde 'host society' te beschrijven. In dit onderzoek wordt een concept gekozen dat de wederzijdse relatie tussen 'nieuwkomers' en de al gevestigde bevolking beter kan vatten. Met 'vertrouwdheid' oftewel 'vertrouwd worden' (Eng. 'familiarization') is er voor een concept gekozen dat vooraf gaat aan integratie en dat zowel het bekend worden met de lokale omgeving als ook met de omwonenden omvat. Verder wordt vertrouwd worden

als een proces gedefinieerd dat zowel het verwerven van kennis, als ook de dagelijkse ontmoeting en ervaring omvat. De hoofdvraag van dit onderzoek luidt:

> "Welke effecten hebben verschillen in de ruimtelijke, materiële en institutionele open- of geslotenheid van asielzoekerscentra op de vertrouwdheid tussen asielzoekers en buurtbewoners?"

Het doel van dit onderzoek is om inzicht te verschaffen in de maatschappelijke gevolgen van restrictief asielbeleid, de consequenties van gesloten vormen van asielopvang op vertrouwdheid tussen asielzoekers en omwonenden, en de mogelijkheden en beperkingen van alternatieve vormen van asielopvang om de stigmatisatie van asielzoekers tegen te gaan. Dit proefschrift biedt inzicht in de alledaagse processen die zich 'tussen' asielzoekerscentra, de omwonenden en de bredere omgeving afspelen. Zo wordt er een genuanceerder beeld getoond van de effecten van een 'politiek van ongemak' op asielzoekers en omwonenden. Hiermee levert dit onderzoek een bijdrage aan depolarisatie van het discours rondom asielopvang.

De wetenschappelijke bijdrage van dit onderzoek bestaat uit de volgende vier aspecten: Ten eerste wordt de analytische waarde van een relationele benadering van ruimte benadrukt, wat betekent dat ruimte zowel een product is van sociale relaties, als ook deze vormt. De open of geslotenheid van asielopvang is dus zowel een product van menselijk gedrag als ook een factor die sociale interacties beïnvloedt. Ten tweede levert de analyse van 'ruimtelijke, materiële en institutionele open- en geslotenheid' een duiding van de verschillen tussen, en maatschappelijke consequenties van, verschillende vormen van asielopvang. De derde wetenschappelijke bijdrage is het introduceren van het concept van vertrouwdheid aan het wetenschappelijke debat rondom migratie en integratie; een concept wat ontleend is van studies over grenzen, grensregio's en toerisme. Tenslotte wil dit onderzoek het probleem van 'over-onderzoek' onder de aandacht brengen, een probleem dat niet alleen een methodologische kwestie, maar vooral ook een ethisch dilemma is door de negatieve gevolgen van over-onderzoek op zowel de onderzochte plekken als de deelnemers aan onderzoek.

**Onderzoeksopzet**
De centrale vraagstelling is beantwoord door middel van een casestudie waarin twee binnenstedelijke asielzoekerscentra met elkaar worden vergeleken. Er is voor een kwalitatieve benadering gekozen omdat hierbij de verschillende aspecten van een fenomeen centraal komen te staan; het is dus minder bedoeld om causale relaties vast te stellen en meer om te begrijpen hoe een fenomeen wordt waargenomen of ervaren. Om te begrijpen hoe en in hoeverre asielzoekers en buurt bewoners vertrouwdheid met elkaar opbouwen is het nodig om te weten hoe en in hoeverre alledaags contact plaats

vindt, wat mensen van elkaar weten en hoe ze elkaar waarnemen.

