

Methods for Measuring Integration

Literature Review: Refugee Urban Integration

A FEINSTEIN INTERNATIONAL CENTER BRIEF 

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This is a section of a broad literature review on refugee urban integration that was conducted by the Refugees in Towns Project (RIT) at Feinstein International Center, Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University beginning in December 2017 and being continually updated with new publications. It was conducted to inform the public, academics, and policymakers about the state of refugee urban integration, and to prepare the RIT project for analysis of original data on refugee integration collected from towns around the world.

All references that are available online have a URL link provided in text. Full citations are in the Works Cited document.

What constitutes methodological rigor for collecting and analyzing data on refugee integration is unclear and varies substantially between academics, policymakers, and practitioners.¹ Within the literature there is a wide range of methodological quality.² Methods for forced migration and urban studies first developed in the mid-1900s by Chicago-based sociologists rely largely on qualitative data; more recently, however, there has been a tendency toward quantitative indices from large national datasets,³ but the discipline is “still in its infancy.”⁴

Despite its infancy, there are several methodological best practices identified in the literature. In terms of research questions and outputs, the literature highlights the illegibility, scale, and transitory nature of forced migrant populations, and therefore suggests research questions that focus on underlying trends⁵ rather than exact numbers,⁶ and suggests the production of “good enough”⁷ “estimates”⁸ that provide findings that are relevant to practitioners or generalizable in academic theory.⁹ The following are examples of good practices taken from the literature on methods for studying refugee urban integration.

Localization and the Participatory Approach

Currently, research on forced migration and integration tends to use methods that rely on external, international, non-localized experts.¹⁰ There are some notable exceptions; for example, [Ager and Strang](#) (2008: 168), who interviewed roughly 50/50 refugees and non-refugee practitioners in their dataset for developing a conceptualization of integration, and work by the Joint IDP Profiling Service.¹¹

The Feinstein International Center’s literature review on localization in humanitarian action¹² defines localization based on de [Geoffroy and Grunewald’s work](#) (2018) as the “collective process involving different stakeholders that aims to return local actors, whether civil society organizations or local public institutions, to the center of the

¹ Diemer et al. 2013

² [Knox Clarke and Darcy 2014](#): 15

³ [Wong and Tezli 2013](#)

⁴ [Bürkin and Chindea 2012](#)

⁵ [Nityananda 2014](#)

⁶ [Chemaly, Baal and Jacobsen 2016](#)

⁷ [Luttrell 2000](#)

⁸ [Bardsley and Storkey 2000](#)

⁹ Kunz 1981

¹⁰ [Jacobsen 2017](#)

¹¹ [JIPS 2015](#)

¹² Maxwell 2018

humanitarian system with a greater role in humanitarian response.” Local actors are defined by Gingerich and Cohen (2015) as those geographically, socially, ethnically, religiously, or nationally proximate to the area of concern.

Researchers may find guidance for the localized approach to research in the humanitarian localization agenda derived from the localization principles underpinning the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):

Localizing development is a process to empower all local stakeholders, aimed at making sustainable development more responsive and...relevant to local needs and aspirations. Development goals can be reached only if local actors fully participate, not only in the implementation, but also in the agenda-setting and monitoring.¹³

Localized methods have both advantages and disadvantages. Advantages of using localized researchers include access, contextual knowledge, language skills, accountability, and lower cost and resource demands relative to imported international researchers.¹⁴ Localization has particular advantages with subjective measures and indicators and qualitative data that are highly culturally specific. As David (2013: 206) describes, imported Western methods that feature “extreme adherence to logical-positivistic, natural sciences-patterned, highly quantitative, hypotheses testing-oriented, universal-seeking, and western culture-dominated research paradigms”¹⁵ are often ineffective when studying non-Western populations. Localized methods avoid the importation of incorrect presuppositions and methodologies that are not contextually relevant.

Disadvantages of localized research include the partiality of local actors, the effect of reordering power balances in communities through local hiring, and the projection of some members’ perspectives over others.¹⁶

Site-Based Approach

The site-based approach—which concerns local context-specific recruitment of research participants—intersects with the use of localization and participatory research. In qualitative studies, the use of a site-based approach for selecting and recruiting participants is suggested,¹⁷ especially when dealing with forced migrant populations that are not documented with extensive quantitative datasets.¹⁸ Effective application of the site-based approach typically requires local context provided by local participatory researchers.

Reflexivity and Positionality

Urban studies offers the good practice of reflexivity to challenge pre-existing paradigms about how cities function through “critical urban theory”¹⁹ that questions the position of researchers in relation to the places and people under study, drawing attention to the ways in which in-group and out-group dynamics alter the validity and authenticity of findings.²⁰ Reflexivity has particular relevance when applied to the social complexity of urban spaces where there are many diverse yet overlapping positionalities.²¹ This reflexive work may take place through formal analytical exercise, or informally through “kitchen table” discussions about researchers’ positionalities before, during, and after data collection.²² However, most methods sections of the bulk of forced migration research do not discuss positionality and are not written reflexively to consider the author’s position.²³

Urban Profiling

Profiling studies of urban refugees are widely criticized for not revealing their methods, being heavily reliant on unreliable quantitative datasets, leaving out demographic data beyond just sex and age breakdowns (especially

¹³ [Localizing the SDGs 2017](#)

¹⁴ Maxwell 2018

¹⁵ David offers the examples of Enriquez, 1977, 1993; Church and Katigbak, 2002; Kim, 2000; Kim, Park and Park, 1999; Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino, 2000; Shams, 2002; Sinha, 1997; Yang, 2000

¹⁶ Maxwell 2018

¹⁷ [Arcury and Quandt 1999](#)

¹⁸ [Ager and Strang 2004](#)

¹⁹ [Brenner and Schmid 2015](#); [Brenner 2009](#)

²⁰ Mohamed and Saltsman 2017; see also Holmes 2014

²¹ [Brenner 2009](#); see as an example Walker, Read and Priest 2013

²² [Kohl and McCutcheon 2015](#)

²³ [Lammers 2017](#)

genders),²⁴ and having issues with translation and interpretation of qualitative responses,²⁵ especially from a gendered perspective. Good practices in urban profiling include being clear in published findings about what methods were used; having transparency about limitations and validity threats; disaggregating data along sex, age, and gender; and spending adequate time during research design developing enumeration strategies with local cultural and linguistic sensitivities.

