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### Abstract

The recent increase in refugees in Europe highlights the need to advance ways to implement integration policies, develop practice, and improve integration services and programmes. The primary concern of this article is to examine municipalities that have used municipal planning as a strategic tool to improve integration practices. The article is grounded in qualitative research findings from a case study of two Norwegian municipalities.

The key findings indicate that strengthening the administrative and political foundations for integration and involving more partners in the field of integration, appear to be the most evident motives. Using municipal planning as a strategic tool can be beneficial for municipalities with a lack of intersectoral collaboration, difficulties providing and coordinating services, and problems sustaining the engagement of municipal employees in the work of integration. In the two studied municipalities, planning processes was seen as a way of addressing these issues.

### Introduction

The article contributes to research on municipalities' integration practices. It aims to examine why actors in public management use municipal planning as a strategic tool to improve integration practices and how these activities can contribute to integration efforts and the implementation of integration policies in municipalities. The recent increase in refugees in Europe will impact the Scandinavian countries and might become a critical issue for local communities (Skjelbostad & Hernes, 2021). Several studies have shown that prioritising integration in municipal planning at a local political level is a possible success criterion for integration efforts (Rosdahl, 2004; Berg, 1996; Skutlaberg et al., 2014; Djuve et al., 2017; Heinesen et al., 2009; Hansen et al., 2006). Previous research has generated various findings suggesting that embedding local integration initiatives into municipal planning systems can be significant for establishing a political foundation for integration and broader collaboration across sectors (Busengdal et al., 2020; Djuve et al., 2017). Findings in Danish benchmarking analyses (Heinesen et al., 2009; Hansen et al., 2006) show that collaborative processes can impact on the development and construction of general, shared ideas about integration efforts throughout the municipal organisation. These processes often involve municipal planning. In common with other policy areas such as public health, the environment, sustainability, and public safety, the field of integration is a so-called cross-sectoral discipline. Previous studies have identified a need to integrate issues related to these cross-sectoral disciplines into planning and management systems to ensure intersectoral responsibility and political support during the development and implementation of local policies (Holt, 2016; Carey & Crammond, 2015).

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in how municipal planning can contribute to integration of immigrants (Nyseth, 2021; Allen & Slotterback, 2021; Busengdal et al., 2020; Bernt, 2019; Kühn, 2018; Saemi & Batool, 2018;

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Zapata-Barrero et al., 2017). However, a knowledge gap exists between, respectively, the literature on planning and that concerning integration. According to Allen and Slotterback (2021), various planning theorists have conceptually established, the importance of involving integration issues in planning decisions, though little research has been conducted on how best to achieve this. The integration of refugees is essential for the social and cultural development of local communities' and impacts on a range of issues relating to community life, including living conditions, social inequality, justice, quality of life, social belonging, and social capital. According to Heino and Jauhiainen (2020) and Kondo (2012), immigration is rarely considered in depth in planning processes, municipalities fail to plan adequately for integration, and negative attitudes towards immigration often prevail in both administration and politics.

Integrating refugees entails the integration of people who need to escape from their homeland due to war, conflicts, or persecution. This is a group that has few resources and consequently needs more facilitation than, for example, labour immigrants. While integration policy is a national responsibility in Norway, local authorities play a key role in implementing that policy by providing services to accommodate their individual needs and empowering them to contribute to their new communities (Ministry of Education, 2018). The national focus is on implementing measures targeted at education and transition to the labour market, as these arenas reduce reliance on local welfare systems and strengthen their broader social inclusion (Ministry of Education, 2018). Another argument is that being able to take care of oneself and one's family is believed to be central to individual well-being (Søholt & Tronstad, 2021). In Norway, municipal authorities are responsible for implementing the national integration policy, which mainly includes activities to improve language skills, social studies, education, and work-oriented qualifications to help refugees establish a permanent sense of belonging within local communities and in working life (Imdi, 2021). Integration of refugees needs to happen at the local level, where people are located. However, previous research has shown that local authorities experience problems in public service delivery for refugees, stemming from factors such as a lack of sector responsibility, a deficit in collaboration across levels of governance, and policy incoherence across sectors such as housing, labour, health care, and education (Busengdal et al., 2020; OECD, 2018; Djuve & Kavli, 2015; Heinesen et al., 2013). The lack of overall policies, plans, and strategies within the field of integration leads to fragmentation and sporadic initiatives, which constitute barriers for local integration efforts (Eimhjellen & Seegard, 2016).

