

# Resource Development in Refugee Arts Organizations: The Case of the Malaika Theater

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## *Abstract*

Following the so-called European refugee crisis in 2014-2015, artists, cultural institutions, and funding bodies initiated and supported numerous arts projects aimed at fostering integration by broadening access to cultural life. The promotion of social cohesion through cultural participation was featured, amongst other topics, in the Swiss political agenda. While some studies have attempted to provide insights into the outcome and impact of such social goals within the arts, little is still known about arts participatory projects from an organizational perspective. This study explores a refugee theater organization and thus aims to offer a deeper understanding of participatory projects and organizations using arts and cultural activities as a medium for social integration. It draws on resource-based thinking in order to explore how such ventures are initiated and sustained by focusing on how tangible and intangible resources are bundled and transformed over time. Our article also reflects on the implications of the study's findings for arts management and cultural policymaking.

Im Zuge der sogenannten europäischen Flüchtlingskrise 2014-2015 initiierten und unterstützten Kulturschaffende, -institutionen sowie -förderer viele Kunstprojekte mit dem Ziel, Integration durch einen breiteren Zugang zum kulturellen Leben zu fördern. Dabei steht die Förderung des gesellschaftlichen Zusammenhalts durch kulturelle Teilhabe auch auf der politischen Agenda der Schweiz. Bisherige Studien fokussierten insbesondere die Ergebnis- und Wirkungsebene solcher gesellschaftlichen Ziele; jedoch fehlt es weitgehend an einer organisationalen Analyse. Gegenstand dieser Studie ist die Untersuchung einer Flüchtlings-Theaterorganisation mit dem Ziel, zu einem vertieften Verständnis für partizipatorische Projekte und Organisationen, die Kunst und kulturelle Aktivitäten als Medium für das Erreichen gesellschaftlicher Integration nutzen, beizutragen. Mithilfe von 'resource-based thinking' wird analysiert, wie letztere initiiert und erhalten werden und wie (im)materielle Ressourcen zur Zielerreichung gebündelt und transformiert werden. Daran anknüpfend werden die Implikationen für Kulturmanagement und -politik reflektiert.

## *Keywords / Schlagworte*

Transformation, social cohesion, community arts, cultural policy, diversity / Entwicklungsprozesse, Gesellschaftlicher Wandel, Soziokultur, Sozialer Zusammenhalt, Diversität

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## 1. Introduction

War and persecution are the main reasons why people are fleeing from countries such as Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, or Eritrea (UNHCR 2013). In the wake of the European refugee crisis in 2014 and 2015, far-right political parties with an anti-immigration agenda gained support in many of the countries that experienced a high refugee influx (STEINMAYR 2017). At the same time, with the continuing flow of migrants to Europe, a growing number of private and public initiatives have been using art and cultural activities as a medium to integrate asylum seekers, refugees, and new immigrants into the host society.<sup>1</sup>

At the political level, and despite emerging anti-immigration sentiments, cultural participation to achieve social cohesion has gained some momentum in the agendas of German-speaking regions of Europe. In Switzerland, for example, the topic of cultural participation (aimed at the entire population) was defined as a central axis of action for the federal government's quadrennial cultural policy agenda in 2016 and again in 2021 (BAK 2020). While empirical studies show that participation in cultural life depends strongly on factors such as education and income (KOSLOWSKI 2019: 13), the policy as well as increased media coverage and the societal *zeitgeist*, among others, have sparked the interest of further governmental and private funding bodies as well as cultural organizations and artists to support and initiate art-based integration projects. However, not all projects promoting cultural participation are eligible for funding. Especially socio-cultural, bottom-up initiatives operating at the interface between integration and culture often fall short of traditional grant requirements.

Following the proliferation of initiatives, projects, and organizations using art and cultural activities as a medium for integration in western countries, many scholars have attempted to offer insights into such endeavors. Much of the work has focused on the output, outcome, and impact level of analysis (KIDD et al. 2008; COSTANZO 2013; MCGREGOR/RAGAB 2016). Recently, Gross et al. (2021), who interviewed arts managers, citizens, and refugees in Germany, explored

1 Definitions in this realm are far from straightforward. The terms "refugee" and "asylum seeker" are legal terms that refer to an administrative status. However, they carry significant emotional and political weight in that even though such status is transitional, the sense of loss and exile may last for many years. It is also recognized that refugee communities are not homogenous groups but that considerable differences exist (KIDD et al. 2008).

the pre-requisites to ensuring the transformative power of integrative arts projects: contact between refugees and citizens, equal status, a common goal, and social authority (e.g., museums).

Yet, in part given the difficulty of comparing diverse endeavors (and the fact that research studies having different research scopes, aims, and methodologies), little is known about the endeavors themselves, in particular at a process level of analysis. Given the growing number of art-based integrative projects or organizations and the increasing relevance attached to them, there is a need for a better understanding of how they are initiated and sustained, particularly outside the context of traditional arts organizations.

By conducting an in-depth case study of the Malaika Refugee Theater (“the Malaika Theater”) in Zurich, Switzerland, this study aims to offer a deeper organizational understanding of participatory arts and cultural activities as a medium for social integration that sheds light on the process (rather than outcome/impact) level of analysis. The Malaika Theater began as a loosely organized, bottom-up integration initiative which rapidly became a nonprofit organization bringing together refugees and the local community in joint cultural activities. From an organizational perspective, the Malaika Theater successfully navigated a dynamic and fragmented environment, among other things in terms of funding, in which (bottom-up) art-based integration is (still) not addressed specifically in grant descriptions for artistic or for social/migration projects. Drawing on a resource-based, inward-looking view of organizations, which looks at resources and capabilities to analyze organizational development, we examine how the Malaika Theater has transformed its resource base over time for greater financial viability and broader social impact.

