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To cite this article: Majbritt Lyck-Bowen & Mark Owen (2018): A multi-religious response to the migrant crisis in Europe: A preliminary examination of potential benefits of multi-religious cooperation on the integration of migrants, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, DOI: [10.1080/1369183X.2018.1437344](https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2018.1437344)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2018.1437344>



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A multi-religious response to the migrant crisis in Europe: A preliminary examination of potential benefits of multi-religious cooperation on the integration of migrants

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ABSTRACT

Since the beginning of the new millennium, violent conflicts around the world have contributed to a significant increase in the number of international migrants, reaching nearly 260 million in 2017, including almost 26 million refugees. Many of these migrants have arrived in Europe leading to some countries struggling to handle the substantial need for humanitarian assistance and long-term integration. Civil society actors and organisations, some of which have religious affiliations, have stepped in and provided vital help. The existing academic literature recognises the important contribution of religion and religious actors in integration processes. However, one increasingly pertinent area that has been largely neglected is the issue of multi-religious cooperation. Hence this study examines the potential positive advantages of a 'multi-religious approach to integration' from an organisational perspective.

Data collected during a pilot project identifies a range of different possible advantages for a multi-religious approach, and is used to critically reflect on existing literature concerning religion's role in integration processes. The study concludes that a multi-religious approach to integration has some distinctive benefits and therefore should be encouraged and supported. The project also identifies a range of important areas for further study which have the potential to make a significant positive impact for migrants, host communities and broader community cohesion and security.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 9 October 2017
Accepted 31 January 2018

KEYWORDS

Religion; migrants; integration; cooperation; post-secularism

'We are just at the beginning; this should become normality.'

Markus Dröge,

Bishop of the Evangelical Church of

Berlin-Brandenburg-Silesian Oberlausitz.

(Dröge 2016)

Introduction

Since the beginning of the new millennium the number of international migrants defined as *persons living in a country other than where they were born*, has risen by 51 percent to

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 Supplemental data for this article can be accessed at <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2018.1437344>

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nearly 260 million in 2017, which includes almost 26 million refugees (Migration Data Portal 2017). Violent conflicts in different parts of the world including Syria, Somalia, Afghanistan and Iraq, along with turbulence and oppression in countries such as Pakistan, Nigeria and Eritrea, have contributed to a significant increase in migration into Europe from other parts of the world (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2015; Eurostat 2017).

There have been noteworthy differences in various European countries' willingness to help newly arrived people. Countries such as Sweden and Germany have generally emphasised the humanitarian imperative to help and welcome migrants, whereas others including Hungary, Poland and the UK have been notably more sceptical and reluctant to open their borders. These differences in attitudes and approaches have led to increased tensions within and between European states (Poushter 2016; Wilson and Mavelli 2017). It would be overly simplistic to generalise as to why attitudes to migration in countries across Europe have differed; reasons are inevitably complex and often contextually specific. However, it is possible to state with some certainty that migration has become one of the most pressing issues, in terms of both domestic politics and European wide political, social and economic cohesion, faced by European countries for decades.

Migration has risen to the top of the list of many voters' concerns (Wagenvoorde 2017); with pervasive narratives of migrants taking jobs, depressing wages, straining social services and associations with increased crime, now common place in many countries. Some political parties and candidates have attempted to reap the benefits of these negative associations, with varying degrees of success (Falk 2017). The issue of migration has also become securitised: with particularly Muslim migrants perceived by some to be a threat to, traditional identities, the religious balance in host communities, and community cohesion (Falk 2017; Wagenvoorde 2017). Increasingly negative stereotypes of Muslims, and a tangible and growing fear of jihadi terrorism, has manifested in increasingly negative attitudes towards migrants, and in the most extreme cases overt xenophobia and violence (Falk 2017).

Given then the political sensitivities, the limited resources many national institutions possess, and the scale of the challenges involved in welcoming and integrating large groups of migrants from diverse backgrounds, it is perhaps of no surprise that governments and communities in some European countries have struggled to handle the substantial increase in people needing not only immediate humanitarian assistance, but also a new long-term home. A consequence of this is that nation states have turned to civil society actors for assistance in welcoming and helping integrate migrants (Wilson and Mavelli 2017). One group of organisations that has traditionally been involved in supporting the reception and integration of migrants are organisations with religious origins and/or affiliations; often known as Faith-based Organisations (FBOs).

Many FBOs have a long-standing tradition of being able to mobilise resources and networks for a wide variety of altruistic activities, ranging from local, social and community work, to help deliver humanitarian aid and disaster relief in countries around the world (Haynes 2007; Ter Haar 2011). However, although religious organisations have long been involved in positively contributing to integration processes, they have traditionally tended to work alongside each other, and less often have organisations from different religious and faith traditions collaborated. More recently, however, cooperation between religious groups and traditions has become increasingly common, and this study explores what might be termed as a 'multi-religious approach to integration'.¹

There are at least three reasons why this should be seen as a legitimate and increasingly important area of study:

- (1) In recent years there has been a proliferation of interfaith and multi-religious organisations,² and growing literature on multi-faith and multi-religious cooperation (Smock 2002; Bouta, Kadayifci-Orellana, and Abu-Nimer 2005). However, the evidence base explaining exactly why, how and in what circumstance multi-religious cooperation can be effective is sparse.
- (2) Secondly and relatedly, funding criteria for religious involvement in integration processes often demonstrate an implicit, and sometimes explicit, assumption that a number of religions working together have distinct advantages.³ Once again, the evidence to support this assumption is not obvious, and therefore the presumption needs interrogating.
- (3) Thirdly, the arrival of migrants from different parts of the world means that inevitably host communities, organisations supporting reception and integration, and those arriving from different countries and needing help, will be religiously and culturally diverse (Ager and Ager 2017). Inevitably therefore if religion is a factor for migrants, integration organisations or host communities, the interaction between different religions and any possible benefits warrants further investigation.

