Universität
Konstanz

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Research Report

HybOrg Project

Nationwide administrative district survey on the response to the increase in the number of asylum seekers in 2015/16
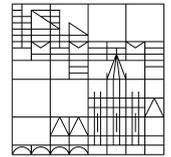
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Content

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1. Local Administrative Crisis Management During the 2015/16 Refugee Crisis in Germany

The HybOrg Survey on local administrative crisis management in Germany was conducted within the research project "Emergence and Social Effects of Hybrid Organizations in Local Cirsis Management. The HybOrg research project is a joint project of the University of Konstanz, LMU Munich and ETH Zurich. It examines both how state institutions engage in crisis management activities at the local level as well as how such efforts can help generate valuable social capital. Supported by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research, the three-year project aims to create a systematic record of administrative action within the realm of crisis management, analyze its effects on social cohesion, and formulate a set of concrete recommendations for relevant stakeholders.

All crises have significant political and social ramifications. During crises, the legitimacy of political actors is at risk, as the failure to overcome the crisis can quickly and irrevocably undermine public trust in the capabilities of political leaders. Interestingly, crises have the potential to erode, but also to foster social cohesion and societal resilience (Kaniasty & Norris 1993). The HybOrg project aims to measure what effect variation of administrative action in crisis management has on societal resilience during times of crisis. Hence, the overall aim of the project is to examine how German administrative institutions operate crisis management at and below the district or county level and how they can contribute to building bridging social capital - a core prerequisite for social resilience. The focus of the project lies on the case of the so-called German refugee crisis of 2015/16, which can be defined as such, as an overburdening and sometimes even inertia of the German politico-administrative system with regards to the distribution, accommodation, primary and health care of protection seeking persons, as well as the reception and processing of asylum applications, could be observed.

During second project phase, administrative actions in crisis management are recorded systematically. The comprehensive presentation of administrative actions in crisis situations is of great interest for basic administrative research on the one hand, and on the other hand it can provide administrations, the public and political decision-makers with an important overview and benchmark. In order to map local crisis management strategies and to learn about the varieties of local administrative behavior during times of crisis, the HybOrg district survey was conducted among German district administrations (counties & district- free cities). This report aims at describing survey methodology, respondents, process and results.

People Involved:

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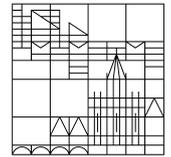Research Group for Public Administration & Organization Theory, University of Konstanz

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2. First Research Period and Preparatory Phase

Table 1: Information on first research stage

Type of Event	Date	Participants
Expert Interview I	March 3rd, 2018	Interview with a representative of the Rural District Association (*Landkreistag*) of one of the federal states
Expert Interview II	April 11th, 2018	Interview with the head of Caritas of one of the federal states
Expert Workshop I	April 20th, 2018 Konstanz	Participants: 5 staff members of administrative institutions (district administration, regional council, or similar) 3 representatives of civil society organizations (e.g. *DRK*, *Flüchtlingsrat*) 6 academic researchers from other research projects
In-depth Workshop II	Mai 6th – 7th, 2019 Konstanz	Participants: 2 staff members of administrative institutions (district administration, regional council, or similar) 1 representative of civil society organizations

In the workshops and interviews, the experts discussed their experiences and take-aways from the refugee-crisis as well as relevant findings from existing research. Questions of administrative actions, challenges and possible solutions concerning the cooperation of government agencies and civic actors formed the central focus. Overall, the conversations showed that flexibility and participation are two essential concepts when it comes to successful crisis management.

The conclusion that flexibility is important, stems from the fact that its necessity was brought up for various different areas of crisis response. A fast and facile adjustment of capacities was mentioned as a major part of successful crisis management. Therefore, a flexible process concerning the recruitment of new, urgently needed personnel was identi-fied as essential. The creation of shorter decision paths through the formation of interfaces was also specified as an asset. Furthermore, the questioning and adjustment of established jurisdiction rules as well as falling back on existing structures for disaster control were detected as important practices. The delegation of tasks was presented as a successful course of action just as regular coordination taking into account all involved actors. Meanwhile, the experts criticized that scopes for action were often not taken sufficient advantage of or even concealed. The adaption of better internal communication, effective cooperation between fire department, army, police and municipalities as well as an early installment of a crisis unit were proposed as beneficial practices.
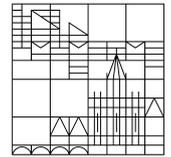
Similar to flexibility, participation was also a concept that appeared throughout the workshops and interviews. It includes the cooperation with volunteers as well as communication with the public. The conscious implementation of information policy towards citizens as well as an open and honest communication with the public were deemed significant. Furthermore, it was emphasized that transparency is important as well as the clear division of responsibilities, which should be explained publicly. Equally, the importance of providing information concerning false facts in order to prevent resentments was emphasized. Beyond this transparency, the experts endorsed an improvement of the collaboration with welfare organizations and civil society after determining needs and possibilities