In our aim to contribute to arts management theory and practice, we explore the following research questions: What resources are needed to initiate refugee arts projects and organizations? What resources are crucial for their sustainable development over time?

This paper is structured as follows: The next section briefly covers the terms “participation” and “integration,” delving into their use in relation to cultural engagement. The subsequent section then elaborates on the resource-based viewpoint as a conceptual framework to analyze the Malaika Theater. Against this backdrop, we then describe our research design and case findings. The final section discusses this paper’s contributions, derives recommendations for policymaking, and

concludes by acknowledging limitations and suggesting possible avenues for future research.

## 2. Definition of Terminology

In the literature, several definitions of the term integration have been proposed by various scientific disciplines. Although differences of opinion – especially in the context of migration – still exist, in academic discourse, there appears to be some agreement that integration refers to a dynamic two-way process involving both individuals and the receiving communities (UNHCR 2013). Berry described different types of migrant adaptation processes including integration and assimilation. Unlike assimilation, which involves “relinquishing one’s cultural identity and moving to the larger society”, integration refers to retaining “cultural identity and moving to join the dominant society” (BERRY 1992: 4).

According to Costanzo, integration has been operationalized as “types and rates of political participation, degrees of local language proficiency, residential and occupational proximity to ‘native’ populations, psycho-social senses of belonging and identity, and perceptions of spatial membership, possessing shared attributes, experiences, beliefs” (COSTANZO 2013: 61). She also understands “creative participation” to mean the collective act of practicing something artistic or cultural as an expression of integration. In this light, and the context of this paper, we understand creative participation and cultural participation to be synonymous, although the former tends to indicate stronger levels of (active) artistic engagement.

Cultural or creative participation can be understood as a continuum between receptive observation and active engagement consisting of the five phases: spectating, learning, involving, enabling, and inventing (Gretler Häusser, quoted in NKD 2015). In the arts and cultural sector, “participation” or “engagement” is often used instead of “integration.” This is because the latter often has negative connotations in the art scene, is often mistakenly equated with assimilation, and assigned a cultural, ethnic component, which implies a one-sided adaptation of migrants. For Jäggi (2016), participation is the logical continuation of integration, and, accordingly, integration means that “one can take part in all social negotiation and decision-making processes” (ibid: 88). Furthermore, recent years have seen a remarkable growth of what is referred to as socially engaged arts practice – participatory in nature and with a clear

intention to function as an intervention in the social and political sphere (BELFIORE 2021: 2).

In their 2008 publication, Kidd et al. referred to participatory arts practiced by and with refugees and asylum seekers as “the arts and refugees” (1). This broad term encompasses increasingly diverse art practices, both in terms of creative activity in its own right, the instrumental use of the arts to address social objectives, and artistic and cultural development that includes the interests of refugees who are artists (KIDD et al. 2008). While we acknowledge that cultural engagement depends heavily on factors such as (art) education, we focus here on refugee arts projects that draw on participatory arts activities to foster social cohesion. Indeed, we accept as given the apparent power of the arts to encourage social inclusion and enhance community life (JOWELL 2004). In arts management and cultural policy, this issue is not unchallenged. While some have lamented the instrumentalization of the arts for social purposes, others have argued that the arts, being a less influential policy area, have simply attached themselves to socio-economic agendas for greater political support (BELFIORE/BENNETT 2010). There is also a dichotomy between defenders of art for art’s sake and those who ascribe a social function to the arts — often seen as intrinsic versus instrumental (CROSSICK/KASZYNSKA 2016: 15).

### 3. Theoretical Background

The resource-based view (RBV) has emerged as an important theoretical lens that understands organizations as “bundles” of resources and capabilities (PRAHALA/HAMEL 1999) and can be traced back to Penrose’s seminal work of 1959, which primarily advocates an inward-looking view of organizations. The RBV directs attention to internal resources — rather than to output or products — for analyzing organizations (WERNERFELT 1984).

The understanding of what exactly constitutes a resource in the RBV continues to evolve (CLARKE/MAC DONALD 2019). Originally, the concept of “resources” was used as a broad term to define fixed input enabling organizations to perform a particular task. The input is made up of people and the real (physical) assets that they use, which are, therefore, classified either as tangible or intangible (PENROSE 1959). Physical resources consist of tangible assets such as infrastructure; intangible resources encompass human capital and other intangibles

such as reputation. In later versions of the RBV resources were categorized as physical, human, or organizational (BARNEY 1991). The extensions of the RBV that focus on competitive advantage emphasize that intangible resources are more valuable than tangible resources since they are more difficult to be replicated (HART 1995) and are often the result of social complexity or causal ambiguity (DAS/TENG 2000). “Capabilities” refers to the organizational ability to deploy resources “to the greatest end possible” (PETERAF 1993: 189).

The RBV has gained scholarly interest in business research as an alternative to mainstream management to explain organizational development and performance (LADO et al. 2006). While some studies have applied it to a non-profit context (ARYA/LIN 2007 in the health sector, or CLARKE/MAC DONALD 2019 in the social and ecological fields), only a few works have applied the RBV to arts management research.

According to Labaronne (2019), resource-based thinking can add analytical value to arts management because it offers a more holistic view of organizations that does not reduce complexity to a logic of metrics, nor the imperatives of rational thinking, linearity and standardization, as many management models do (TRÖNDLE/STAHL 2019). The RBV has been also used as an alternative to mainstream management approaches to offer a more holistic yet differentiated insight into how arts and cultural organizations create and sustain artistic achievement by exploring the disposition and development of human resources (artists) (LABARONNE 2019). Further work has applied resource-based thinking to better understand resource transformation for strategic development in arts and cultural organizations (LABARONNE/TRÖNDLE 2020) and communication of excellence in arts management executive programs (TRÖNDLE/SCHINDLER 2021).