The research project

Background and focus

The research project that this paper draws on was initiated by the European Council of Religious Leaders (ECRL), and carried out by the University of Winchester's 'Centre of Religion, Reconciliation and Peace' (CRRP). The initial brief was to develop and implement a research project which examined a multi-religious approach to cooperation on the integration of migrants. The principal objectives of the project were: to determine whether there is any evidence of distinct benefits which are the direct result of a multi-religious approach to integration; and if there are, what are the circumstances and variables which make such an approach to integration particularly effective in different situation and contexts.

Initial investigation into this area revealed that multi-religious cooperation on integration is still relatively rare: as is related academic literature. As a result, the first step was to attempt to identify relevant case studies, and subsequently to establish and understand the proposed motivations for cooperation between organisations with different religious foundations. The pilot project focused on three primary research questions: (1) Why the organisation decided to cooperate with other religious organisations on integration? (2) What have the initial benefits of working together with organisations from other religious traditions been so far, and what is the evidence to support the benefits? and (3) What are the main challenges of working with organisations from other religions' traditions? This paper presents the data and evidence which was collected predominantly in response to Question 2; although evidently there is some overlap, as, for example, reasons why organisations decided to cooperate (Q1) might well be supported by subsequent benefits.

Case studies

Case studies were chosen because it allowed for the work of the organisations to be examined in detail and in a real-world context, and it facilitated the uncovering of benefits that had not been identified previously (Yin 2012; Denscombe 2014). Based on the research questions, the case studies were purposively sampled and the main criteria used for choosing appropriate case studies was where two or more organisations representing different religious traditions had begun to cooperate on projects aiming to support the integration of migrants. Four different projects were identified: a UK-based project called *Refugee Support*,⁴ a Swedish project named *Goda Grannar*⁵ (Good Neighbours), a German project called *Weisst Du Wer Ich bin? (2016)*⁶ (Do you know, who I am?) and a Polish project called *Dialogue for Integration – a Multi-Faith Approach*.⁷ A fifth project in Italy called Corridoi Umanitari (Humanitarian Corridors), a Christian ecumenical collaboration, worked more informally with local Muslim communities and mosques.⁸

The *Refugee Support* is a project run by the British Red Cross, Hampshire, Isle of Wight and Surrey that aims at providing emotional and practical support including helping asylum seekers and refugees gain access to important services and adapting to their new life.⁹ The British Red Cross cooperates with a wide range of organisations including non-religious organisations such as Southampton and Winchester Visitors Group¹⁰ (SWVG), mono-religious organisations such as the Citylife Church's City Life Education and Action for Refugees¹¹ (CLEAR) and multi-faith organisations such as Southampton Council of Faiths¹² (SCoF).¹³

The Swedish project was established during the autumn of 2015 when a large number of migrants arrived to Stockholm central train station.¹⁴ A local mosque¹⁵ initially decided to provide food and shelter to some of the migrants. A local church¹⁶ wanted to help out as well and rather than starting their own project they decided to contact the mosque. This led to a cooperation that helped thousands of transiting migrants. Both the church and the mosque soon realised that providing shelter and food were only the first steps and that there were other ways they could help the migrants in the longer term. Hence, the two institutions decided to set up the project *Goda Grannar* (Good neighbours) that include language classes and a service that provides legal advice as well as information about the community, which local or national authority should be approached about different issues.¹⁷

The German project *Weisst Du Wer Ich bin?* was initiated in 2016 but it is a relaunch of an interfaith dialogue project that ran from 2004 to 2011. The participating organisations are the same for both projects namely *The Council of Christian Churches in Germany*,¹⁸ *Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs*,¹⁹ *The Islamic Council for Germany*,²⁰ *The Council of Islamic Cultural Centres*,²¹ *The Central Council of Muslims in Germany*²² and *The Central Council of Jews in Germany*.²³ The project aims at encouraging Muslim, Christian and Jewish communities and organisations to cooperate on projects that focus on assisting migrants in the integration process.²⁴ The project is supported by the German Federal Ministry of the Interior who has made €500.000 available for multi-religious (at least two organisations of different religious affiliation) initiatives locally active in the integration of migrants. A wide range of multi-religious projects all over Germany have benefitted from this funding.²⁵

The Polish project 'Dialogue for Integration – a Multi-Faith Approach' was initiated by Afryka Connect Foundation, an organisation that was set up to promote better relations

between mainly African migrants and the local population in Poland.²⁶ The organisation hosted seminar meetings in four different cities (Krakow, Lodz, Wroclaw and Poznan) where members of different religious communities, local community leaders and representatives from local governments and non-governmental organisations were invited to discuss the role of religion and religious communities in the process of integrating migrants.²⁷ The aims of the project were to improve integration by supporting networking and exchange of knowledge and ideas between relevant stakeholders, building the capacity of religious communities and attempting to develop shared recommendations on the role of religious communities in promoting integration. The outcomes of the seminars were presented at a national conference roundtable meeting in Warsaw in November 2016.

Research methods

The primary data for this pilot project was collected through semi-structured interviews with representatives from the different organisations and projects. The participants identified and chosen were considered to be in an appropriate position to provide information about the initial benefits of cooperation with other religious organisations from an organisational perspective. The interviews with representatives from the Swedish, Italian and the UK-based organisations were carried out face-to-face, whereas because of budget constraints the interviews with the representatives from the Polish and German projects were carried out over the internet using Adobe Connect and Skype.