for both parties. In order to realize this, they recommended the creation of a coordination unit if necessary. It was made apparent that cooperating with welfare organizations is crucial, because they are the primary way to recruit helpers, as they have a pool of volunteers and are better at mobilizing than districts. There is, however, a difference between untrained helpers and volunteers trained for civil protection. Besides, it was mentioned that the inclusion of refugees as well as autonomous migrant organizations entails a positive effect. Generally, it was seen as essential to not exclude volunteers and refugees from important decision-making processes.

3. Survey Design

The HybOrg survey was aimed at the local district administrations of all 401 German counties and district-free cities (Landkreisämter & Stadtverwaltungen kreisfreier Städte). Instead of sampling the administrations, we decided to use full coverage. Therefore, we collected the addresses and information of all administrations within Germany and contacted all of them.

The HybOrg survey is an online survey. All 401 district administrations received a cover letter with a formal invitation for the survey, supported by the German Landkreistag. We did not include a paper version of the questionnaire but asked for online participation via code. All counties and district-free cities were also contacted via e-mail. The participation was of course voluntary for all subscribers and no incentives were provided. Further information on the procedure can be found below.

A structured survey was chosen in order to best understand the perceptions of administrative staff with regards to the districts' crisis management during the refugee situation 2015/16. The questionnaire comprises a

number of modules, which are described in more detail below.

3.1. Topics / Modules

The survey was developed based on relevant literature and the fieldwork conducted among the first research period (see Chapter 3 for a detailed description). The questionnaire included several modules about the status and the amount of changes in structures within the administration, necessary in order to react to the migration crisis of 2015/16 in Germany.

In the first module, some general information regarding the respondent's position within the administrative department and information about the framework conditions in which the corresponding county or city administration had to operate were collected.

The second module asked about changes in the structures and behaviors for the inclusion of citizens and volunteers. This section aimed at understanding the necessity for cooperation with and integration of volunteers, as well
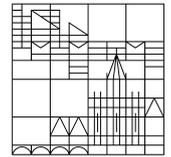
as the administrative efforts to change communication strategies in order to mobilize volunteers, but also to inform the public and influence public perceptions of the administrative handling of the situation.

The third module covered the topic of flexibilization. Questions in this section referred, for example, to the amount of leeway given in decision authority, the role of discretionary powers, mechanisms of centralization or decentralization, the creation of new structures, such as offices, units, etc., the development and application of new coping strategies, innovation and creativity. But this section also asked about staff related issues such as staff recruitment and mobility, and issues regarding rule breaking and law bending.

Module four collected information on the district's ability and perceived necessity to adapt their communication strategy to the crisis situation. There, questions were concerned with immediacy, relevance, and intensity of communication with the public, the frequency of information events, and the level of cooperation with the local media. Finally, the survey ended with a final module asking questions about effectiveness, learning effects and social cohesion in more general terms.

3.2. Pretest

In order to check the validity of the questions, a pre-test among fellow researchers and public officials in some county administrations that agreed to collaborate with our project was carried out on July 20th-25th. A total of 15 pretesters were interviewed. In order to represent the actual survey situation as realistically as possible, and also for practical reasons, as most of our collaborators in the local administrations were spread over Germany, we used the pretest function of the Unipark Software. When this function is enabled, testers can make use of the opportunity to write down comments on the questionnaire in a separate version. We also received feedback from experts at the GESIS Leibnitz Institute for the Social Sciences which provides free of charge support for researchers at publicly funded universities.
(https://www.gesis.org/en/services/study-planning/consulting/)

On the basis of all comments, we evaluated and improved the questionnaire. Consequently, the order of the questions for the main study was adjusted and some questions reworded or omitted. The pretest also gave indications about inadequate formulations or technical problems. These issues could subsequently be resolved for the actual survey.

4. Fieldwork

The HybOrg survey was aimed at the local district administrations of all 401 German counties and district-free cities (Landkreisämter & Stadtverwaltungen kreisfreier Städte). Instead of sampling the administrations, we decided to use full coverage. Therefore, we collected the addresses and information of all administrations within Germany and contacted all of them.