Er is voor twee vergelijkende cases gekozen omdat door deze benadering de dynamieken van een specifieke setting kan worden aangetoond en vergeleken. De twee binnenstedelijke asielzoekerscentra zijn gekozen op basis van verschillen in hun materiële en institutionele openheid. De eerste case is een vorm van alternatieve asielopvang, het 'Grandhotel Cosmopolis' (hierna 'GHC' genoemd), een project dat ontstaan is vanuit de lokale bevolking met het doel een ontmoetingsruimte te creëren voor asielzoekers, omwonenden en toeristen. Het project combineert de opvang van asielzoekers met een hotel , een café, restaurant en ruimtes voor creatieve ondernemingen. Het GHC heeft ruimte voor vijftig asielzoekers en biedt onderdak aan zowel families als ook alleenreizende vrouwen en mannen. De tweede case is een asielopvang beheerd door de Beierse overheid en is een typerende vorm van asielopvang. Gevestigd in een voormalig industrie- en kantoorgebouw huisvest deze accommodatie rond honderdvijftig asielzoekers, waaronder families en alleenreizende vrouwen en mannen. Beide centra zijn geopend in 2012 en liggen in de stad Augsburg in verschillende, binnenstedelijke wijken.

Door twee centra te kiezen in dezelfde stad wordt de variatie in contextuele factoren verminderd. Gegevens zijn verzameld door middel van semigestructureerde interviews en participerende observatie. Daarnaast is er ook gebruik gemaakt van een media-analyse en van walk-along interviews met asielzoekers. Door deze methoden triangulatie wordt niet alleen het inzicht in het onderwerp vergroot, maar ook de betrouwbaarheid van de bevindingen.

De gegevens zijn verzameld tussen September 2016 en November 2017; de onderzoekspopulatie van dit onderzoek bestaat uit omwonenden op loopafstand van de centra en uit asielzoekers die in de centra wonen. Onder asielzoekers worden mensen verstaan die een aanvraag op asiel hebben gedaan, ongeacht of hier al een beslissing op is genomen. De heterogeniteit in de asielzoekerspopulatie en de bewonerspopulatie wat betreft leeftijd, gender, land van oorsprong en lengte van verblijf in het centrum of de buurt, resulteert in een diversiteit aan ervaringen en meningen binnen deze twee groepen. Er zijn éénendertig semigestructureerde interviews met buurtbewoners afgenomen en dertig interviews met asielzoekers uit beide centra. De interviews met buurtbewoners zijn in het Duits afgenomen, de interviews met asielzoekers in het Duits of Engels of in enkele gevallen met hulp van een tolk. De verzamelde data is geanalyseerd vanuit een grounded theory benadering, die de motivaties en ervaringen van deelnemers zichtbaar maakt en minder deductieve aannames maakt die de interpretatie beïnvloeden. De gegevens zijn volledig geanonimiseerd, getranscribeerd en gecodeerd in MAXQDA. Dit proefschrift bestaat uit zeven hoofdstukken, na een algemene inleiding volgen

de vijf wetenschappelijke artikelen die op het vijfde hoofdstuk na, zijn verschenen in internationale wetenschappelijke tijdschriften of boeken. Tot slot volgt een conclusie waarin niet alleen de hoofdstukken zijn samengevat, maar ook beleidsaanbevelingen worden gegeven. De belangrijkste bevindingen van de vijf wetenschappelijke artikelen zijn samengevat in de volgende paragraaf.

**Bevindingen en Conclusie**

*Hoofdstuk twee neemt* de lezer mee naar het eerste centrum van dit onderzoek, het 'Grandhotel Cosmopolis' (GHC). In dit hoofdstuk worden de ervaringen van buurtbewoners van het GHC vergeleken met de representatie van het project in de media. Er wordt hierbij gebruik gemaakt van Lefebvre's ruimtelijke triade. De media analyse vergelijkt het portret van het GHC in nationale en lokale krantartikelen en laat zien dat het GHC in nationale kranten gekaderd wordt als een utopistische plek, en dat het in lokale kranten geportretteerd wordt als een experiment. Dit sluit aan bij de ervaringen van buurtbewoners die het GHC over het algemeen als veiliger ervaren dan andere asielzoekerscentra, vooral door de mogelijkheden voor dagelijks contact en het opbouwen van vertrouwdheid. Meer dan een utopie blijkt deze vorm van alternatieve opvang een experiment dat slaagt in het opbouwen van een mate van vertrouwdheid tussen asielzoekers en buurtbewoners, maar slechts beperkt succesvol is in het tegengaan van dominante stereotypes over asielzoekers.