Using semi-structured interviews has some well-acknowledged short-comings; chiefly that the answers are inevitably recollections of experiences and/or conscious responses which may or may not reflect the interviewee's actual interpretation or understanding of a given situation. This potential limitation was addressed by including supporting and corroborating data from the homepages of the organisations, and media reports from reliable sources about the organisations and their projects. Semi-structured interviews were preferred because they enabled the interviewees to talk relatively freely about the subject, which facilitated the exploration of unconsidered dimensions. Once the interviews had been transcribed and translated a thematic analysis was conducted using codes to identify, analyse and report patterns within the data.

Project discussion

Academic discussion on religion and integration

Examples of academic literature on multi-religious approaches to integration are notable largely by their absence. Arguably the one exception is the 2009 'International Organization for Migration' publication 'Integration: A Multi-faith Approach'; a project report which details the results of attempts to work with migrant religious leaders to help migrant communities better understand the expectations and norms of host communities in relation to their own cultural and religious values.²⁸ Whilst interesting and potentially useful learning, it was not intended as an academic study and therefore its methodology and subsequent evidence is relatively weak in identifying how a focus on 'training' religious leaders in this way might enhance integration processes. Studies which specifically focus on FBOs and integration are also rare: Lant's (2017) 'Praxis Community Projects: A Secular Organization? Exploring the Boundaries between Religious and Secular in

Migration Support', in which she explores the possible advantages and disadvantages of being an organisation involved in integration which explicitly draws on religious values, being one of very few examples.

However, despite a gap in literature on multi-religious approaches, over the last two decades the role and potential importance of religion (as understood more broadly) in the integration process has been recognised; and studies in this area have increased exponentially. In very broad terms studies have tended to see religion as either a positive force or 'bridge' which can assist with different dimensions and aspects of integration (see, for example, Borjas and Hilton 1996; Peek 2005; Fonner and Alba 2008; Mayda 2010; Aleksynska and Chiswick 2011; García-Muñoz and Neuman 2012; Ager and Ager 2017); or a 'buffer' and barrier which hinders migrants from integrating with a wider host society (Ghazal-Read 2004; Cadge and Ecklund 2006; Constant et al. 2006; Ramakrishnan and Viramontes 2006; Van Tubergen and Sindradóttir 2011). Many of these studies have also sought to explore an apparent division between Europe and U.S. – with studies seeming to suggest that religion is more likely to assist in successful integration in North America than in Europe. Perhaps inevitably numerous studies have focused on the increasing attention/prejudice to Islam and Muslims in public discussion in Europe (as well as in the U.S.) which has been observed since 9/11 (Allen and Nielsen 2002; Sheridan and Gillett 2005; Strabag and Listhaug 2008).

As would perhaps be expected, as the subject area has developed studies have attempted to problematise these overly simplistic dichotomies and demonstrate that the way in which religion operates in relation to integration is much more complex, and responds to numerous different contextual and environmental factors. More recently studies have sought to identify and comprehend the effect of increasingly complex variables. Examples include: Maliepaard and Phalet's (2012) examination of the impact of minority and majority group contact; Connor and Koenig's (2013) and Voas and Fleischmann's (2012) focus on generational and intergenerational factors; Adida and Laitin's (2016) analysis of the religious identity of host and migrant communities and the role of discrimination in integration; and Borup and Ahlin's (2011) study of whether ethnic origin or religious identity influences acculturation.

There are two additional 'theoretical lenses' which warrant at least recognition in this article, if not the deep attention they deserve due to the limitations of space. Firstly, the growing body literature on 'Migrant Organizations' (MOs),²⁹ and in particular those that have focused predominantly on Islamic organisations (Kortmann 2012; Rosenow-Williams 2012; Kortmann and Rosenow-Williams 2013; Vinding 2013; Rosenow-Williams 2014; Rosenow-Williams and Sezgin 2014) has a potentially important contribution to make to a deeper understanding of the contextual factors which might influence multi-religious approaches to integration. Secondly the current debates on 'post-secularism', and growing challenges to dominant Western secular discourses which have traditionally influenced humanitarian work (Ager and Ager 2017; Beaman, Selby, and Barras 2017; Kidwai 2017; Lant 2017; Wilson and Mavelli 2017). Both of these topics will be returned to in the project discussion and concluding sections.

Defining key concepts: religion and integration

As this brief review of current literature aptly demonstrates, the role of religion in integration processes is still disputed. This is a likely consequence of the myriad of potential

contextual factors that play a role in how religion operates as a force supporting or impeding integration: or in some cases both simultaneously. However, a further issue which has been recognised as affecting studies in this area is the various ways both 'religion' and 'integration' have been used and understood. For instance, when looking at 'religion', Maliepaard and Phalet (2012) have examined religiosity in terms of social identity and a social practice. Alternatively, Knott (2011) has sought to understand religion more widely, exploring integration in four 'arenas' in which religion operates and provides resources: culture, society, history and context. These ideas and concepts are clearly not comparable, and will inevitably impact the research focus, process and results.

Defining religion is a topic which has preoccupied religious studies scholars for decades (King and Hedges 2014). Agreement on a comprehensive and universally accepted definition still has not been reached, and is far beyond this article. However, establishing a working understanding of both religion and integration is desirable and necessary not just for this article, but for future studies in this area. For the purpose of this research project we used a broad and inclusive definition of religion, which recognises the wide variety of culturally and contextually conditioned understandings of religion. This shifts the emphasis away from contemporary Western notions of religion as private and an internalised set of beliefs, to seeing religion as a multifaceted, dynamic and pervasive concept comprising of institutions, communities, hierarchies, rich symbolism and meaning, interacting with the political, social, economic and cultural development of societies. Notions of self-determination and individual understandings were also taken seriously during data collection, and as much care as possible was taken not to project understandings of religion onto project participants.