All 401 county and district-free city administrations first received a letter of invitation directed to the county commissioner or mayor asking them to take part in the survey. The letter contained information about the research project and the research team, as well as a support note from the German Association of Rural Districts (Deutscher Landkreistag). We did not include a paper version of the questionnaire but asked for online participation via code.
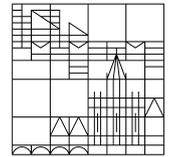
In a next step, we distributed the link to the online survey as well as an individual access code for each district via e-mail. The e-mail contained a copy of the formal invitation letter which was sent out in advance. The e-mails were sent out August 21st of 2018. There, we encountered problems of non-contact in 22 cases. In those cases, we corrected the e-mail addresses via online research or phone afterwards and reached out to those cases the 24th of August. Furthermore, some counties contacted us following up on the invitation letter and asked us to forward the invitation e-mail to different corresponding e-mail addresses. We ensured that each county or district-free city could only reply once. Reminders were sent out on September 19th and October 8th. The survey was open for participation until November 15th 2018. In the case of Berlin data was missing. As it was, however, highly relevant for the further research design, we identified another contact for Berlin and initiated another round of collection only for this one case from January 15th to January 23rd. To our knowledge, no further problems arose during the survey. The high response rate despite the absence of incentives underlines the relatively good quality of the data collected.

Figure 1: Field report
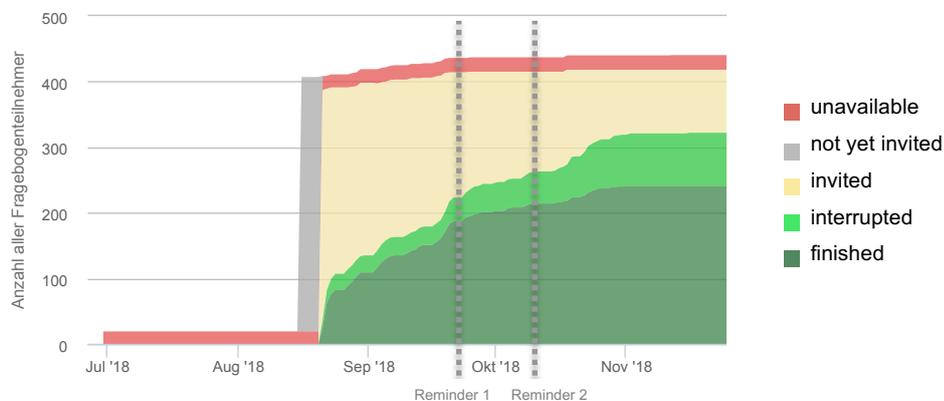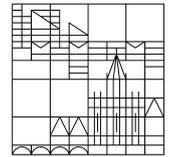
5. Response Rate

Due to several reasons, we decided to not offer incentives but rely on the support of the German Association of Towns and Municipalities and the German Association of Rural Districts (*Deutscher Städtetag* und *Deutscher Landkreistag*), who recommended the participation in the survey within their networks. Nevertheless, the adjusted response rate was 60%. The average response time was 21 min.

Table 2: Response Rates

| Region	Not Completed	Completed	Total Invited
Germany total	160 40%	241 60%	401 100%
West	130 40%	195 60%	325 100%
East	36 50%	40 50%	76 100%
County	104 35%	189 65%	293 100%
District-free city	62 57%	46 43%	108 100%

5.1. Type of Respondents

For reasons of comparability the position each respondent holds within her/his district administration was surveyed. A differentiation has been drawn between several functions and competencies. The first category comprises county commissioner and mayors (Landräte und Bürgermeister) who are usually the heads of administration of the respective organization. Furthermore, a distinction is made between line organization and staff organization (Linien- und Staabsorganisation). Line organization is a common technical organizational unit within the administration. Staff organization refers to an organizational unit that combines several departments with reference to a specific topic. In addition, a distinction is made between positions with and without personnel responsibility.

Table 3: Position of Respondents

| Position of respondent	Count
County commissioner / mayor	14
Line organization with staff responsibilities	145
Line organization without staff responsibilities	7
Department with staff responsibilities	61
Department without staff responsibilities	3
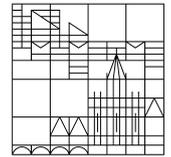
6. Preliminary and Exemplary Empirical Findings