The literature on integration indicates a pressing need for political legitimacy, collaboration across sectors, and the sharing of ideas regarding integration efforts throughout the entire municipal organisation (Skutlaberg et al., 2014; Bredal & Orupabo, 2014; Tronstad, 2015). This requires political and administrative support, coordinated action across sectors, and accountability on the part of political and administrative leadership (Busengdal et al., 2020). Planning can be defined as a democratic process in which actors enter into a constructive collaboration to share ideas and find solutions that can lead to an intermediated consensus concerning the factors above (Innes & Booher, 2015).

This indicates that investigating municipal planning as a strategic tool to improve integration practices is a field of interest to study.

### Aim and outline

This article is grounded in qualitative research findings from a case study of two Norwegian municipalities (one rural 3500-10000 inhabitants and one urban 20000-80000 inhabitants), which are recognized as exemplary in their approach to refugee integration at the national level.

It is challenging to find qualitative research on local processes whereby various management actors work through municipal planning with regard to integration, which raised interest in studying the article's primary concern:

*Why actors in public management use municipal planning as a strategic tool to improve integration practices and how these activities can contribute to integration efforts and the implementation of integration policies in municipalities?*

The objective of the article is to gain more knowledge about how municipal planning can contribute to facilitating refugee integration at the local level. In the field of integration, it is crucial to bring a variety of actors to the table so that their voices can be heard and to build relationships that can break up established policy silos. This is a dialogical process that can have process outcomes. In this article, planning refers to activities that facilitate refugee integration in more general terms. This means that the article does not deal directly with on-the-ground integration work but instead examines how management activities in municipalities relate to such integration efforts.

### Theoretical perspectives

A significant aspect of planning practice is its exact attempt to connect various forms of knowledge with forms of action in the public domain (Friedmann, 1987). The academic landscape of public planning perspectives is often seen as rather unclear as many types of activities in the public sector are considered as planning (Innes & Booher, 2015). Planning can be acknowledged both as a bureaucratic action and as a political process. It might be limited to the physical planning tradition or include activities that facilitate developments, such as analysing situations, negotiating, defining problems, and compiling solutions through plans and policies (Allmendinger, 2009). Simultaneously, planning can also be the *process* of such activity (Rydin, 2007). This means that many professionals at different levels and departments in the municipal organisation are planners, not just individuals who write planning documents (Friedmann, 1987). Planning can be seen as an activity among professionals, between planners, professionals, citizens, and politicians or include both the private sector and volunteer organizations (Davoudi, 2015). In these terms, planning can be considered as an interactive political democratic process and a governance activity, which reflects the theory of collaborative planning in the academic landscape (Rydin, 2007; Innes, 2017; Innes & Booher, 2015, 2016, 2018).

Collaborative planning combines the two rationalities, instrumental planning or the traditional expert-driven planning and the communicative turn in planning theory, which focuses in considerable part on communication processes,

interaction, and the qualities of dialogue (Innes & Booher, 2015). Collaborative planning is a way of understanding action, or what a planner does, as an interactive activity. When mutually dependent actors develop shared understandings and build consensus in planning and policymaking, it can balance the power relations between them. Simultaneously they can agree to disagree and still find a consensus on how to move forward (Forester, 2004, 2012). Collaborative planning emerged from the idea that the core of knowledge in planning should be grounded in local and experience-based knowledge (Rydin, 2007), where outcomes arise from interactive processes, sharing meanings, and dialogue rather than from rational models, scientific analysis, and desired outcomes (Innes & Booher, 2015).

While communication by itself does not change public actions or institutions, it does play an integral part in such change by shaping actors' understandings and values (Innes & Booher, 2015). The collaborative processes can create trust, new relations, and interpersonal networks and in the end, enhance a higher degree of social, intellectual, and political capital, also outlined as institutional capacity (Agger & Løfgren, 2008; Healey et al., 1999, 2000). In the municipal sector, institutional capacity is seen as a way of strengthening departments and agencies' capabilities to plan, implement and manage policies and programs. What politicians, planners, and other professionals do in their interactions can make a difference and change the content, procedures, and ways of conducting governance activity (Healey, 2003). The collaborative planning theory stresses that these processes where multiple actors engaged in management meet, discuss, and negotiate can generate ideas about integration efforts that are shared throughout the whole municipal organisation. According to Healey (2003, 2006), these processes are important, as they both have process outcomes, as well as measurable results. The following section addresses the methods and materials used in this research.