Similarly, the concept and phenomenon of integration is one that is far from clear and has been widely disputed. Popularly understood ideas of integration conjure up often indistinct concepts of migrants being incorporated successfully into an alternative social setting. However, 'Integration is a chaotic concept: a word used by many but understood differently by most' (Robinson 1998, 118), and as Castles et al note, 'There is no single, generally accepted definition, theory or model of immigrant and refugee integration. The concept continues to be controversial and hotly debated' (2001, 12). That said, in its broadest sense, integration can be understood as the process by which people who are relatively new to a country (i.e. whose roots do not reach deeper than two or three generations) become part of society (Rudiger and Spencer 2003; Esser 2004; Penninx and Garcés-Masareñas 2016).

Scholars have developed numerous and diverse theoretical models in an attempt to identify and measure successful integration (Esser 2001; Ager and Strang 2008; Migrant Integration Policy Index 2015; Penninx and Garcés-Masareñas 2016) Arguably there are some agreed aspects of integration, including recognising that it is a dynamic two-way process of interaction and participation; and that it should promote the economic, cultural, social and civic participation of migrants, and an inclusive sense of belonging at the national and local level (Spencer 2010; see also Penninx et al. 2004; Lindo 2005). Whilst the researchers were aware of this in order to retain some conceptual framework, similar to religion participants and organisations where given the space to articulate their own understandings and ideas in relation to integration. There are evidently advantages and disadvantages to this fluid and participative approach to understanding both religion and integration.

Summary of results of perceived benefits of multi-religious cooperation on integration

In analysing the data, it is possible to distinguish three general areas into which the potential benefits of multi-religious approaches integration can be divided: (a) benefits for integration services and process; (b) benefits for the FBOs and broader religious communities involved; and (c) benefits for wider community cohesion and security. These three areas will be examined systematically below. However as is often the case in the categorisation of data, the complexity of the issues under scrutiny means that the groupings have been made with the intention to act as a device for convenience as opposed to definitive classifications; and all are open to challenge and revision. Inevitably some factors span more than one categorisation, and/or their placement is contestable. For example, advantages for organisations often then translate into improved integration services, which itself is intended to impact on wider community cohesion. A final section reflects briefly on the contribution an exploration of multi-religious approaches to integration can make to the contemporary debate about post-secularism in relation to humanitarian interventions and aid (Table 1).

The following are a selection of quotes from the interviews that are further expanded on in the discussion below:³⁰

- ‘So, is it only Christians we have to help? No, we do not ask about religion. Here everybody is welcome’ (Interview Sweden 2016).
- ‘Religion is a fantastic integration glue. It’s a brilliant way of stripping away all the orientation problems you have if you are new to a completely alien city’ (Interview UK 2016).
- ‘There are many things we have learnt about each other, we have taught each other what Christmas means and what Eid means and about what happens in the mosque. We talk about family issues’ (Interview Sweden 2016).
- ‘Our meeting place, our faith in God, we want to show a God that loves unconditionally, maybe it is the same God we have’ (Interview Sweden 2016).
- ‘It is bringing people together. I think it’s very good if you have together a goal. So, in our case it is to help refugees and what could the other do for helping refugees and how can we work together so I think we can initiate good relationships. They are sustainable, when you work together, and speak together and live together. So, it is sustainable for relationships in other times’ (Interview Germany 2016).
- ‘Our cooperation makes us more visible’ (Interview Sweden 2016).
- ‘People have heard from the Imam that this cooperation is not just between the church and the mosque, he does not want to hear this, everybody has to get together and create some things. Cooperation is not just that you talk about it but that you find human beings to cooperate with’ (Interview Sweden 2016).

Discussion of perceived benefits of multi-religious cooperation on integration

Benefits for integration services and processes

Addressing one of the central debates within the religion and integration literature, the data tentatively supports the notion that multi-religious approaches can overcome

Table 1. Summary of results of perceived benefits of multi-religious cooperation on integration.**(a) Integration services and processes benefits**

- Overcome some of the recognised 'barriers' to integration.
- Improve the quality of integration services available.
- Help host communities meet and understand new migrants and their needs from different religions.
- Counter balance negative stories about religion by showing that religious groups can work together
- Religious leaders can encourage their congregations to warmly welcome the migrants.
- Help migrants understand the different features of host communities, and how interreligious collaboration and cooperation can help build more accepting and cohesive societies.
- Counter the narrative that it is more important to help migrants from a particular faith than from others.

(b) Organisational and religious community benefits

- Cooperation on integration → cooperation in other areas of work.
- Cooperation on integration → long-term relationship.
- Cooperation with one other religious organisation → foster interest in working with other religions/inspire others to cooperate as well = building of horizontal relationships/network.
- Led to internal dialogue about the importance of human beings working together regardless of their religiosity.
- Building relationships between people from different religions through working for a common aim.
- Bottom-up effect = cooperation at the local level → establishment of interreligious councils at the local, regional and national level → building of vertical relationships/networks.
- Greater visibility.
- Challenge dominant secular discourse prevalent in humanitarian work.