Firstly, the survey data shows observable variation in administrative crisis management among districts. The results reveal that some administrations became considerably more flexible and participatory than others. Further-more, variation in administrative action is re-flected with regard to the number of asylum seekers entering districts in East and West Germany (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Between county variation with regards to changes in flexibility and participation
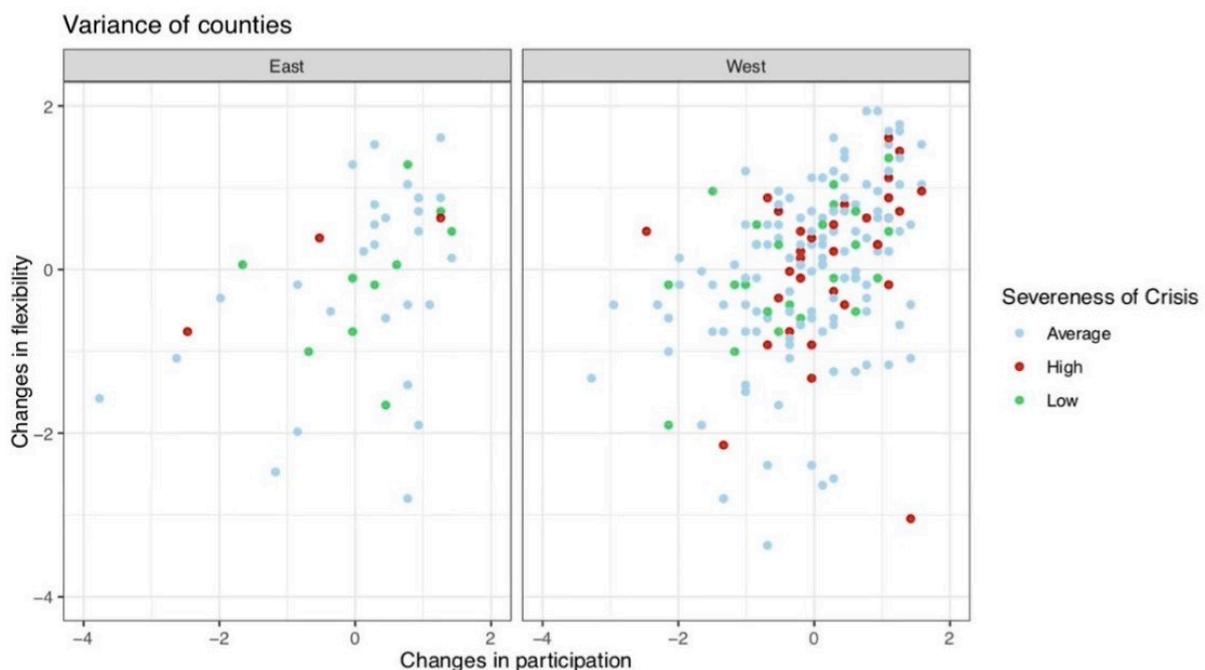
Note: The scatterplot shows how the different counties are positioned along the two dependent variables changes in flexible and participatory behavior. Eastern and Western states are depicted with different forms, while the color indicates how severely the counties were affected by the crisis (measured via the normalized relative shares of asylum seekers, indication standard devia-tions from least affected (negative) to most severely affected counties (positive). N = 226. Graph created for the research paper "Latent Organizational Hybridity in Administrative Crisis Management: The German Refugee Crisis of 2015/16" by Eckhard et al. currently under review.

Besides, looking at the perception of volun-teer helpers by public administrators provides some informative findings. The predominant assessment of the surveyed representatives from relevant authorities displays that volun-teers can offer formidable support for author-ities with duties in crisis management. Two thirds of respondents evaluated the assis-tance provided by volunteers during the refu-gee crisis as helpful to very helpful. However, differences in the evaluation of different types of helpers can be identified (Figure 3).
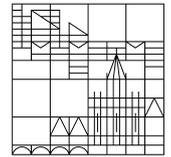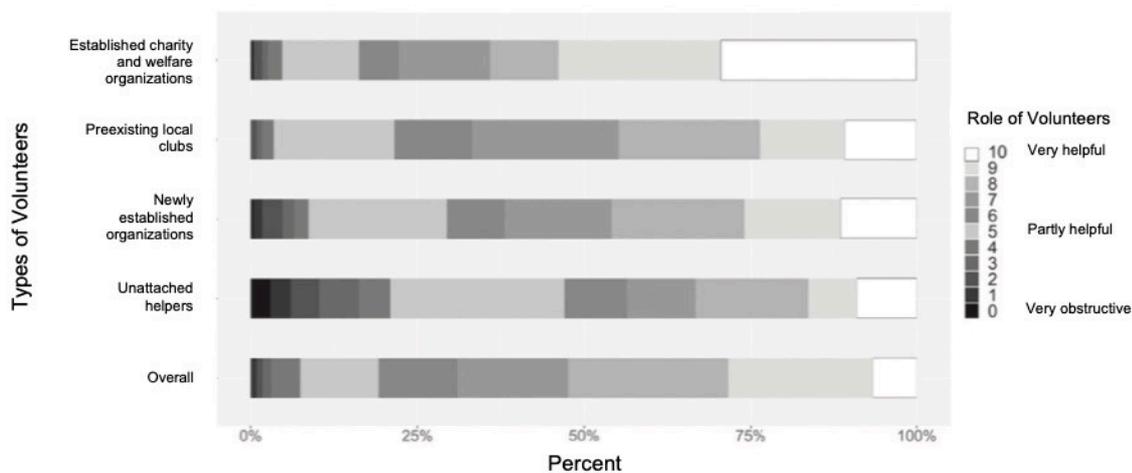
Figure 3: Role of Volunteers per Type

