

1. The City of Oldenburg

1.1 Geographic location, economy and demography

Situated in the northwest of Lower Saxony, 70 km from the Dutch border and 50 km from the North Sea, Oldenburg is a “small-scale big city” that blends tradition with modernity and strong regional awareness with a cosmopolitan lifestyle.

Although hardly a major port city like neighbouring Bremen, Oldenburg nevertheless possesses a global network due to emigration, immigration and trade. This is reflected in the population as well: Oldenburg is home to people from over 140 nations.

While agriculture dominates the region around Oldenburg, the city itself has a large number of highly professional small to medium-sized enterprises, especially in the high tech, renewable energies, high-quality corporate services and IT sectors. Moreover, a number of banks and insurance companies have their headquarters in Oldenburg.

With over 20,000 students enrolled at Carl von Ossietzky University and a variety of institutes of higher learning, Oldenburg is also a strong centre of education.

Manufacturing and processing industry, above all in the food sector or the automotive supplier market, account for a comparatively small proportion of Oldenburg’s jobs and economic output.

The high degree of civic engagement in municipal life is a particular quality of Oldenburg. Volunteering, civic associations and an active commitment to communal life are characteristic of the city’s political and collective self-perception.

1.2 Migration to Germany and Oldenburg

The most formative migratory movements in 20th-century Germany began at the end of the Second World War. Several million German citizens were forced to flee the former eastern territories of Germany or were displaced westward, to what became the Federal Republic of Germany. During the 1960s and 70s, so-called “guest workers” were recruited to all areas of Germany from Southwest and Southeast Europe, Turkey and North Africa in order to satisfy the demand for labour in the industrial sector. Of the roughly 14 million guest workers, around 3 million settled in Germany, with some bringing their families to join them.

Over 1.5 million ethnic Germans moved to Germany from the territories of the former Soviet Union during the first half of the 1990s alone (approximately 4.5 million persons from 1950 to the present day). Around 400,000 war refugees from the Balkans states also sought protection in Germany around the mid-1990s, although the majority returned to their homes after the end of the Yugoslav Wars.

2. “ARRIVAL CITIES” – The Project

ARRIVAL CITIES is an international European project supported by URBACT, the cooperation programme for sustainable and integrated urban development. URBACT is co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the 28 Member States, as well as by Norway and Switzerland.

The aim of ARRIVAL CITIES was for all partner cities to develop Integrated Local Action Plans to overcome the specific local challenges in the wider area of integration.

Among other things, this includes an assessment of the situation so far, identification of challenges, development of actions for their management, and the definition of indicators and suitable mechanisms with which to monitor and evaluate the individual actions and the action plan as a whole.

The project attaches particular importance to the inclusion of as many different social actors and *stakeholders* as possible in the preparation of action plans.

ARRIVAL CITIES launched in Oldenburg on 15 September 2015 and will end on 3 May 2018.

Besides Oldenburg, the following cities were participating in the project:

Amadora, Portugal (Lead Partner)
Val de Marne, France
Dresden, Germany
Riga, Latvia
Vantaa, Finland
Thessaloniki, Greece
Patras, Greece
Messina, Italy
Roquetas de Mar, Spain

2.1 Core elements of ARRIVAL CITIES

Aside from ARRIVAL CITIES, the URBACT cooperation programme is currently responsible for 23 other projects – so-called “Networks” – that address an immense variety of topics within the overarching field of integrated urban development. All of them apply the same underlying methodology comprising shared core elements that are characteristic of URBACT projects:

The Local Support Groups – At the heart of the project

Each partner city within an URBACT Network establishes a Local Support Group. These support groups should be as diversified as possible, and all *stakeholders* in the

network topic should be represented. In this regard, the term *stakeholders* describes all actors that are involved in the issue of integration, irrespective of the level. The objective is to build a Local Support Group comprising members of the city administration, as well as representatives of civic society, organisations, associations, the business community and advocacy groups. The purpose here is to bring together a complete range of perspectives, interests, experience and competencies.