(c) Broader community/Societal benefits

- Shift perspectives on the role of religion in society.
- Alleviation of racism and radicalisation.
- Expect cooperation will promote interreligious dialogues and cooperation.
- Working for a common cause → opportunity to show common humanity/love for all.
- Working for a common cause → open space for interreligious dialogue and exchange of knowledge about each other's religious beliefs, festivals and life in general.

some of the problems well-documented in religion acting as a 'buffer' to integration (Ghazal-Read 2004; Cadge and Ecklund 2006; Constant et al. 2006; Ramakrishnan and Viramontes 2006; Van Tubergen and Sindradóttir 2011), and in particular the notion that religion facilitates the 'ghettoisation' of migrants by inhibiting the building of contacts and networks outside their own religious/ethnic communities. In the UK project, for example, it was evident how both Christian and Muslim communities and organisations were involved in helping migrants settle, providing contacts and networks for housing, material assistance, employment opportunities and spiritual/religious support which transcended religious boundaries and established a wide and religiously diverse support network early in the integration experience (Interview UK 2016).

There is also clear evidence that cooperation enhanced the integration practices and services provided. Traditionally in Western liberal contexts and narratives, the inclusion of religious organisations in any humanitarian work was seen as problematic. This was in part because a religious foundation to humanitarian work was seen to contradict the foundational (and arguably erroneous) principles of neutrality and impartiality (Heist and Cnaan 2016), but also because religious organisations were often seen as lacking in professionalism, relevant skills and experience, and the fear that religious organisation saw humanitarian work as an opportunity to proselytise (see Beaman, Selby, and Barras 2017; Lant 2017; Wilson and Mavelli 2017). Whilst generalisations about FBOs are unhelpful, it is also undeniable that in some cases these critiques are not without foundation: and in the past faith-based initiatives and organisations were sometimes staffed by the willing and religiously inspired, with little professional experience or training.

Times have evidently changed, and many of the largest and most well established humanitarian organisations do have some faith origins or foundations. However, in response to increased migration there is little doubt that smaller, less professional religious community groups and organisations have felt compelled to become involved in the area of integration, with the associated problems. It was evident in the examples examined that multi-religious collaboration helped avoid some of the potential weaknesses and criticisms levelled at FBOs. For example, in the German context, FBOs with little experience in integration (often Muslim) partnered with others with substantial knowledge (usually Christian), helping bridge the experience and skills gap (Interview Germany 2016). Similarly, in Sweden collaboration saw mosque volunteers who possessed the language skills necessary to communicate with the new migrants, and vital knowledge of and experience with the cultures the migrants come from, mutually compliment the church-led initiative which had the institutional knowledge about immigration and refugee processes (Interview Sweden 2016). Another initiative in Germany worked with the Jewish community who had experience and empathy with the refugee experience, and could help on a range of issues (Interview Germany 2016). All tangible examples of complementarity which evidently helped improve integration services and experiences.

It is possible to identify a range of other potential benefits which can be seen to directly enhance integration practices and processes. Multi-religious cooperation can assist in the building of relations amongst diverse communities and constituents, providing important opportunities to meet the 'other' humanising migrants and hosts, and breaking down inaccurate and negative stereotypes. Religious leaders from the different religious communities have been involved in this process; and the importance of their engagement in humanitarian and peacebuilding work is being increasingly recognised (Lederach 1998; Appleby 2000; Gopin 2000; Hertog 2010). These encounters can also help migrants understand more clearly the different features and expectations of host communities and societies, offering a broader perspective than if they quickly became embedded within a community that was predominantly made up of their own religious/ethnic constituents.

Organisational and religious community benefits

For both formal organisations and the supporting religious communities, data indicated that multi-religious cooperation on integration led to a number of notable developments and opportunities, particularly in relation to cooperation in other areas, and the initiation of more and stronger horizontal and vertical networks. For example, in Sweden; whereas the mosque and church initially began by providing shelter and food for the migrants, they now also run language courses and an information-service where migrants can get help with navigating the social support system (Interview Sweden 2016; Kyrkan 2017). The project members have also been contacted by other mosques and churches from around Sweden that want to learn more about their collaboration with a view to setting up similar projects (Interview Sweden 2016). In Germany, some multi-religious projects that started out providing basic help to migrants have also led to increased cooperation in language courses and visits to different places of worship (Interview Germany 2016). Likewise, the number of multi-religious projects in German is increasing, and has also led to the initiation of regional interreligious councils (Interview Germany 2016), with

the multi-religious cooperation helping migrants seen as an important step in the promotion of wider interreligious dialogue (Interview Germany 2016).

In accordance with intergroup contact theory (Everett 2013) coming together as local religious communities to work for a common cause has positively impacted on the relations between the broader religious communities. In Sweden volunteers from the mosque and the church have progressed from the practical issues involved in working together on integration, to dialogue about each other's religious beliefs, festivals and life in general (Interview Sweden 2016). Church-goers and religious leaders have visited the mosque and vice versa. Relationships at all levels of the religious community have been improved. Similarly, in Germany participants from different religions have visited each other's places of worship and explored each other's religions (Interview Germany 2017).

The multi-religious aspect of the cooperation on integration had also helped provide greater visibility about the positive work that the religious organisations are undertaking. An example of this comes from Germany where the launch event of a project was attended by the Secretary of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and attracted wide public attention (Interview Germany 2016). The Swedish project has also been showcased on the UNHCR webpage (Crouch 2016). In a sector that is dominated by secular narratives, where the role of religious actors is not well understood, documented or even accepted, and competition for funding is severe, positive publicity can help heighten the profile of religious organisations and thereby help them establish themselves as important contributors to the welcoming and integration of migrants (Ager and Ager 2017).