Note: Graph created for the policy brief by Roth et al. (2019) "Wege zur Einbindung von Freiwilligen - Lehren aus der sogenannten Flüchtlingskrise." Behördenspiegel, 12/2019. https://bit.ly/3crKiaO6.

85% of persons surveyed considered volunteers from well-established charity organizations valuable. Also, the contributions by neighborhood organizations and local sports clubs in connection with the refugee crisis were viewed as quite useful. Newly established organizations in the area of asylum were assessed mostly positively as well, however, the number of critical voices was higher with those organizations. Finally, only a narrow majority viewed unattached helpers as beneficial. Overall, the results show that the role of volunteers was evaluated more positively the more organized and structured the volunteer helpers were.

In addition, the survey shows that the incorporation of volunteers is especially successful in districts that were equipped with formal or informal structures of cooperation between public administration and civil society in the field of asylum even before the number of refugees rose. This does, however, not apply to unattached helpers. The results altogether do not identify significant differences between rural and urban districts or district-free cities when it comes to the relationship between preexisting cooperation structures and the positive evaluation of the contribution of civil society actors.

Taking into consideration the findings of the survey, only a focus on benefitting the comparatively loose structure as an additional resource will allow accessing the full potential of unattached helpers. In this process, so-called intermediary organizations hold an important role, acting as a link between administrative professionals and volunteers. Administrative authorities should encourage intermediary organizations and support them in simplifying the efficient use of helpers and benefitting from their specific qualities. Furthermore, aimed training measures for professionals and volunteers is another option to improve collaboration. Authorities have a number of different opportunities to use the potential of volunteer helpers effectively when they are introduced in due time before crises. For authorities, this means they need to proactively work to establish cooperation structures instead of passively waiting for the occurrence of crisis situations. It is especially important to adjust instruments to the local context and build on already available structures in order to benefit from the existing civic potential in the best possible way. If this succeeds, the public administration will be well-equipped for future crisis situations despite persistent challenges.
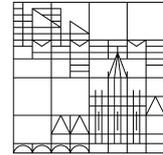
7. <u>Information on the project</u>

The HybOrg research project focuses on the administrative management of the so-called refugee crisis in Germany between 2015 and 2016. It asks about the societal effect of variation in local crisis management (*Landkreise* and *kreisfreie Städte*). Supported by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research, the three-year project aims to create a systematic record of administrative action within the realm of crisis management, analyze its effects on social cohesion, and formulate a set of concrete recommendations for relevant stakeholders.

HybOrg is a collaborative research project which is coordinated by Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Seibel(University Konstanz) and involves researchers at ETH Zurich (Dr. Florian Roth), LMU Munich (Dr. Matthias Fatke), and University Konstanz (Jun.-Prof. Dr. Steffen Eckhard, Alexa Lenz, and Lorenz Wiese). The project is funded by the German Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF) (2018-2021).

For more details, please visit the project webpage (German).

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Alexa Lenz is a research fellow and PhD student at the Chair for Public Administration and Organizational Theory at the University of Konstanz. She works in the research project "Emergence and Social Effects of Hybrid Organizations in Local Crisis Management (HybOrg)" on the topic of societal effects of crisis management with a focus on the generation of social capital and political trust. In her doctoral project, she studies public perceptions of administrative performance with a focus on crisis management and social capital.

Steffen Eckhard is assistant professor for Public Administration and Organizational Theory at the University of Konstanz, principal investigator of the research network "Hybrid Organizations in Local Crisis Management" and member of the research group "International Public Administration". In his research and teaching, he examines the political and societal effects of public administration at various levels: locally, for the management of internationalized crisis phenomena; and internationally, when dealing with global political problems and challenges.

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