Het daaropvolgende hoofdstuk, *hoofdstuk drie,* introduceert het theoretisch raamwerk van dit onderzoek en onderbouwt de centrale aanname dat ruimtelijke, materiële en institutionele verschillen in asielopvang het opbouwen van vertrouwdheid tussen asielzoekers en buurtbewoners beïnvloedt. Het hoofdstuk pleit voor een relationeel ruimtelijke benadering van asielopvang en argumenteert dat ruimtelijk, materieel en institutionele openheid van asielopvang vertrouwdheid kan bevorderen, en dat ruimtelijke, materiële en institutionele geslotenheid van opvang processen van vervreemding en stereotypering voedt.

*Hoofdstuk vier* vergelijkt beide centra en laat zien hoe asielopvang ongemak veroorzaakt bij zowel asielzoekers als de omwonenden. De gedetailleerde empirische data van dit hoofdstuk illustreert hoe de materiële en institutionele aspecten van asielopvang ongemak veroorzaken. De analyse is gebaseerd op het werk van Goffman en van de carcerale geografie. Door de grenzen tussen het lichaam en de gecontamineerde omgeving te vervagen, door mensen te depersonaliseren en door het beperken van verschillende rollen van individuen in het dagelijks leven, zaait asielopvang vervreemding tussen asielzoekers en omwonenden. Naast deze tendensen laat het hoofdstuk ook zien hoe asielzoekers en omwonenden het ontstaan van ongemak tegengaan door het creëren van ontmoetingsruimte en door het verstrekken van specifieke, gepersonaliseerde

informatie over de bewoners van het centrum.

*Hoofdstuk vijf* biedt een vierdieping van de ruimtelijke open- of geslotenheid door te focussen op het dagelijks gebruik en ervaring van asielzoekers in de stad zelf. Ruimtelijke openheid is in dit hoofdstuk conceptualiseerd als toegankelijkheid tot stedelijke infrastructuren die het proces van aankomen in een stad bevorderen. Er wordt drie verschillende 'aankomst infrastructuren' onderscheiden, voor informatievoorziening, voor taalverwerving en voor het opbouwen van sociale netwerken. De resultaten laten zien dat de toegang tot deze drie infrastructuren voor asielzoekers afhankelijk is van zowel persoonlijke, institutionele als ook ruimtelijke beperkingen. Verder wordt zichtbaar dat het vooral de informele, niet-geïnstitutionaliseerde en door vrijwilligers opgerichte structuren zijn die een cruciale rol spelen in de informatievoorziening, taalverwerving en sociale netwerken.

Het laatste hoofdstuk voor de conclusie, *hoofdstuk zes,* bespreekt ethische kwesties van veldwerk binnen zogenaamde 'over-onderzochte plekken'. Binnen migratieonderzoek is over-onderzoek, een disproportionele en onevenwichtige aandacht van onderzoekers voor bepaalde populaties, organisaties of plekken, een veel voorkomend fenomeen. Het eerste centrum van dit onderzoek, het GHC, is een voorbeeld van een over-onderzochte plek. Aan de hand van het GHC illustreert het hoofdstuk de consequenties van over-onderzoek op het verkrijgen van toegang tot het veld en tot de onderzoekspopulatie, als ook op de positionaliteit van de onderzoeker zelf binnen het veld. Een belangrijk gevolg van over-onderzoek betreft het wantrouwen tussen de onderzoeker en de deelnemers aan het onderzoek. Afsluitend gaat het hoofdstuk ook in op strategieën om over-onderzoek te voorkomen of te verminderen.