## Methods and Materials

### Sample

The project has been approved by the Norwegian Center for Research Data (NSD). The two municipalities were selected based on the fact that they are recognised as exemplary in integrating refugees at the national level as they have succeeded in establishing effective local solutions and measures and have good results in their introduction program and settlement work. These local solutions and measures presuppose collaboration within and across levels of governance and sectors. The municipalities score high on national integration statistics that show they have succeeded in attaining a high number of refugees into permanent employment or training. They are nominated for integration awards and have received much media attention for their practice. In other words, the cases are atypical in many ways. The municipalities have employed municipal planning as a strategic tool to improve their integration practices and embedded the integration of immigrants as a crucial topic at all levels, from top management to the level of caseworkers. The urban municipality has worked systematically for a long time to maintain the principle of sectoral responsibility regarding

integration. Both municipalities have included immigrant integration in their municipal plans for several years.

### Study design

The power of a case study is its focus on the local situation rather than how it represents other cases in general (Stake, 2006). A case study design was selected to obtain an understanding of the phenomenon in its entirety and to explore it from different angles (Stake, 2006, 2010). In a case study, neither the findings nor the empirical material can be generalised to all municipalities (Thomas, 2016). However, an understanding of the phenomenon in the studied municipalities can provide insights, ideas, and experience-based knowledge of how municipal planning can contribute to refugee integration.

### Methodological approaches

The data was obtained from semi-structured individual and group interviews with politicians and municipal employees (chief municipal executives, municipal leaders, and employees from health, culture, education, the planning office, and the refugee office) and employees of the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration and upper secondary school. A total of 20 informants were interviewed across the two municipalities. A document analysis of existing planning documents, strategies, and relevant case documentation from the selected municipalities was also conducted. The selection was documents from introduction programmes, master plans, programme of action, thematic plans, and sector plans. The document study was not employed as an in-depth analytical tool but was instead used to prepare the interview questions and supplement the interview data.

The sample of informants was selected based on the hypothesis that a variety of informants would offer differing experiences, perspectives, and knowledge about the topic because of their various sectoral responsibilities.

### Analysis

The analytical dimension in the empirical analysis is to study processes where public officials address integration through municipal planning activities. The data was analysed to identify overarching themes relating to municipal planning as a strategic tool to improve integration practices and how these activities could contribute to integration work and the implementation of integration policies in the studied municipalities. The transcribed interviews were encoded in NVivo's digital tool for analysing qualitative data using the six steps for thematic analysis developed by Braun and Clarke (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., 2014, 2018). The themes were then redefined in relation to collaborative planning theory, and when the results section had been written, the text was revised to ensure conformity between the materials and the text. The interviews covered topics such as how they collaborate, what kind of planning processes they employ, their motivation for and experiences of using municipal planning in integration efforts, and the opportunities and challenges they had encountered.

As a backdrop for following up the analytical dimensions in the empirical analyses the informants draw attention to planning as interactive processes, and

as activities related to defining goals, problems, and solutions for moving forward. They also refer to planning as an activity of agenda-setting and consensus-building, which relate to the theories of collaborative planning. In the studied municipalities, planning is an activity that is largely undertaken by planners, other professionals, as well as politicians. i.e., it involves both elected representatives and municipal employees. Only to a minor degree did the interviewees draw attention to the physical planning tradition or planning processes involving citizens, the private sector, and volunteer organisations.

## Results – Municipal Planning as a Strategic Tool in Integration Efforts

### Distribution of sector responsibility through municipal planning

The document analysis of existing planning documents such as plans for housing, health care, childhood, culture, and public health shows that the plans include goals, strategies, and interventions related to the integration of refugees. Refugees are also the main target group of child poverty strategies and a focus area in housing plans, master plans, and public health strategies. These findings partly contradict previous research findings (Qadeer & Agrawal, 2011; Heino & Jauhainen, 2020), which shows that immigration is rarely considered in depth in planning and that municipalities fail to plan adequately for integration. In the studied municipalities there seems to be a strong capability to plan, implement, and manage policies and programs regarding refugee integration. Healey (2003) refers to these processes can generate ideas, in this case about integration efforts, that are shared throughout the whole municipal organisation.