The application of resource-based thinking for the present analysis is consistent with the phenomena of investigation, given that it underlines intangible resources such as motivation and specialized knowledge, which emerged in our inquiry as being relevant for initiating and sustaining bottom-up refugee arts projects. The RBV, which is traditionally associated with an organizational level of analysis is therefore applicable to the case studied because, while the Malaika Theater started as a loosely structured initiative, it rapidly became a stable organization. In addition, the inward-looking focus of the RBV as a starting point of the analysis is consistent with the inside-oriented perspective of (cultural) participation, which strongly characterizes the approach taken by the Malaika Theater to foster integration. While it exhibits organizational adaptability, it draws

on existing resources for activity development, such as intellectual and creative capital, instead of being determined by exogenous influences.

#### **4. Research Design**

To address the above-mentioned research questions, we conducted a case-study methodology (YIN 2009), using mixed methods and following an explorative approach. This type of explorative inquiry cannot be considered a sequential, deductive procedure but rather an iterative one, whose research questions are likely to be redefined and sharpened throughout the investigation. Case study research offers the advantage that the data collection process often overlaps with data analysis and allows for research design adjustments as the investigation evolves (EISENHARDT 1989: 539).

##### **4.1 Case Selection and Description**

The Malaika Theater was selected as a case study based on considerations of theoretical sampling, which – unlike random selection – aims to enrich insight rather than emphasize representativeness (FLYVBJERG 2011: 306). Further, the focus of our study was on a single “extreme” case, chosen according to an information-oriented selection strategy, that is, according to its richness of information content (FLYVBJERG 2011: 307). Extreme cases facilitate concept and theory building because of their salient focal dynamics (EISENHARDT 1989). The Malaika Theater defines itself as “a theater and integration project that brings together refugees and locals for joint activities” (<[www.fluechtlingstheater-malaika.ch](http://www.fluechtlingstheater-malaika.ch)>). The artistic activity is pursued as a means for integration and community building (In other words, its motivation is not, first and foremost, therapeutic). From a sociocultural perspective, the Malaika Theater allows us to gather a significant number of insights on participatory arts projects that foster cultural participation and social integration since their theater-based work with asylum seekers, refugees, recent migrants, and volunteers is incredibly complex. It combines expertise in participatory art practices with profound knowledge and a deep understanding of the wide diversity of refugee communities and their specific needs and interests.

The Malaika Theater constitutes an interesting empirical setting and object of study for further reasons. Since its inception as a one-

week theater project in May 2014 – before the peak of the 2015 refugee crisis – the Malaika Theater has become a non-profit association with paid staff as well as volunteers and an established network of partners and supporters. It consists of about 40 local people and refugees of different ages, religions, and origins such as Afghanistan, Syria, Tibet, Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Kenya. While the original focus lies on community building through stage performances, projects were increasingly expanded as the organization broadened its field of activities to further foster cultural and social participation and offer access to economic integration.

Because the Malaika Theater is one of the first refugee art projects to have evolved successfully over time, it has become widely accepted as a reference project within the greater Zurich area and in German-speaking Switzerland as a whole. It is important to note that the case study takes place in Zurich, Switzerland. Regarding asylum applications, the Swiss quota (as a percentage of the permanent population) has been the highest in Europe and one of the highest among the OECD countries (SEM 2021). Zurich as the most populated city in Switzerland has also accommodated the highest number of applicants (SEM 2021). By diving into the real-life complexities of this case, some macro-level insights can be gained about how cultural participation, particularly in the realm of refugee integration, shapes and challenges the practices of artists, arts managers, and policymakers alike.

#### **4.2 Data Collection and Analysis**

Initially, we conducted a comprehensive desk research involving secondary literature on participatory cultural projects in relation to integration. This broad scope of selection criteria was then narrowed down to focus on refugee arts as an extreme case of cultural participation – not only because of the complexity involved in such activities but also given that the broader contextual problem field in which they are embedded poses real challenges in research and practice for arts management and cultural policy.

Building on insights from the literature, we began empirical fieldwork, which was carried out between May 2019 and October 2020. First, a semi-structured, in-depth interview with the project initiator and manager was conducted, together with an analysis of published internal documents (e.g., annual reports, information brochures, and websites) and media coverage. Field observations also took place at



Type	Source	Date
Semi-structured in-depth interview (2)	Project initiator and manager	2019/06/04 2020/10/29
Semi-structured in-depth interview (1)	Project team member	2020/10/29
Semi-standardized ethnographic short interviews (15)	Volunteers and project participants	2019/09/17
Field notes	Participating observations in the field	2019/09/06 – 2019/09/21
Standardized quantitative survey of audience (theatre performance)*	Visitors and participants of the intercultural festival “About Us” in Zurich	2019/09/06 – 2019/09/21
Media articles (2015-2010)	Regional newspapers in German-speaking Switzerland	
Website Malaika Refugee Theater	<a href="https://malaika-kultur.ch/">https://malaika-kultur.ch/</a>	
(Internal) documents	Brochures, etc. provided by project manager	
Semi-structured qualitative Interviews (4)	Experts from field of art education and social work with several years of experience in initiating and implementing socio-cultural projects for migrants, including refugees <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initiator and leader of socio-cultural of several projects such as «Zuhören Schweiz»</li> <li>• Initiator and co-leader of socio-cultural project «Abendschule Import»</li> <li>• Initiator and leader of socio-cultural project «MachMit Winterthur</li> <li>• Initiator and leader of socio-cultural project «SingKontakt»</li> </ul>	2019/05/14  2021/06/04 2019/06/17 2019/07/24

\*Not directly used as data material for the article in a way that formally contributes to the present analysis but used to better understand the broad context and the participants of the Malaika Theater and other similar projects and organizations.