> *"Welke effecten hebben verschillen in ruimtelijke, materiële in institutionele open- of geslotenheid van asielzoeker accommodatie op de vertrouwdheid tussen asielzoekers en buurtbewoners?"*

De centrale onderzoeksvraag wordt in twee delen beantwoord. Eerst worden de effecten van ruimtelijke open-of geslotenheid op vertrouwdheid tussen asielzoekers en buurtbewoners besproken, daarna wordt de vraag beantwoord welke effecten van materiële en institutionele open- of geslotenheid op vertrouwdheid heeft.

Twee aspecten staan centraal bij de effecten van ruimtelijke open- of geslotenheid van asielopvang op vertrouwdheid tussen asielzoekers en omwonenden: ten eerste de verschillen tussen een rurale en een stedelijke ligging van de asielopvang en ten tweede de ligging van asielopvang in wijken die verschillen in hun bevolking en bebouwde omgeving. Interviews met asielzoekers lieten zien hoe een rurale of stedelijke locatie

invloed heeft op de toegankelijkheid tot noodzakelijke voorzieningen voor migranten en vluchtelingen en tot gespecialiseerde etnische economieën en netwerken. De twee centra vertonen ook duidelijk de verschillen in ruimtes voor alledaagse ontmoeting binnen de wijken waarin zij liggen. Ruimtes voor dagelijkse ontmoeting bieden mogelijkheden voor het opbouwen van directe ervaring met de ander, en vergroten de individuele herkenbaarheid tussen asielzoekers en omwonenden. Tenslotte moet ruimtelijke openheid ook als toegankelijkheid tot essentiële formele en informele infrastructuren worden begrepen die de vertrouwdheid van asielzoekers met de nieuwe omgeving en zijn bewoners vergroten.

Naast de effecten van ruimtelijke open- of geslotenheid heeft ook de materiële en institutionele dimensie van asielopvang invloed op vertrouwdheid tussen asielzoekers en omwonenden. De vergelijking van de ervaringen van asielzoekers en omwonenden van de twee centra toont aan dat de grootte van asielopvang en het aantal bewoners het opbouwen van kennis over de ander beïnvloedt door de mogelijkheden voor alledaags contact en ontmoeting. Zo bleek er minder individuele herkenning te zijn tussen asielzoekers en omwonenden van het centrum met honderdvijftig bewoners dan van het eerste centrum met rond vijftig bewoners. Minder individuele herkenning tussen asielzoekers en omwonenden bevordert processen van stigmatisering en depersonalisatie van asielzoekers. Daarnaast versterkte de geïnstitutionaliseerde vorm van asielopvang ook gevoelen van ongemak voor zowel asielzoekers en omwonenden. Het tweede centrum werd gezien als een plek die onder het gezag van een bestuurlijke autoriteit staat, en daardoor verminderde het contact tussen asielzoekers en omwonenden. Ook zonder een daadwerkelijke geslotenheid in de wettelijke zin, schept asielopvang in zijn geïnstitutionaliseerde vorm een beeld van geslotenheid die het opdoen van alledaagse ervaring en kennis tussen asielzoekers en omwonenden verminderd.

### Beleidsaanbevelingen
De algemene conclusie uit dit onderzoek luidt als volgt: een hogere mate van ruimtelijke, materiële en institutionele geslotenheid van asielopvang versterkt processen van vervreemding tussen asielzoekers en omwonenden, en een hogere mate van openheid biedt mogelijkheden voor het opbouwen en versterken van vertrouwdheid. Het gebruik van ruimtelijk, materieel en institutioneel gesloten asielopvang als afschrikking in het migratiebeleid, frustreert niet alleen de integratie van vluchtelingen, maar draagt ook bij aan de toenemende stigmatisering van asielzoekers.

Op basis van de belangrijkste bevindingen van dit onderzoek kunnen de volgende beleidsaanbevelingen worden gedaan, die hier zijn samengevat in drie kernboodschappen.