Informants in both municipalities stressed a problem of lack of sector responsibility, whereby the responsibility for integrating refugees was given to a small number of municipal actors, and not placed on the agenda of other sectors. Some informants stressed that including local integration initiatives into municipal plans helped them distribute responsibility for integration to all sectors and departments. Previous research suggests that prioritising integration in municipal planning can be significant for establishing a political foundation for integration and broader collaboration across sectors (Busengdal et al., 2020; Djuve et al., 2017; Rosdahl, 2004; Berg, 1996). Several informants claimed that planning involves the allocation of resources, in terms of both competence and economic resources. The use of municipal planning by sector authorities', places responsibility on more actors in facilitating refugee integration in existing sector work. Inclusion of integration goals in planning also involves more people, which might increase measures and activity in the field of integration. The informants believed that integrating refugees is something they must solve together, which indicates a need for multiple actors engaged in management to meet, discuss, and negotiate issues concerning integration as Healey (2003) refers to. An informant from the development department described the situation as follows:

*The politicians decided that the integration theme should be embedded into the municipality's planning system because it should be part of everything. The practice is part of the*

*programme of action and all the theme plans in the various departments, such as health, housing, development, and education.*

The statement suggests that municipal planning is employed to share sector responsibility for integration among diverse departments, which indicates that using planning as a strategic tool might be beneficial for municipalities with a lack of intersectoral collaboration. It also highlights that there is political support for including local integration initiatives within municipal planning activities. According to Forester (2004, 2012), when mutually dependent actors develop shared understandings in planning and policymaking, it might balance the power relations between them. Simultaneously, they can find a consensus on how to move forward, which seem to be evident in the studied municipalities.

The interviewees believed that employing planning as a tool enabled them to distribute integration efforts to all sectors and departments. Some informants from the administration emphasised that using planning as a tool makes it more realistic to place refugee integration on the political agenda and raise awareness among those working in the municipal organisation. These findings suggests that it could improve relations between sectors as it makes politicians and management more aware of the topic. This conforms to the idea of planning as an interactive consensus-building activity, where various actors meet, discuss, negotiate, and distribute sector responsibility even though there is a diversity of interests (Forester, 2004, 2012).

On the other hand, the informants from the planning department in the urban municipality stressed the need for planners to have more knowledge about integration efforts. The planners reported that initially, it was new for them to consider diversity and integration of refugees as a field of action that planning could contribute to. Both Bernt (2019) and Kühn (2018) stress that in planning, problems related to urban shrinkage and local growth strategies are often the focus of urban planning debates related to immigration, rather than the contribution planning can make in facilitating refugee integration or build relations. In the studied municipalities, discussions in administration and at the political level stressed that planning could be an important tool for pushing the integration field forward. The planners pointed out that planning involves many expectations: "many professional areas have an important function in the municipality. If no one is pushing the field forward or trying to incorporate it into planning, the topic is easily neglected". One of the planners argued that because planners do not have expertise in the area of refugee integration, they are dependent on expertise from the professional area of integration. These findings suggest a need for increased knowledge regarding integration efforts among planners as it was new for them to consider diversity in their planning efforts.

### **Planning processes can generate shared understandings for refugee integration**

Several informants emphasised that discussing integration issues in planning processes helps the administration to generate mutual understandings and a shared consensus regarding refugee integration. They also believed that

involvement in planning processes enables the municipal organisation to develop a collective attitude and shared opinions on how refugee integration can be facilitated, which is in line with present knowledge regarding the motives for employing planning as an instrument of governance in other policy areas (Innes & Booher, 2015, 2016, 2018; Healey, 2003). Some noted that it helps them to reflect beyond their own department and contributes to establishing a universal way of working throughout the entire municipal organisation. Other informants stressed that sector authorities tend to converge more in their mindset when they are involved in planning processes. Previous studies (Heinesen et al., 2009; Hansen et al., 2006) have also suggested that collaborative processes cause the development of ideas regarding integration efforts that are shared throughout the entire municipal organisation, and that these processes often involve municipal planning.