Table 1: *Data corpus.* (Source: own illustration)

an intercultural festival in September 2019 to collect additional data about the Malaika Theater and similar organizations. To enhance the validity of data collection, multiple voices from the field were considered (DENZIN/LINCOLN 2011: 5). Semi-standardized, short, ethnographic interviews with 15 volunteers and Malaika Theater participants were conducted at the festival, among others, dealing with their motivation, function, and tasks as well as benefits derived from participation. The rather informal and spontaneous nature of ethnographic interviews, which are often conducted during participant observation, allows for learning about a community from the members themselves, in their own words and a natural setting (MUNZ 2017). Table 1 summarizes the data corpus including primary and secondary research.

The language barrier posed a problem during interviews with participants, so these were carried out in the interviewees' preferred languages

(English, German, or Spanish). Interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed in the source language. Having considered the implications of colluding with the invisibility of other languages through early translation, only the relevant quotes were translated into English at a later stage (TEMPLE/YOUNG 2004).

To further enhance internal validity, several types of data were triangulated (EISENHARDT 1989). To enhance external validity, we also carried out semi-structured, qualitative interviews with experts from the fields of cultural participation, arts education, and social work to validate emerging macro-level insights. The write-up for the case study included ethnographic reports, informal and formal interviews, as well as internal and external documents. The data were analyzed using ATLAS.ti software.

The first phase of analysis involved closed reading, namely, reading the data as a complete corpus and taking in the entire written record as it evolved (EMERSON at al. 2011: 174). Then followed the first structuring of material, in which the data set was coded according to non-content attributes, and schemes were derived from the literature research. In line with Barney (1991), we also considered, for instance, whether the key internal/external resources were tangible or intangible or categorized as physical, human, or organizational.

In a second analysis of the material, we deductively and inductively developed coding schemes in relation to the relevance and transformation of resources across and along with the historical narrative of the case. These were developed from the data material with an in-case analysis (EISENHARDT 1989). The second phase of data analysis partly overlapped with data gathering activities. From the interplay between literature, empirical phenomena, and data analysis, four analytical themes emerged: uncovering, binding, diversifying, and consolidating resources. These four themes represent phases of organizational development that are clustered together and reflect the use of key intangible and tangible resources along with the historical narrative of the case.

## 5. Case Study and Findings

The following offers a historical narrative of the Malaika Theater, which is framed with a resource-oriented perspective that allows an inward-looking view of the organization as a starting point of analysis. The findings are clustered into four phases that – more or less in chronological order – also

reflect the relation (uncovering, binding, diversifying, consolidating) to key tangible and intangible resources with regards to the development of the Malaika Theater.

Figure 1 summarizes the four phases of organizational development and its milestones, highlighting the crucial tangible and intangible resources along with the historical narrative. As it can be gathered from Figure 1, as the organization evolves, there is a shift from an emphasis on intangible resources, such as motivation, commitment, and volunteer engagement to more tangible resources such as self-earned revenue.

### 5.1 Uncovering Resources

People see what I can do – not only the refugee. What people have seen are our strengths. (Interview with a participant from Kenya, 2020)

Our thing is to look and see what people need; we look at the needs and the project develops from there [...]. (Interview with Project Leader, 2019)

The Malaika Theater was developed out of an ad-hoc theater week in Zurich, initiated by the current project manager. By chance, while searching for premises for an earlier theater project, *Schräge Vögel* (Strange Birds) – aimed at homeless people, she came across a lunch for refugees organized by a local church, in which about 200 refugees regularly took part in a German language course. Soon after, she had the idea of organizing a theater week where the refugees could act together with local people, including homeless people from the earlier theater project. In addition to the refugees who took part in this lunch, a network of German teachers and social workers was able to attract other interested parties to make the theater week possible. During several meetings with interested refugees, ideas and feedback were collected, and initial shyness was overcome.

The involvement of a refugee who had previous social work experience and acted as a bridge between the project management team and interested refugees also proved extremely helpful. In addition to assisting with translation, he helped convey the needs and interests of the target group(s) so that these could be considered. The project leader – a qualified drama teacher and social worker with several years' experience in socio-cultural participatory projects – was supported by other volunteers who contributed in various ways. The project also had free access to the premises of a local cultural institution for rehearsals and performances.