The Integrated Local Action Plan – The project objective

The work of each URBACT Network in participating cities should culminate in the preparation of an Integrated Local Action Plan. Produced in collaboration with the Local Support Groups, this paper is intended to identify local needs within the relevant area, analyse chances and opportunities, and indicate where there might be sustainable and viable solutions. In this regard, it must state clear actions, timeframes for their implementation and how they will be financed.

The Toolkit – Equipment for the work on the ground

The URBACT Toolkit is a collection of methods to integrate *stakeholders* and local actors, as well as to coordinate work on the ground. These methods help to prepare and analyse the local needs, challenges and potential solutions, to provide training and strengthen competencies among the Local Support Groups. They also provide best practice examples and materials for self-assessments of the project at local level.

Transnational Workshops – Cross-border learning

Although the Local Support Groups operate in a specific situation in their respective cities, there are many similarities between challenges facing the various cities in the individual countries. Several “Transnational Workshops” are held in each Network in order to learn from these similarities and differences, as well as from the various perspectives and interventions initiated in the Partner Cities. Each of these workshops addresses a specific theme. Lasting several days and attended by delegates from the various Local Support Groups, the events include visits to the projects and facilities in the host Partner City and provide a framework to get to know each other and discuss technical details.

URBACT Experts – Comprehensive advice

URBACT makes a pool of experienced Experts available to each Network. Their specialty fields extend from the establishment and organisation of Local Support Groups, to technical issues, budget planning and public relations.

2.2 Challenges and potential – Oldenburg’s participation in the project

The Syrian Civil War broke out just shortly after the Oldenburg Integration Concept was adopted in 2010, spreading quickly to become an international conflict with

ramifications for the entire region. Since then, the refugee movements it unleashed and which were not felt in Central and Western Europe until around 2013 have dominated discussions on integration policies and how they should be implemented, and – quite apart from the likelihood of further refugee movements – they will continue to do so for at least the medium term.

The city of Oldenburg’s participation in ARRIVAL CITIES presents a significant opportunity to ensure ideal preparation for the shifting tasks and challenges of practical integration that lie ahead. Here, it is necessary to emphasise that this is not restricted to the management of refugees alone. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that the situation over recent years has acted almost as a catalyst for in places fundamental issues that have already existed for some time.

Overall, three overarching challenges for practical integration can be identified in light of recent developments:

From arrival to participation

The arrival of refugees in Oldenburg and their accommodation in initial reception centres before they transition to their own housing after obtaining a residence permit, are merely the very first steps in a chain of development that lays the foundation for downstream integration actions.

What can be done to support this process? How can it be ensured that the environment provided actually fosters social participation and equal opportunities? What can be done to check that services are used and opportunities taken?

Clarifying these issues and developing a practical concept for the city of Oldenburg requires a two-pronged, reciprocal approach: first it is necessary to decide which definition of “integration” should apply as the municipal objective. Once this is done, the environment and actions applied in both the municipal integration policies and the integration work itself must be constructed to suit this defined objective. In other words, experience acquired from practical integration must flow back into the definition of objectives. Adherence to this reciprocal procedure will enable the creation of effective and efficient integration policies to manage future immigration.

Diversity of actors

It would not have been possible to provide initial care and support to the large number of refugees that have arrived in Germany and Oldenburg within a very short period in recent years, without the support of the numerous dedicated volunteers. Indeed, a large number of volunteers continue to assist refugees in coping with everyday life and negotiating the various areas of our modern society, even beyond their arrival in the state reception centres and municipal accommodation facilities. In doing so, they make an invaluable contribution to the integration process, augmenting the work of the refugee counselling centres and the municipal social workers for integration affairs in the city of Oldenburg.

While this new, independent culture of volunteering for many provides an easier, more direct way of becoming without direct membership in an organisation, the

Socio-economic statistics for non-German citizens are used as examples to demonstrate their access to social participation and equal opportunities. The aggregated data demonstrates that foreign nationals are at a clear disadvantage compared to German nationals in the areas of qualification, training and job market situation and levels of poverty.