Broader community/societal benefits

In terms of broader community and social cohesion, multi-religious cooperation can be seen to have a number of significant and highly topical benefits. For migrants from countries where religion and religious identity has played a negative role in division and conflict, multi-religious collaboration and contact with religious organisations and individuals from apparently opposing sides can be a hugely beneficial and educative experience; although evidently this is a process and encounter that must be handled with caution and expertise. It can help graphically demonstrate that in host countries characteristics of society are different from the migrants' home countries, and assist them in adjusting to these variances. Multi-religious collaboration in host countries can clearly demonstrate how people of different and sometimes apparently contradictory religious beliefs can socialise together and build a democratic peaceful society together; work and co-exist side by side; and accept freedom of religious belief and practice without hostility.

In Sweden refugees from the Middle East were surprised to see a mix of Christian and Muslim refugees in the Swedish mosque and the cooperation between the mosque and the church (Interview Sweden 2016), and were reassured by a representative from the mosque that this is one of the ways Sweden is different from their home countries (Interview Sweden 2016). In Germany, it was revealed that for Muslims refugees who have fled violent conflicts with religious dimensions, experiencing multi-religious cooperation helped them see that religions can act as a positive force to bring people together (Interview Germany 2016; Krings 2016; Interview Germany 2017). Relatedly, staff from the projects in Germany reported that migrants from some Middle Eastern countries in particular

are not used to religious freedom, and seeing multi-religious cooperation helps them become accustomed to this unfamiliar idea (Interview Germany 2016; Kiesel 2016; Interview Germany 2017). These examples are a theme taken up by post-secular theorists, who have argued that contrary to dominant discourse values such as freedom, democracy and equality can sometimes be better promoted in a framework that is not exclusively secular (Wagenvoorde 2017).

Multi-religious cooperation can also help counter some of the prevalent narratives that are increasingly being seen to drive societal division in Europe, and as harmful to community cohesion. It can help oppose beliefs that it is more important to help migrants from one particular religion than others: and in the case of migration into Europe that usually means Christians as opposed to Muslims. This is a narrative that is particularly widespread in the U.S. (Goodstein 2017; Hurd 2017), but also expressed by influential politicians in some Eastern European states including Poland, Slovakia and Hungary (BBC 2015; McLaughlin 2016; Wagenvoorde 2017; Wilson and Mavelli 2017), as well as by fringe groups in many other European countries. Multi-religious collaboration challenges these prejudices, and by its nature rejects exclusive attitudes towards other religious and ethnic identities. This is particularly important as existing evidence demonstrates that isolation and victimisation based on religious identity can in some instances increase the likelihood of communities and individuals becoming more militant and violent (Appleby 2000; Toft, Philpott, and Shah 2011). An example of this is from Sweden where the representatives from the mosque and the church were eager to emphasise that they did not ask the migrants about their religion and that they welcomed everybody regardless of their religious background (Interview Sweden).

The data collected also tentatively indicates that multi-religious cooperation can help counter racism and Islamophobia. There is significant literature on the ways in which religious leaders can influence the way people think, and encouraging their congregations to warmly welcome the migrants into their local community can have a positive impact (Wilson and Mavelli 2017). In particular, religious leaders can use the case of multi-religious cooperation on the integration of migrants as an example of what can be achieved when you reach out to and cooperate with people from other religions. This was the case in Poland where a local Catholic Church was concerned about increasing racism and Islamophobia in its congregation, and consequently started a dialogue with other religious communities in order to help promote tolerance and change perceptions within its own congregation (Interview Poland 2016). Again, in Sweden; an Imam in his Friday prayer sermon used the mosque's cooperation with a local church on welcoming and integrating migrants as an example of the importance of getting to know people from other faiths and of working together with them (Interview Sweden 2016).

Multi-religious cooperation on assisting in the integration of migrants can potentially also help alleviate the fear that migrants have been/are being radicalised. This is especially important and pertinent in Europe today, with the issue of migration being increasingly securitised and Muslim migrants seen as a threat to security (Falk 2017). Religious leaders and volunteers from the different religions can jointly speak out against negative perceptions and stereotypes concerning radicalisation and terrorism. In Sweden Imams, priests, deacons, volunteers and members of the congregations of the church and mosque from the Goda Grannar project attended the 'Love Manifestation' after the terrorist attack in Stockholm in April 2017 together and laid flowers to honour the victims

(Aftonbladet 2017). Another example from Germany saw religious leaders calling on Christian, Muslim and Jewish refugee helpers to jointly refute the fear that migrants are radicalised and for religious leaders to visit refugee centres together to show their shared compassion and commitment to religious freedom (Dröge 2016 and Pürlü 2016).

Multi-religious approaches to integration and post-secular discourse

Multi-religious approaches to integration might also offer a notable contribution to current debates on 'post-secularism'; and in particular the growing challenge to the dominant Western secular discourse which has traditionally influenced humanitarian work. It has been noted that despite their religious affiliation many FBOs have had to focus largely on secular activities in order to conform to the broadly agreed parameters of humanitarian assistance national and international refugee policy frameworks, and to qualify for related funding (Ager and Ager 2017). Kidwai has highlighted that the secular orientated development and humanitarian sectors have long distrusted religious actors

due to fears of proselytization; assumptions that faith values will inherently be at odds with human rights; and in recent years, suspicion that the activities of faith-based organizations in conflict zones (namely Muslim organizations) would fall foul of counter-terror legislation. (2017, 177)

Kidwai has also contended that though the development and humanitarian sectors are increasing accepting and engaging religious actors, religious values are still not recognised which she suggests is problematic *because* 'the removal of faith considerations from humanitarian and development activities leaves a stark gap in meeting the essential needs of beneficiary communities' (2017, 177).