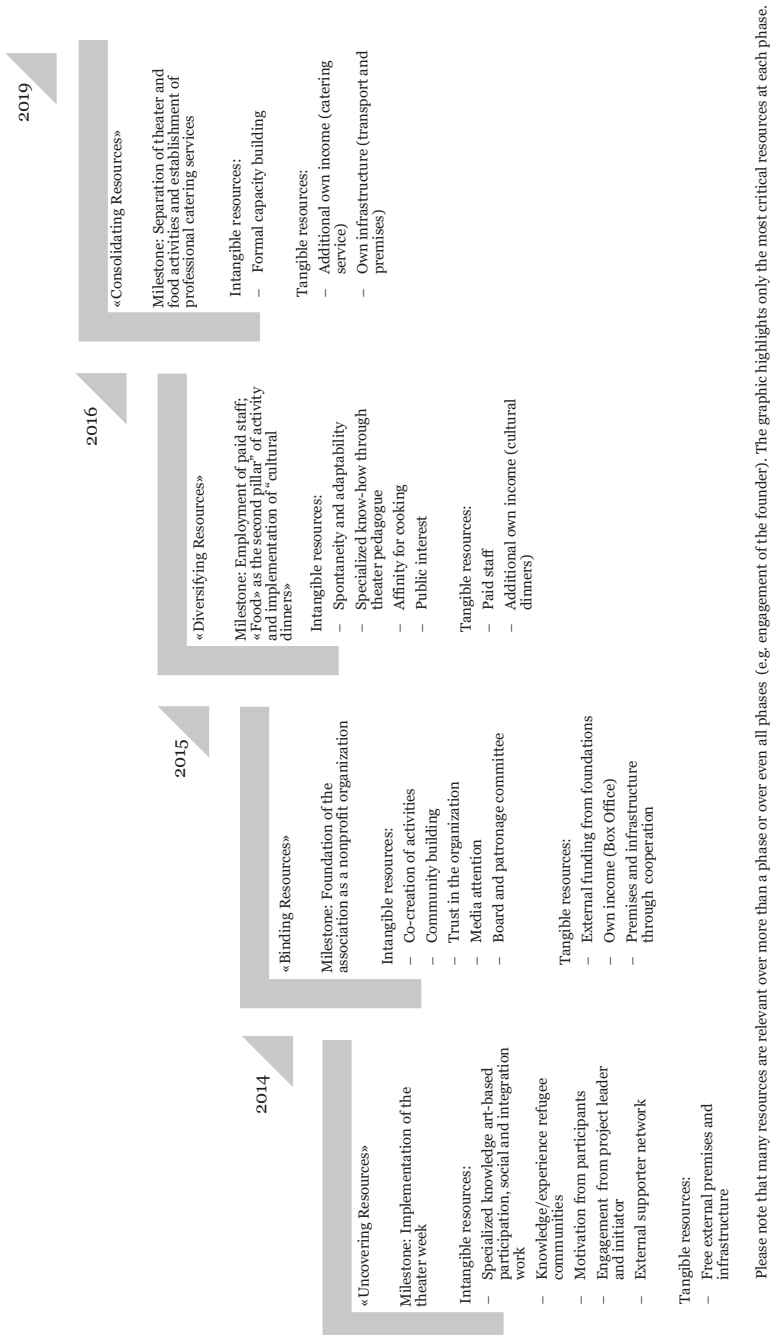


Figure 1: *Phases of organizational development.* (Source: own illustration)

The original goal of the theater week was to enable a group of refugees and homeless people to (re-)integrate by providing a structure and regulated daily routine that helped people better participate socially. However, during the project, it became clear that the needs of these two target groups (refugees and the homeless) were very different:

We had highs and lows this week and especially, [...] the best was that many friendships were formed [...] people really blossomed, they came out of their shells [...] and so, afterward, they wanted to continue! (Interview with Project Leader, 2019)

The refugees' high level of motivation and the desire to do something were noticeable and resulted in the project being continued:

The theater connects. You can tell that people like it and that they act with passion. That's what I appreciate so much. (Interview with Volunteer from Germany, 2019)

## 5.2 Binding Resources

We did it! We're a family, and we'd like to go further. (Interview with Project Leader, 2019)

To meet the needs of both target groups adequately, the project managers decided to set up an independent theater group for refugees. One year after the first theater week and successive theater rehearsals as well as social gatherings – which normally revolved around cooking and eating together – the Malaika Theater was established in 2015. With the formal establishment of an association, a board of directors and official patrons were appointed. In this phase, activities were supported primarily through the association's own efforts and the financial support of private foundations.

To pursue more sustainable fundraising, the project managers took advantage of a qualified consultant, who advised them on a voluntary basis on organizational and funding issues. The self-conception of the association – which sees itself as politically and religiously neutral – was also expanded.

The Malaika Theater is intended to be a “safe space” and a substitute family (a “family-like atmosphere,” which the project leader refers to as “we, the Malaikas.”) in which everyone can share their culture and contribute their skills:

Everyone contributes different resources and abilities and is, in turn, encouraged and supported. Also, everyone can try out, get to know, or practice new things freely. We develop our plays together. Everyone gives something of themselves and their

culture. In this way, we get to know new people and countries through acting. By performing in front of an audience, we gain more self-confidence and can improve our German because we have more contact with Swiss people through Malaika. To do theater together means integration for us. ([www.fluechtlingstheater-malaika.ch](http://www.fluechtlingstheater-malaika.ch))

As theater projects were institutionalized and became part of an organization, agreements on how participants related to each other were also made. This helped the groups avoid possible conflict arising from cultural differences and strengthened group identity. Areas of potential tension included, for instance, how men relate to women (and vice-versa) and punctuality. The project leader as well as some participants emphasized that this mediation of local culture and customs was highly appreciated because it also facilitates their integration into the Swiss labor market (Interview with Project Leader 2019, Interview with Participant from Swiss Volunteer and Participant, 2019).

The refugee participants came from a number of different countries. Some of them had been waiting for years to find out whether Switzerland would grant them asylum status. Together, they wrote one of the first plays called *Diversity Zurich* as well as *Die Küche ist voll* (The Kitchen is Full) and *Mini World Show*, which thematized intercultural differences between their countries of origin and Switzerland in particular.