➢ **Creëer en controleer de eisen aan de locatie van asielopvang**

Stel specifieke eisen aan de locatie van asielopvang en neem deze op in de definitie van minimum standaarden van asielopvang. Minimum standaarden voor een locatie omvatten zowel de toegankelijkheid van goederen en voorzieningen, als de kwaliteit van de gebouwde omgeving met betrekking tot de mogelijkheden voor alledaags contact en ontmoeting.

➢ **Kleinschalige opvang is beter dan grootschalige opvang**

Vermijd grootschalige asielopvang omdat deze stigmatisering van asielzoekers bevordert en het opbouwen van vertrouwdheid tussen asielzoekers en omwonenden vermindert. Grootschalige opvang reduceert de individuele herkenning tussen asielzoekers en omwonenden en bevordert daardoor de stigmatisering van asielzoekers. Het beeld in de media van een homogene massa wordt hierdoor versterkt en asielzoekers worden verder gedepersonaliseerd.

➢ **Geen integratie zonder vertrouwdheid tussen asielzoekers, omgeving en samenleving**

Het opbouwen van vertrouwdheid is een belangrijke voorwaarde voor de integratie van asielzoekers en kan bevorderd worden door het scheppen van mogelijkheden voor direct contact tussen asielzoekers en omwonenden van asielopvang en voor het uitwisselen van kennis en informatie. Hiervoor is niet alleen de locatie van asielopvang bepalend, maar ook de type opvang en de directe omgeving. Plekken voor alledaagse ontmoeting kunnen het tijdig opbouwen van vertrouwdheid bevorderen.

# Curriculum Vitae

Marielle Zill (1987) grew up in the city of Augsburg, Germany. After obtaining her 'Abitur' diploma at an all-girl gymnasium in Bavaria, she studied acting at a private acting school in Hamburg for one year. Wanting to learn more about the world, she followed her second big passion and went on to study Geography at the University of Bonn. During her bachelor studies she also spent one year at the University of Bristol, which proved highly influential for her future career. Bristol introduced her to feminist geography, with the result that she wrote her Bachelor thesis on the combined works of her favorite feminist geographer, Doreen Massey. She then decided to continue her education in Geography at Utrecht University, where she graduated cum laude from the Research Master Human Geography. The decision to write her master's thesis on an innovative 'integration project' in her hometown, Augsburg, proved a fateful decision. For the next ten years she remained connected to the 'Grandhotel Cosmopolis'. She not only wrote her master's thesis on the project, but was able to continue her collaboration with the project during her PhD, made possible through an NWO Talent Grant. She presented her research at numerous conferences, including the RGS in London and Cardiff, and published in several international journals and edited books. After working at the Athena Institute of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam in the field of community service learning, she is currently working again as a lecturer in (feminist) urban geography at the department of Human Geography and Planning at Utrecht University.

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# FAMILIAR STRANGERS, DISTANT NEIGHBOURS

In this dissertation, urban geographer Marielle Zill compares the everyday experiences of asylum seekers and local residents of two different inner-city asylum centres in Augsburg, Germany. Her research takes a closer look at how differences between collective forms of asylum accommodation, including spatial location, size or architecture, shape feelings of familiarity and estrangement between asylum seekers and local residents. Her empirical results suggest that larger, closed and mono-functional forms of asylum seeker accommodation limit possibilities for individual recognition and exacerbate feelings of estrangement between asylum seekers and local residents. Small, open and multi-functional asylum accommodations are more likely to increase familiarity between both groups and thereby contribute to a sense of safety.

Through its ethnographic approach, this dissertation provides a more nuanced account of a polarized debate by illustrating not only how asylum accommodation creates 'discomfort for all', but also how alternative forms of asylum accommodation can increase feelings of familiarity and comfort for local residents and asylum seekers and thereby benefit society at large.