An emergent post-secular approach encourages a rethink that includes acknowledging the potential role of religion in helping migrants come to terms with their new situation and in integrating them into their new host communities (Ager and Ager 2017). FBOs involved in multi-religious collaborations are responding to the more practical needs, helping migrants understand how public services work, housing, material support, legal aid, etc., as well as cultural awareness and relationship building, including learning local laws, customs and language, and the establishment of new social contacts and networks (Interview Germany 2016; Interview UK 2016 and Kyrkan 2017); However in addition to these important services they are also well equipped to introduce migrants into relevant local religious communities, and facilitate emotional, religious and spiritual support; which can be imperative for the well-being of some religious migrants who have experienced significant trauma (Hertog 2010; Ager and Ager 2017). The projects presented here shows that some FBOs are at the forefront of dealing with the complex identities and requirements of migrants, which do merely cut across secular and religious classifications, but also challenge and blur the boundaries between this simplistic dichotomy.

Perhaps one of the greatest concerns and criticisms of FBOs within the area of humanitarian assistance is the issue of 'aid conversion'; participating in humanitarian work with the implicit and sometimes explicit intent of conversion, and/or making assistance dependent on the religious affiliation of migrants (Beaman, Selby, and Barras 2017; Lant 2017; Wilson and Mavelli 2017). Whether this is true or not, legitimate questions can and have been asked about the suitability of involving religious organisations in

assisting migrants, due to fears vulnerable migrants might feel pressured into claiming allegiance to a particular religion and/or over-emphasising their religiosity in order to gain help (Beaman, Selby and Barras 2017).

It is plausible to suggest that multi-religious cooperation can in some instances help overcome these problems. Different religions working together can show migrants that they are all considered equally deserving of help regardless of their religious or secular background. Furthermore, multi-religious collaboration can often result in a 'creative tension' which often exists when different religions work together. The delicate balance between not wanting to dismiss or disrespect another's religion, whilst simultaneously avoiding compromising one's own religious ideals and beliefs, can lead to organisations from different religion's searching for shared moral, ethical and spiritual ideals. These common principles are very often closely comparable to Universal Human Rights. Hence multi-religious cooperation can, help avoid the promotion of one particular religion over another; promote the notion that basic human rights apply to all human beings regardless of their religious affiliation; and counter tendencies towards proselytisation which would inevitably undermine a multi-religious ethos and practical collaboration and benefits.

Conclusion

Whilst this research project is in its early stages and will be expanded over the coming years, this is the first study which attempts to chart the tangible and potential benefits of multi-religious approaches to integration from an organisational perspective. While existing literature recognises that historically religion has in a variety of ways impacted both negatively and positively on integration, this study demonstrates that FBOs' contributions to integration can potentially be enhanced in a number of ways through the adoption of a multi-religious approach. A multi-religious approach can help counter some of the problems associated with religion acting as a barrier to integration, by expanding social networks, countering negative stereotypes and perceptions through opportunities for engagement, and encouraging migrants to look beyond potentially exclusive religious and ethnic communities and identities. The pressures and fears on host societies and communities should also not be lightly dismissed; and there is good indication that multi-religious collaborations can also benefit existing inhabitants in a number of important ways.

However, what became quickly evident in undertaking this project is that multi-religious co-operation is far from the norm, and there are a number of reasons for this. It was emphasised in interviews that it was difficult to establish contacts with organisations from other faiths because interfaith dialogue and cooperation is still in its infancy in many places. Consequently, there is a need for the establishment of local, regional and national platforms where leaders and representatives from religious organisations and communities can meet, and vertical and horizontal networks between relevant actors can be developed. In addition, whilst there was a willingness to co-operate with different religious groups and organisations, several interviewees revealed an initial reluctance largely due to anxieties over lack of knowledge and experience, and as a result there is need for some form of guidance that can support interested parties in their endeavours; and an attempt to develop such a model has already been initiated in Sweden.

This research also has significance for government policy and practice. It identifies a lack of funding in this area, and hence a reliance on volunteers, for carrying out project activities

and management. This often jeopardises the projects' sustainability and potential for expansion. If the findings of this project are taken seriously more funding for such initiatives needs to be more readily available. This is already happening in Germany where the Ministry of Internal Affairs has made substantial resources available; and even made the funding of integration projects conditional on a multi-faith approach. More than 40 projects have been established based on this criterion, and a call has recently been made to G20 leaders to ensure this kind of funding is also available in other countries (Casey et al. 2017).

However, as a new subject area there is also evidently much greater scope for research, and in order to enhance our understanding the study of multi-religious approaches to integration needs to be approached from a range of different perspectives. Perhaps most notably, an important addition to this study would be give voice and listen to migrants themselves. This important next step is currently being developed, with the intention over 2018 to interview a range of migrants from the four case study countries. Furthermore, whilst some of the claimed benefits are already being realised as part of the collaboration process, some of the assertions made here are more speculative, and longitudinal analysis is required in order to corroborate some of the more long-term perceived benefits of a multi-religious approach. More case studies from a greater array of different contexts are also required in order to more understand more thoroughly under what circumstances a multi-religious response would be most useful. Furthermore, a comparative study between non-faith based, faith-based and multi-religious-based projects focusing on integrating migrants would also help elicit the possible differences a multi-faith approach can bring.