Further productions, *Crazy Zurich* and *Überraschung Zürich* (Surprise Zurich), dealing with life in Zurich and the refugees' homelands, were performed at various local theaters and cultural venues. However, the narrative did not deal with how each of them fled their home countries. Rather, the organizers realized early on that although many participants were traumatized, the Malaika Theater was not qualified to offer formal (art) therapy sessions. Working with them demands an ethical approach in dealing with people who may face significant external pressures and encounter hostility and suspicion in the host community (KIDD et al. 2008). Although individual escape stories were not portrayed, theater activities are believed to "still have a somewhat therapeutic effect" (Interview with Project Leader, 2019) and all participants – whether refugees or local volunteers – experience their involvement in the project as enriching and supportive. A longtime volunteer describes the effects of the Malaika Theater on participants as follows:

"I am convinced and I know that it [participation in the Malaika Theater] really has an impact, both on the mental and physical health of the participants. That's what they report back to me... but also as soon as the permit comes. They are then one step further, they feel better, they are more self-confident and find work more quickly [...]. In work integration projects the difficulty is that people don't come on time and with us you learn that you have to come on time. They learn better German

and so on. They may take a small step, but they are one step ahead.” (Interview with participant from Germany, 2019)

Most of the participants also appreciate that they learn more about their host city, especially considering that Zurich is not an easy place for social integration. As one volunteer explains:

Zurich is an anonymous city. People are closed and it is difficult to make social contacts. To experience the communicative talent of other cultures and the exchange at Malaika Theater is enriching. (Interview with Swiss volunteer, 2019)

At the same time, however, such effects on people learning about other cultures and feeling “part of a community” (Participant from Chile, 2019) are not limited to the refugees. Also, volunteers from the host city tend to experience such enrichment:

At the beginning you think, yes, there are refugees and you are helping to integrate them [...] And I realized that I am the one who learns and that so much comes back. You learn much more than you give [...]. (Interview with German Volunteer, 2019)

External interest in the Malaika Theater grew during the 2015 refugee crisis as the issue received greater media attention (CATHOMEN 2016; DEMMERLE 2016; HUMM 2016). In December 2015, for example, the *Schauspielhaus Zürich* (Zurich’s main theater venue) began presenting the biography of a refugee before performing certain plays that dealt with integration issues. Furthermore, about 75 refugees and their families were invited to performances. As the media portrayed it, the program included, for example, a brunch with the participants of the Malaika Theater after the play (KEDVES 2015).

Such attention from the media and the cultural field was perceived by the organization with some skepticism, however. As one volunteer put it, “everyone wanted to do refugee art,” and, as a result, the demand for engagements for the Malaika Theater increased. However, such attention was not always “easy” for the project managers or for the participants as the motivation of different actors to cooperate was not always aligned with the philosophy of the Malaika Theater. As the project leader explained:

I’ve known many people during this time who also wanted to do such projects and who came and were totally euphoric [...] I mean if you say: ok, I want to do a play with refugees [...] we’ll meet every two weeks and act together and leave again [...] I think that won’t work [...] the relationship level has to be included [...]. (Interview with Project Leader, 2019)

### 5.3 Diversifying Resources

I am a refugee myself and I can feel everything that people feel here. The hope of having a better life and being able to stay or the fear of not knowing what is happening. And that's also my motivation: to be able to help where I can and all that through the meals [we share] and getting to know different cultures and what's better than food at uniting. Food unites the world at the table. (Participant and Volunteer from Chile, 2019)

Since the beginning of the project, refugees have been free to decide how and to what extent they wish to be involved. Consequently, some participants are involved in the organization by helping in the kitchen at social gatherings, for example. Others started out not performing on stage, only to overcome their initial reluctance over time.

[...] they often come and don't say a word [...] they are very cautious, also towards the Swiss; for many, it's only through us that they come into contact with Swiss people for the first time [...] at first, they don't dare, and then, gradually, they blossom; the exchange becomes normal for them... suddenly, they are standing on the stage and are singing something, which they have never dared to do before [...]. (Interview with Project Leader, 2019)

This freedom allowed participants to decide for themselves what they wanted to contribute and opened avenues for new developments. As the project progressed, it became apparent that the “Malaikas” had an affinity for cooking and eating together, and food became the second pillar of the organization. Regular stage performances were expanded to include the so-called “cultural dinners”, which are a combination of theater, music and food that are co-devised by the participants. Here, too, it was possible to address not only the Malaika world but also interested third parties—including many local residents—who were willing, paying guests. Such events were also widely covered by the media, especially for enabling informal encounters between local residents and the refugees (STOTZ WÜRGLER 2019). The increased media coverage accentuated the demand for the cultural dinners and aroused more interest in cooperation among renowned artists and cultural institutions (DEMMERLE 2016; ZÜRCHER UNTERLÄNDER 2018; STOTZ WÜRGLER 2019; RÜMLANGER 2020).

With self-earned revenue from the cultural dinners increasing, the organization was now able to hire the first paid staff member, a trained theater pedagogue who supports the project managers and runs the theater activities. In addition to a growing network of volunteers, this hire constituted a central success factor for professionalizing both pillars of the organization.



## 5.4 Consolidating Resources

Our project was only low key initially, very low key. And [the organization] became more and more high-profile, and, of course, if we can now also offer professional catering, we will have an entire range of things we can offer. So actually, someone who is totally new to Switzerland, who does not speak German, can start with us. He or she comes to the rehearsals, learns the basics about living in Switzerland, and then, at some stage, is given a permit. Then they could start with us in catering. First, you can get some experience at our community events and cooking together; if someone does well, we could then hire him or her to do a traineeship, and there is even a possibility to be hired with a contract. (Interview with Project Leader, 2019)

Remarkably, in a short time, the growing demand for these cultural dinners, and later for their gastronomic services, led to the establishment of a professional catering service, which today offers paid work. These catering services, offering cultural dinners as well as external catering services for private or company events, are not only self-supporting but also a cross-subsidized part of the theater and community-building activities.