Some informants explained that ensuring that representatives from all municipal departments work together during the planning process and agree on content and how plans should be compiled facilitates the development of shared attitudes. One of the planners argued that sector authorities tend to be on the same page when they are involved in planning processes. This gives the participants a sense of shared ownership of the actions and solutions. One of the planners described the situation as follows:

*We spent more time on the municipality master plan than necessary because we saw that the administration was not on the same page; we simply did not have a shared understanding. This also emerged in the discussions on integration. When we spent more time on the planning processes, we established some shared thoughts.*

This statement stresses the importance of consensus-building for moving forward (Forester, 2004, 2012), and suggests there is a need for shared understandings of refugee integration across departments within a municipality. The interviewees appeared to regard participation in interactive processes as an attention-focusing activity and a means of seeking consensus, which highlights the benefits of a dialogical process that engages a diverse range of stakeholders. It also highlights the benefits of creating trust and new relations to enhance a higher degree of institutional capacity (Agger & Løfgren, 2008; Healey et al., 1999).

A problem in local integration efforts is that the practice often rests on few actors, which make the practice vulnerable. Besides, in practice, they do not have the capacity to solve their responsibilities without other departments or administrative levels participating (Svendsen and Berg; 2018; Busengdal et al., 2020). The informants highlighted that shared values and attitudes to integration, in both politics and administration, are essential for success. It is helping them to create *robustness* in the municipality by ensuring that integration practice is not driven by the enthusiasm of a few municipal actors but by shared values across the entire system. These statements suggest that for integration to find its way into established norms and practices, collaborative dialogue between sectors is essential to reshape established ways of working. Similar approaches are

outlined in the literature on the motives for using planning as an instrument of governance (Innes & Booher, 2015; Rydin, 2007).

### Municipal planning to improve integration efforts at a higher strategic level

Several informants stressed that there were complexities in the organisational structure of the service provision departments and that one aspect was that integration of refugees was often not placed on the agendas of these departments. The urban municipality stressed that a spokesperson for integration efforts should be appointed to highlight integration in various planning and strategic processes. In Norway, it is not commonplace to have an integration coordinator. Other cross-sectoral disciplines such as public health and environment often have a spokesperson. The informants stressed the importance of appointing an integration coordinator to simplify inclusion of integration issues in strategic practices.

Furthermore, informants from the urban municipality explained they were trying to improve their integration efforts at a higher strategic level by establishing a diversity and integration network. The network included representatives from schools, kindergartens, child welfare, the refugee office, hubs, adult education, health care, and the culture department. The informants reported that the network actors worked closely together on giving input to plans and that these processes helped the municipal actors to establish shared thoughts and think beyond their sectoral responsibilities. They emphasised this was important for establishing uniform ways of working across the entire municipal organisation. These statements suggest a need for a broad political and administrative foundation in the policy area of integration and to include integration efforts at a higher strategic level.

### Municipal planning is employed for legitimating actions

The rural municipality has continuously identified integration as an important focus area within its programme of action and financial plan. Here, planning is seen as a bureaucratic action and a political process (Allmendinger, 2009). One of the informants explained that it was crucial to anchor integration efforts within these plans because the plans are updated every year and determine the allocation of financial resources. Moreover, several informants pointed out that since the financial plan is a political document, the inclusion of refugee integration increases political support, reflecting the findings of previous studies (Djuve et al., 2017; Heinesen et al., 2009). The chief executive in the rural municipality stated the following:

*I have always employed the municipal plans in my efforts as a chief executive. If a theme has come up politically or in national guidelines, I have anchored it in the municipal plans. It is important to be involved and keep track of what is happening to know what area we need to focus on in the future. In this respect, I have always strained to ensure that the focus area is enshrined in plans or programmes of action in my practice. I also do this with the integration efforts.*

This statement suggests that municipal plans are used for legitimating actions. High normative legitimacy implies putting refugee integration on the local political agenda and commitment to participate from actors outside the refugee office. The chief executive stressed that if the focus area is not declared in the municipal plans, she could simply stop the efforts because the plans determine what area they need to focus on during that period. Thus, incorporating the topic of integration into municipal plans ensures that issues related to the topic are placed on the municipality's agenda of important causes for action, which means she acts on the basis of instrumental rationality. The informant explained that when integration efforts is embedded in the financial plan and programme of action, the sector authorities reach the municipal council, which the informants emphasised as the most critical organ in the municipality. As Allmendinger (2009) indicates, preparing a financial plan is a long process involving many participants at diverse administrative levels. The informants stressed that they reach out to many public actors at every level in the municipality. Therefore, it is crucial to anchor the topic of integration in both the programme of action and the financial plan.