Spatialization

Integration is in part about placemaking,²⁶ and therefore, studying integration benefits from the use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS), and documentation through participant observation of how space and place limit or benefit the integration process.²⁷ Spatial data may give working estimates of key figures like population size, distribution, distance to services, use of space, and (in)accessibility of resources.²⁸ These observations may include “rules of use,” degrees and types of intergroup interaction, relevance of space and symbolism, and how national frames of “us versus them” play out in neighborhoods and public spaces.²⁹

GIS is particularly helpful in “data poor environments...where data are not routinely collected and/or poorly archived, or where public records are not easily [accessible],”³⁰ making it especially valuable for studying refugee urban integration, since the majority of forced migrant urban integration is occurring in the developing world where high-quality and reliable data are scarce.³¹

Adding this spatial component allows findings to be linked to the rich literature on the “right to the city” that highlights issues of access to public space and services among urbanites.³² For two examples, see a map documenting gender normative placemaking through movement in a public park, or the ethnographic notes on the effect of place on integration of different ethnic groups, both below.

²⁴ [Baird et al. 2017](#); Gagnon, Tuck and Barkun 2004; Hussain and Bhushan 2011; [Women’s Refugee Commission 2011](#)

²⁵ [Chemaly, Baal and Jacobsen 2016](#): 6; [Knox Clarke and Darcy 2014](#): 15-17; Bloch 1999

²⁶ Attoh 2011

²⁷ [Higgins, Bird and Harris 2010](#); Low 2014

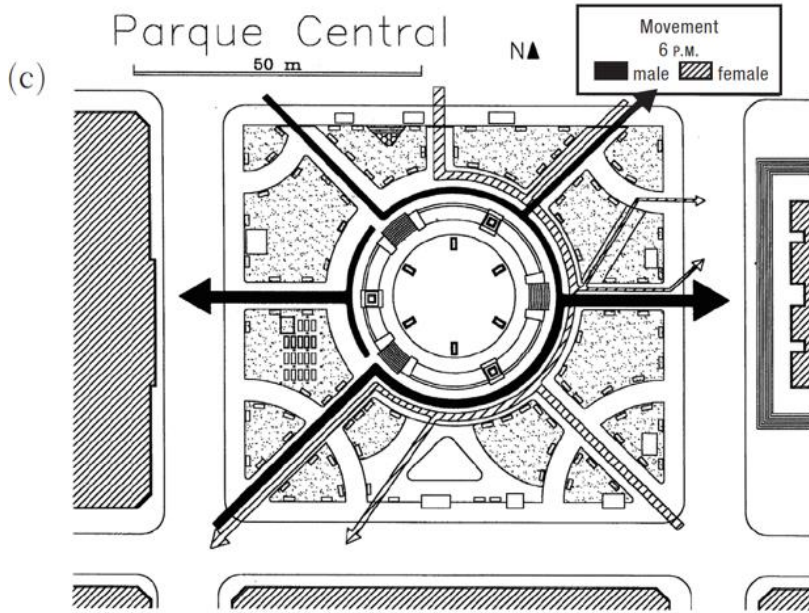
²⁸ [Brown 2001](#)

²⁹ [Pastore and Ponzio 2016](#)

³⁰ [Abu-Dayyeh 2005](#)

³¹ [World Bank Group 2017](#): 3

³² Attoh 2011



Relations	Representations		
	Positive	Indifference	Negative
Cooperation	Different ethnic groups in the secret garden on D'Eynsford Estate in Camberwell (UK)	Chinese families and elderly Hungarian nannies in Taraliget Residential Park in Kőbánya (HU)	Chinese traders and Roma employees in Four Tigers Market in Józsefváros (HU)
Lack of contact	Elderly people, teenagers and mothers with children in San Paolo garden in San Paolo (ITA)	Pakistanis and natives in Poble Sec (SPA)	Affluent middle-class residents in redeveloped docklands and working-class residents on council estates, North Bermondsey (UK)
Conflict/competition	Arabs and Hungarian shopkeepers in Józsefváros (HU)	Tourists and residents in Sagrada Família (SPA)	New Turkish residents and old German and Turkish residents in MAN's housing stock in Werderau (GE)

³³ Low 2014: 28

³⁴ [Pastore and Ponzo 2016](#)

Triangulation

Regardless of what specific study instruments, measures, and indicators are used, it is beneficial to design these components to be mutually complimentary such that findings with one instrument can be tested against findings with another instrument.³⁵ Including both qualitative and quantitative indicators is ideal,³⁶ for example, an ethnosurvey triangulates quantitative survey data with qualitative ethnography to reach more valid estimates of population data than would be possible with a single measure or instrument.³⁷ Triangulation can also be designed into the composition of the research team through reflexivity, or through the use of multiple supportive foundational theories.³⁸

³⁵ [Carter et al. 2014](#)

³⁶ [Goodwin and Horowitz 2002](#)

³⁷ Massey and Capoferro 2004

³⁸ [Carter et al. 2014](#)