With the establishment of the food project area, professional, qualified gastronomic apprenticeships (“Gastropraktika”) were also introduced. Refugees who completed the qualification could gain valuable skills, assisting their integration into the Swiss labor market. In cooperation with Gastro Suisse (a professional association of Swiss hoteliers and restaurateurs), food hygiene courses were also offered. This taught essential vocabulary and helped break down linguistic barriers, and there was also the possibility of taking first aid courses. This knowledge was used directly in the Malaika catering service. In addition, the qualification has improved participants’ chances in the job market.

In the future, the two operations will be formally separated, and a new website created exclusively for the professional catering services. Still, cooking together as a social activity will continue at internal gatherings, and through the advertised cultural dinners, so that these two areas of theater and catering will continue to overlap. With the catering services, the cross-financing of the theater project will be secured, and the next milestone – paying everyone involved in catering – will be reached as well.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, both branches of the organization – theater and catering – are suspended at the time of writing. A new stage production has also been postponed because of the ban on gatherings in Switzerland, and further development of the

catering side of the operation is also on hold. This particular delay has hit the participating refugees especially hard, as participation in the projects represents one of the few opportunities for them to interact socially. The post-COVID-19 vision is to again enable the refugees to participate in society holistically, culturally, socially – and to enter the labor market.

To sum up, the Malaika Theater fosters creative and cultural participation through the co-creation of theater plays and cultural dinners and at the same time offers access to economic integration through mentoring, capacity building as well as formal qualification and paid work through the (co-created) catering services.

## 6. Discussion and Conclusion

This study sets out to answer the following research questions: What resources are needed to initiate refugee arts projects and organizations? What resources are crucial for their sustainable development over time? To answer these questions, we first discuss the phases of organizational development in relation to the critical tangible and intangible resources and their transformation. We conclude by summarizing the key bundles of resources and capabilities.

What resources are needed to initiate refugee arts projects? The Malaika Theater's loosely structured beginnings are marked by an uncovering of, mostly, intangible internal resources (Uncovering Resources). Following the decision to initiate a refugee arts project, a bundle of different resources needs to be identified and "unpacked" in terms of knowledge about art-based participation (in this case, amateur theater in general) and the specific needs of participants. In relation to the latter, it is pertinent to mention the dual role as a refugee and as a theatre participant occupied by one of the key team members in the organization. This role ensures the mediation between the project management and participants. This bundle of resources is underlined by a strong belief in the (powers of) socially engaged arts practice that generates high levels of motivation in all parties involved and attracts further volunteers. Tapping into a supporter network also plays a crucial role in procuring tangible external resources such as free rehearsal space, performance venues, and transportation – resources that the Malaika Theater could otherwise not afford.

What resources are crucial for the sustainable development of refugee arts projects and organizations over time? The longer-term viability of

the project is secured as the Malaika Theater is institutionalized as a nonprofit association and cultural participation goes beyond presenting a single theater play to the co-creation of several plays and associated social events (Binding Resources). It is the bonding of staff and participants' resources (know-how, talent, creativity, motivation, etc.) in the co-creation of activities that reinforces the strong identity of the Malaika Theater ("We, the Malaikas"). Continuous efforts to respond to the individual needs of each participant lead to a family-like atmosphere that fosters a feeling of "trust" in the organization.

The organizational identity and active creative engagement as a strong bundle of internal resources are further sharpened in response to the pronounced external attention from the media and the cultural field. While motivations behind each cooperation request are questioned, and some of them even turned down, the Malaikas take the opportunity to perform more often and attract a broader audience, developing remarkable organizational adaptability. The latter becomes more salient as the previous strong bundles are developed further and diversified in the field of activities of theater and food (Diversifying Resources). The organization keeps activating internal resources to respond to external opportunities. For example, the idea of combining an evening at the Malaika Theater with a dinner taps into Switzerland's fascination with ethnic cuisine. With increasing self-earned revenue from the cultural dinners, the organization has appointed a theater pedagogue on a salaried basis to professionalize the theater activities, so they no longer solely rely on volunteer engagement. At the same time, the catering services are professionalized, so both areas of activities are consolidated separately (Consolidating Resources), offering a broader base for integration work.

To conclude, we summarize below the identified bundles of resources and capabilities needed for initiating refugee arts projects:

- A strong internal bundle of specialized knowledge in terms of art-based participation, social and integration work as well as an understanding of the specific needs and interests of heterogenous refugee communities.
- A strong bundle consisting of a network of volunteers and supporters who believe in the organization and can provide, among other things, access to external tangible (e.g., infrastructure) and intangible resources (e.g., consulting services), which might otherwise be unattainable.

In addition to the bundles mentioned above, the following is critical to sustaining refugee arts projects and organizations over time:

- A strong bundle consisting of internal, intangible resources (know-how, talent, creativity, motivation, etc.) mobilized for co-creation of activities coupled with a strong organizational identity (e.g., community spirit).
- Organizational capabilities to transform an intangible bundle of internal resources (e.g., motivation and affinity for food) and external resources (e.g., media and public interest) into sustainable financial operations (e.g., cultural dinners and catering services).
- Organizational capabilities to transform creative engagement and cultural participation into further opportunities for social and economic integration (e.g., volunteering, paid work and capacity building apprenticeships).

Furthermore, our analysis suggests that the active creative engagement or cultural participation as an approach to the integrative goals of the organization is both a process and an outcome while also becoming a key input as the organization diversifies and consolidates its activities.