The chief executive's comments suggest that employing municipal planning as a tool can place important issues on the political agenda and share sectoral responsibility that legitimates actions. It also suggests that they are not struggling to achieve legitimacy and acceptance in the political processes, as they have sufficient political legitimacy and capacity to implement measures, which partly contradict findings in previous research of other cases.

## Discussion

The analysis gives insights into processes of local political prioritisation of integration in municipal planning and how they practice sharing ideas for integration efforts throughout the municipal organisation. A number of studies (e.g., Rosdahl, 2004; Berg, 1996; Skutlaberg et al., 2014; Djuve et al., 2017; Heinesen et al., 2009; Hansen et al., 2006) have suggested that local political prioritisation of integration in municipal planning is a possible success criterion for integration. However, it is challenging to find qualitative research on why municipalities employ municipal planning as a strategic tool in integration practices or how these municipal management activities can contribute to integration efforts and the implementation of integration policies at the local level.

The present study's findings suggests that the approach in the studied municipalities stems from the fact that the field of integration has few partners in the municipality, there is a lack of sector responsibility for integration, a need to improve integration efforts at a higher strategic level and legitimating actions. Scholars from other cross-sectoral disciplines have also acknowledged similar findings regarding ensuring intersectoral responsibility and political legitimacy (Holt, 2016; Carey & Crammond, 2015). The findings suggest that employing municipal planning as a strategic tool can be beneficial for municipalities that suffer from a lack of intersectoral collaboration, have difficulties providing and coordinating services, and have challenges sustaining municipal employees' engagement regarding refugee integration. These dilemmas are previously

highlighted as problems in public service delivery for refugees (Heinesen et al., 2013; Skutlaberg et al., 2014; Bredal & Orupabo, 2014; Tronstad, 2015).

In a municipal context, public service delivery for refugees is related to housing, health care, language training, labour and education-oriented measures, dealing with on-the-ground integration efforts (Imdi, 2021). However, previous research has suggested that for accomplishing these features, there is a need for collaboration across sectors, shared responsibility, and the engagement of municipal employees throughout the entire municipal organisation, as the establishment of integration measures often presupposes collaboration within and across sectors (Hooper et al., 2017; Eimhjellen & Seegard, 2016; Heinesen et al., 2009). The main problem appears to be that the responsibility for refugee integration is given to a small number of municipal actors and not placed on the agendas of other sectors. This indicates that the field is struggling to achieve legitimacy and acceptance in political processes, which results in a lack of commitment from actors outside the refugee office.

According to (Espegren et al., 2019), collaboration in the introduction programme depends heavily on the various actor's trust and understandings of each other's roles and intentions, and these processes can be challenging. The qualitative data presented in this study suggests that planning processes might affect the discovery of shared understandings and values, enabling municipal actors to work more holistically, share sector responsibility, and realise the importance of working together on integration issues, which is promoting awareness. Several informants expressed an opinion that involvement in planning processes enables the municipal organisation to develop a collective attitude. Here, shared opinions on how refugee integration can be facilitated were promoted. These findings relate to the theoretical framework of collaborative planning processes (Healey, 2003, 2006; Innes and Booher, 2015), which in public settings often broaden the political and administrative foundations for action, increase institutional capacity and legitimisation, and the willingness of management actors to change and act (Healey et al., 1999).

However, institutional capacity, political legitimacy, and administrative mobilization change over time (Agger & Løfgren, 2008; Healey et al., 1999), making it hard to predict in integration efforts. The extent of capacity and mobilization among management actors might increase during humanitarian crises, such as the refugee crisis of 2015 or the conflicted situation in Europe today. Placing refugee integration at the centre of attention and embedding integration initiatives into municipal planning and management systems might be considered unrealistic or be met with distrust if there is little mobilization capacity among management actors and politicians.

## Concluding Remarks

This article draws on a growing body of literature that links research on refugee integration with planning practice and gives insights into processes of local political prioritisation of integration in municipal planning. Although the results of this study are context-specific, it suggests that in both studied municipalities, using municipal planning as a strategic tool, can be beneficial for municipalities that suffer from a lack of intersectoral collaboration, have difficulties providing

and coordinating services, and problems sustaining the engagement of municipal employees for the integration of refugees. With respect to their collaborative processes, the interviewees referred to the importance of working together on integration issues and sharing responsibilities, resources, and opinions on how refugee integration can be facilitated. In the two studied municipalities, planning processes was employed as a way of addressing these issues.

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