Whilst this project has begun to demonstrate that multi-religious approaches can be effective in certain contexts, an extremely important area for future studies is developing a much more comprehensive understanding of the contextual factors and variable which are likely to impact on the success and effectiveness of multi-religious approaches. This is an area which can learn much from the growing body of work on Migrant Organisations; where studies have sought to understand the influence of social and political factors such as national integration policies and 'regime of religious governance' (Kortmann 2012; Vinding 2013), and used organisational theory to understand the internal and external factors which shape organisational priorities and activities (Kortmann and Rosenow-Williams 2013; Rosenow-Williams 2014; Rosenow-Williams and Sezgin 2014).

However, whilst potentially extremely valuable, existing studies on MOs tend to use the nation state as the main unit of analysis, whereas this article would suggest multi-religious integration factors would need to be disaggregated to a more local level: with the integration of Syrian refugees into rural areas of the UK an example of attempting to preempt the challenges to the integration of migrants experienced in some UK cities. Furthermore, existing studies tend to address individual organisations, and the complex interaction involved in multi-religious collaboration would conceivably demand a reorientation of theoretical frameworks used in the study of MOs. That said, this is a potentially important area to engage with, and may offer some significant insights into why it is often Christian organisations initiating and leading integration projects and multi-religious networks, and why Islamic organisations often appear to lack the willingness or confidence to take the lead role.

It is perhaps important to end by acknowledging that FBOs participation in integration (and community and international development more widely) is not without criticism. However, evidently negative perceptions are slowly beginning to change. An important

indicator of this shift is the UNHCR's *Dialogue on Faith and Protection* initiated in 2012 that aimed at establishing a better understanding of religious structures, capacities and networks and how they can be applied in the international humanitarian sector (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2012; Ager and Ager 2017). Other actors such as the German government and the World Bank have since joined the UN in recognising the important role religious actors can play in this area (Ager and Ager 2017). That said, it is not our intention in this paper to simplistically reverse the traditional secular bias and suggest that a multi-religious approach to integration will always be desirable. Much more research needs to be carried out on the increasingly complex and changing relationship between 'religious' and 'secular' discourses in Europe, and it remains to be seen how that impacts on future understandings of what integration services and processes should offer, and who are deemed as legitimate organisations for delivering them. However, this article is an important first step.

Notes

1. There is much debate over the exact meanings of the terms religion and faith, which cannot be adequately addressed in this article. In this study, the terms multi-religious and religion are used and understood as more comprehensive ways of describing religions and traditions that can incorporate the more personal and individual dimension of religious belief often referred to as 'faith'. That said this understanding is not definitively accepted; and where necessary we acknowledge and respect organisations' and individuals' interpretation and use of the word faith, as opposed to religion.
2. See, for example, Religions for Peace International <http://www.religionsforpeace.org>; United Religions Initiative <http://www.uri.org/>; European Network on Religion and Belief <http://enorb.eu/> amongst many others.
3. See, for example, <http://www.weisstduwerichbin.de/bewerben/>
4. See <http://www.redcross.org.uk/en/Where-we-work/In-the-UK/Southern-England/Hampshire-Isle-of-Wight-and-Surrey/LocalServices/Refugee-support>
5. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/godagrannar/>; <http://www.unhcr.org/570bb0c16.html>
6. <http://www.weisstduwerichbin.de/aktuell/>
7. <https://www.facebook.com/AfrykaConnectFoundation/>
8. <http://www.mediterraneanhope.com/corridoi-umanitari-0>
9. <http://www.redcross.org.uk/What-we-do/Refugee-support/Our-services-for-refugees>
10. See <http://swvg-refugees.org.uk/public/index.php/about-swvg/who-we-are>
11. See <http://www.citylife.org.uk/category/projects/>
12. See <http://www.southampton-faiths.org/>
13. Interview with Red Cross representative, 18th November 2016.
14. Interview with one representative from the church and one representative from the mosque, 21st November 2016.
15. See <http://www.stockholmsmoske.se/>
16. See <https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/katarina#chlist-view=week&chlist-today=2016-12-15T10%3A20%3A46.000Z&chlist-selected=2016-12-15T00%3A00%3A00.000Z&chlist-pagination.top=3&chlist-pagination.skip=0&chlist-type=date&chlist-filter=day>
17. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/godagrannar/>; <http://www.unhcr.org/570bb0c16.html>
18. *Arbeitsgemeinschaft Christlicher Kirchen in Deutschland*. See www.oekumene-ack.de
19. *Türkisch Islamische Union der Anstalt für Religion*. See www.ditib.de
20. *Islamrat für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland*. See www.islamrat.de
21. *Verband der Islamischen Kulturzentren*. See www.vikz.de
22. *Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland*. See www.zentralrat.de
23. *Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland*. See www.zentralratderjuden.de

24. <http://www.weisstduwerichbin.de/ueber-uns/das-projekt/>
25. <http://www.weisstduwerichbin.de/ueber-uns/projektideen/>
26. <https://www.facebook.com/AfrykaConnectFoundation/>
27. <https://www.facebook.com/events/765653590239138/>
28. Can be accessed at http://84.234.74.196/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=71:integration-a-multifaith-approach-iaa&catid=39:integration&Itemid=150
29. Rosenow-Williams & Sezgin suggest that ‘an organization is defined as a migrant organization if (1) at least half of its members are migrants, (2) it has an enduring, stable, and visible vertical and horizontal structure and (3) issues regarding migrants area a part of its activities and claims (2014, 324: footnote 1).
30. Further quotes and evidence are provided in Appendix 1 in the Supplemental Material.

Acknowledgements

Acknowledgement and gratitude must go to Malgorzata Radomska for her work in scoping out existing literature on religion and migration, and to the two blind peer reviewers for their extremely helpful and perceptive comments.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

This work was supported by the European Council of Religious Leaders.

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