This insight was then used to define four key activity fields to reduce these disadvantages: **language acquisition, school, transition between school and profession** and **job market**. A status quo analysis for all previously implemented actions was carried out in each of these activity fields and an outlook for future development opportunities provided.

2.3 The role of the ARRIVAL CITIES project in Oldenburg

The city of Oldenburg hopes that its participation in ARRIVAL CITIES will help to overcome upcoming challenges for its integration work. Here, not only does the project create an opportunity to meet and discuss with colleagues and experts at local and European level, it also provides a methodical “Toolkit” with which the city and its local cooperation partners can form a Local Support Group “Arrival City Oldenburg” to develop an Integrated Local Action Plan.

3. “Shaping. Oldenburg. Together” – Local implementation of the project

Preparations to update the city of Oldenburg’s integration concept began in 2015. Besides the fundamental necessity for regular evaluation of concepts and actions, these preparations were prompted by the experience of dramatically transforming geopolitical circumstances and the refugee movements unleashed in their wake.

3.1 The three pillars of the Integrated Action Plan

The Integrated Action Plan is based on three pillars: the validity of the **Oldenburg Integration Concept of 2010**, as well as the objectives and calls for action it defines, will be reviewed as the project progresses, also to reflect the changes that have unfolded over the last eight years. The results of the participation workshops held within the framework of the **ARRIVAL CITIES** project form the second pillar. In addition, the knock-on effects of **founding the Office for Migration and Integration** as a strategic implementation entity will also be incorporated in drafting the plan.

4. Establishment of the Office for Migration and Integration

The Office for Migration and Integration was founded on 1 August 2017. The Office is divided into the *Department of Integration* and the *Department of Central Refugee Management*.

Establishment of the Office in the city of Oldenburg pooled competencies and responsibilities from eight different departments, with the aim of positioning migration and integration as a cross-sectoral task and hence as one with relevance to society as a whole.

The Department of Central Refugee Management brings together all tasks related to care and housing for refugees: the approval of benefits according to the Asylum Seekers' Benefits Act (AsylbLG), management of the city's shared accommodation facilities and decentralised accommodation, as well as ultimately the acquisition of individual housing for refugees.

The Department of Integration focuses on the standard tasks associated with municipal integration work: coordination of education and language acquisition services, supporting and empowering migrant organisations, development of concepts for municipal integration work and raising of awareness within the city administration for the issues of migration and integration. Secondly, the Department of Integration in Oldenburg also organises the provision of interpreters, coordinates their use and attempts to introduce more professional structures among the volunteers involved in integration work.

Compared to other municipalities in Germany, a particular feature of the Office for Migration and Integration is its direct responsibility for integration social work. This ensures that a direct and strong contact is immediately established with newly arrived migrants; it also enables a direct and critical appraisal of current actions in the interests of the target group or the needs-based implementation of new actions.

The city's integration work in the field takes place largely in the areas of education and training, language acquisition, professional orientation and job market integration, social participation and voluntary work. The city depends on networks and connections between these areas of work in order to structure its integration work in the community effectively and successfully.

This restructuring has a significant impact on the objective of ARRIVAL CITIES in Oldenburg. The former Mayor's Integration Unit with its just two employees has evolved into an entire Office with over forty staff members that cater to an entire range of integration tasks. Hence, integration work is no longer a peripheral issue and has instead become an established and embedded part of the city administration.

The Integrated Action Plan needs to incorporate these altered circumstances in its development: the results of the SWOT analysis describe and assess a structure that partially no longer exists. Nevertheless, the defined objectives and actions can still be appraised from the perspective of the newly created structures.

The repercussions of the restructuring actions become clear upon consideration of the objectives for the participation process that have already been achieved as a consequence of establishing the new Office (refer to Section 5.4).

5. The Integrated Local Action Plan

At its core, the Local Action Plan is built on the results accumulated in the public participation events within ARRIVAL CITIES in Oldenburg. Section 5.1 and 5.2 describe the main findings of the public participation process.

The future objectives and actions, described in section 5.3 are based on the results from the previous sections: the analysis of the status quo and the objectives and actions proposed in the participation process, but also on a reflection on the current structures and resources and a systematic definition of clear objectives within the individual thematic fields.