Our findings also have implications for arts management and cultural policy. We believe that arts management, as a form of creativity incorporating general management elements to pursue artistic interests (WEINSTEIN/BUKOVINSKY 2009), reflects an “intrinsic” rather than an “instrumental” function of the arts (CROSSICK/KASZYNSKA 2016: 15) – especially considering that the mission of arts organizations revolves around the concept of artistic achievement (TURBIDE/LAURIN 2009). Such a traditional view is challenged as the proliferation of art-based integration shapes cultural life. To the extent that artists and arts organizations genuinely strive for cultural participation, they must strive to “bundle” internal resources with those of the participants, thus allowing for high levels of active creative engagement (as opposed to merely spectating). This, however, implies breaking down traditional intrinsic-instrumental dichotomies in the arts (CROSSICK/KASZYNSKA 2016: 15) to (really) allow for broader cultural participation.

Moreover, it should also be mentioned that, while the so-called instrumentalization of the arts for social purposes is widely thematized in arts management and cultural policy, the instrumentalization of refugees as “exciting material” (HILLMANN 2016; FUCHS 2016) for artistic work and for attracting private and public funding has been less problematized. BELFIORE (2021) recently criticized the systemic

exploitation of socially engaged artists. The analysis of the Malaika Theater shows that given the lack of sufficient funding at the initiation of the project, the organization survived in part because of the great personal engagement of the project founder/leader and a highly motivated workforce comprised of a network of supporters and volunteers. The media and public attention at the peak of the refugee crisis facilitated the activation of a supporting community. Such a high degree of personal commitment cannot be expected from funding bodies. However, art management's scholarly and cultural policy must also reflect on the extent that minorities may (also) be instrumentalized in the name of cultural participation. Our findings suggest that as cultural participation shapes cultural life, there is a real risk that the increased attention to working with refugees may "expose" the same (refugee) communities that are supposed to receive long-term support as they make their way from war and persecution to a safe life in a host city.

At the same time, we hope that our findings can help policymakers and other funding bodies reflect on how they address grant requests for such initiatives, whether bottom-up or top-down, loosely organized or in an institutional context. Our findings suggest that discourse about integration should be reflected upon; public and private funding bodies must examine their understanding of integration and acknowledge that the so-called "target groups" are often minority communities that are seldom homogeneous but exhibit different backgrounds, interests, and needs.

To support projects that are impactful and sustainable, funding bodies should favor applications where participant involvement is considered in the conception and management of the overall project. Further, agencies should disseminate and encourage knowledge transfer by fostering and enabling networks of project initiators, even funding capacity building. To enable participation at all levels on the part of funding bodies, it is also important to break down language barriers (MCGREGOR/RAGAB 2016; SÖHN et al. 2017). We suggest the use of inclusive forms and easy-to-understand language, as formal language poses a difficulty for refugees in the initial period. Policymakers and funding bodies in the arts and culture also need to be more aware that the socially engaged arts cannot be judged with the same artistic rigor—even though a degree of professionalism (at management and directional level) should be expected. At the same time, while it is usual for new projects to rely mainly on volunteers, more established projects or organizations can be expected to engage professional and paid staff.

Working with refugees, and thus also with traumatized people, requires appropriately trained staff. If refugees are taken seriously as artists and are integrated on an equal footing at all levels of cultural production, it is also important to ensure that they receive financial remuneration (SÖHN et al. 2017; SHARIFI 2015).

As a final point worth mentioning, we believe the effects of many “new public management” reforms for the cultural public sector (which also shape the practice of private funding bodies), such as projectification and fragmentation of funding as well as an undifferentiated emphasis on evidence-based policy (LINDQVIST 2012) are counterproductive to dealing with the real-life complexities of socially engaged arts practice. Funding and assessing at the level of single projects (rather than institutional funding) tends to be short-term and less sustainable. Our findings suggest that long-term, continuous (cultural) participation fosters effects that a limited timeframe cannot capture.

Our study has certain limitations, and further research of various aspects is recommended. While our analysis is focused on the setting of refugee theater activities, the insights we have gained can shed light on the so-called “socially engaged art practices” in general. Although the empirical work is based on one case study, our findings may help provide insights for similar projects or organizations even though some characteristics of the setting limit the generalizability of those findings. In addition, while we use different voices from the field for the empirical analysis, the present study often refers to and cites the (founder) project leader. This presupposed dominance may be relativized if we consider the people’s different roles as initiator, volunteer, project manager, and participant. Furthermore, insufficient language skills were in some cases a barrier to interviewing participants, which is why, as mentioned above, the interviews were conducted in the participants’ preferred languages. However, a large proportion of respondents could not be interviewed in their native language, which would certainly have contributed to gaining even more in-depth information.

In terms of the choice of theoretical perspective, it has been argued that the RBV’s limitations reside in its underspecified and vague terminology (MADHANI 2010). These theoretical limitations nonetheless allowed us to contextualize the view in the empirical setting being studied. In addition, while the RBV focuses on internal resources to analyze organizational performance, it tends to neglect how they are put into practice to create value for organizations (KONG 2007: 722) and the external environment of organizations (SANCHEZ 2004). Because

the origins of the RBV have been contested for their conceptualization of resources as fixed assets and a rather static environment, as well as there being little emphasis on the development of new resources (MADHANI 2010), we deliberately speak of resource-based thinking in the scope of this analysis (as opposed to strictly following the RBV). We hope that the application in the present study contributes to a deeper understanding of the potential of resource-based thinking, also in relation to dynamic environments and evolving resources, to analyze organizational development and to frame historical narratives in organizations characterized by intangible resources. As aforementioned, the inward-looking focus of the RBV as a starting point of the analysis seems consistent with the inside-oriented perspective of (cultural) participation. Thus, a promising avenue for further research would be the sharpening of concepts and operationalization of the identified key resources and capabilities for the development and generalization of a conceptual framework for assessment and strategic development of participatory arts projects and organizations.

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