5.1 Analysis of the status quo

The SWOT methodology (Strengths – Weaknesses – Opportunities – Threats) was applied to analyse the current situation regarding Oldenburg integration work in the first workshop. Appraisal of opportunities and risks, strengths and weaknesses was undertaken in all four of the predefined thematic fields work.

According to the SWOT methodology those four categories have then been evaluated against each other: which strength can lead to what potential opportunity, which strength can add to minimizing what risk. And which weaknesses have to be eliminated to seize what opportunities?

The following part describes the results of the above mentioned evaluation

Language and Social Communication

The pronounced commitment shared by residents of Oldenburg and its city administration reduces the potential for conflicts due to a common goal.

The deployment of voluntary assistance can mitigate weaknesses, for instance in childcare and administrative formalities.

Improvements in the quality of available language courses and the creation of transparency help to put benefits and competencies to more profitable use.

Intercultural Learning

The Local Action Group initially agreed on the following definition of intercultural learning:

“Intercultural learning is an interactive and individual process that fosters knowledge, skills, competencies and attitudes about one’s own and a (seemingly) foreign culture and language. Important factors in this regard include a sensitive awareness and

critical handling of prejudices and stereotypes, as well as reflection on their causes. The learning objective is tolerance. The mission is to achieve maximum participation in social and cultural processes.”

A culture of appreciative encounter and a long-term process of change can be initiated through the utilization of strengths such as good networks, intercultural accessibility of existing services and purposeful assignment of financial resources. Self-reflection, a discussion on shared values and coordination of learning services can increase the chances of achieving the defined objective.

Labour Market and Employment

Appraisal of the opportunities for education and training in the city accounts for a significant portion of this activity field. It soon became apparent when mapping the strengths that Oldenburg already has efficient and strong structural approaches for the establishment of educational chains and concepts. The networks in this sector are operating at all levels, from volunteers to professionals. The local branch of the Federal Employment Agency and the municipal Jobcenter provide services to assist newly arrived migrants. Stand-alone initiatives like the pro:connect association bring together employers and job-seekers and take practical steps to implementing the political will to ensure rapid and smooth integration of migrants within the labour market. The opportunities to compensate for the shortage of skilled workers can be increased through strategic efforts to counteract prejudice against migrants on the labour market and their consequent disenfranchisement, as well as by establishing a comprehensive system of intercultural education. Making the city’s administrative bodies and businesses more open to other cultures can help to minimise the risk of conflict and discrimination.

Housing and Meeting

Oldenburg has a particular strength in the areas of places to meet and commitment of volunteers. In responding to the growth in refugee allocations to the city, citizens offered assistance in all areas of life: from providing necessary clothing and household items to accompaniment on official errands or trips to the doctor et cetera. Civic associations and community centres opened their doors and offered space for people to meet and communicate. During the surveyed period (2017), the former Office for Central Refugee Management played a central role by coordinating supply, support and necessary social work.

A range of parallel services emerged due to this striking willingness to provide refugees with help and support. Among the future challenges will be to introduce greater transparency between these services, networking and coordinating their activities in order to identify missing structures.

The establishment of meeting places and the creation of opportunities for communication in the city quarters can help to foster mutual understanding and minimise any conflict potential.

- Each company with more than 30 employees has someone acting as Integration Guide that belongs to a network and supports both employer and employees
- Each adolescent willing and able to embark on an apprenticeship has found a suitable opportunity
- Each language learning courses provider provides flexibly scheduled language courses for working participants
- Improvement in services for vocational part-qualifications, re-qualifications and skills assessments
- Promotion of entrepreneurship among newly arrived migrants

Objectives of the activity area “Housing and Meeting Places”

- All economically disadvantaged persons are living in affordable, acceptable housing
- In 5 years, “Halls of Residence Projects” (for mixed target groups, e.g. refugees, college students and elderly people) exist as places for meeting and communication
- In 5 years, each city district will have a place for people to meet and communicate, where diversity can be celebrated in a communal and cross-generational setting.
- Resources will be shared in urban neighborhoods
- Information on housing and meeting places is transparent, universally accessible and pooled within professional networks
- Open access, multilingual counselling opportunities are available for everyone
- The residents feel a keen sense of responsibility for their neighborhood as a liveable and safe space.
- Robust networks and strong collaboration exist between all levels of actors.
- On request, all refugees living in decentral accommodation facilities or individual housing will receive support from volunteers
- Professional staff assist the volunteers in their work with refugees and newly arrived migrants.

5.3 Reflection on the objectives and actions

Fair opportunities for everyone – from vision to actual practice

The guiding vision for integration work is to create ideal frame conditions for social participation and equity of opportunities for all migrants living in Oldenburg. In the following part, the cumulated objectives and actions (see section 5.2) are evaluated regarding how and in which area they directly or indirectly work towards this vision.

Reflecting on the results from the public participation process

The public participation process “Shaping. Oldenburg. Together” generated a large number of results. These results reflect the diversity and experience of the

Proposed actions:

- Developing a programme for advice, schooling and mentoring/support for new immigrants and refugees willing to become entrepreneurs. Taking up pre-existing experiences and motivation and communicating legal and entrepreneurial basics within German economy. In cooperation with EU programmes, if feasible, and service providers and institutions from economy and labour administration.

Strategic Objective E: Strengthening of civic actors within integration work

Civic actors as associations, initiatives, migrant organisations and a large number of independent voluntary helpers are an invaluable asset within integration work and are greatly contributing in making Oldenburg a welcoming city to refugees. To further support the work of those actors, the results of the public participation process stress the importance of creating more synergies and more structures for cooperation and information.

Operational Objective E1: Establishing coordination structures for different kinds of actors

Intensifying interaction and communication between voluntary helpers and professional actors is a practical approach to create more efficiently working chains of support for refugees, ensure faster reaction times in critical situations and in general to provide a better support service for all target groups.

The cooperation and coordination structures established in the wake of founding the Office for Immigration and Integration, that cross-link the municipal integration social workers and volunteers, as well as the “Work Group for Migrant Counselling Services” have already provided positive experience on this approach.

Proposed actions:

- Establishing of thematic networks allowing different kinds of actors, e.g. municipal bodies, civic associations, welfare organisations and voluntary helpers to exchange experiences about current challenges, problems and upcoming tasks and to talk about approaches of mutual information and support. (During the public participation process at least two possible networks were proposed: a “network for cross-cultural learning”, connecting service providers and actors from educational and cultural work, and a “network for housing and meeting”, connecting professional and voluntary actors from the fields of social work, cross-cultural support for everyday life and community work)

Operational Objective E2: Providing information to support voluntary integration work

For many voluntary integration helpers it poses an additional effort to gain an overview about existing offers, contact persons, administrative procedures and other possibilities of support.

Monitoring based on these indicators will be applied to evaluate the individual stages and achievements.

A large portion of the proposed actions refer to new or extended structures for networking and communication. The internal quality of such structures is hard to define using numbers alone, making evaluation based on numeric indicators not very effective. For other actions, e.g. promotion and support for different kinds of service offers and events, a scale for quantitative indicators as prevalence or participant numbers will have to develop over time to allow for proper evaluation.

Additionally, concept evaluation takes place in each area of the Office's work, hence enabling continuous review of the strengths and weaknesses. Proceeding in this way makes integration measurable, at least on a meta-level.

7. Outlook

This integrated action plan is the first step in producing a comprehensive concept for integration in Oldenburg. It contains the preliminary ideas and most important points of orientation.

The re-structuring of the accumulated objectives and actions from the public participation process into strategic and operational objectives as well as the process of reflecting on the experiences from both local and European exchange are the main points of orientation for the further development of the Oldenburg Concept for Integration and thus the further development of integration work and policy at local level.

Participation in **ARRIVAL CITIES** enabled the creation of networks between actors at local and European level and brought new impetus to the practice of integration. This invaluable exchange has been an enrichment for all of the stakeholders in Oldenburg.