

# The role of community resilience in sustaining home

A case study on an integrative housing project connecting  
students with and without a refugee background

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**Abstract:**

With an empirical study on an integrative housing project in Vienna, this thesis offers a novel examination of the emerging theory of community resilience. The research explores how the reaction of a community to an external stressor can be explained by mechanisms of community resilience. More specifically, by means of qualitative research including 22 interviews with residents and other stakeholders involved, this thesis examines how the reaction to the announced project closure can be explained by the mechanisms of active agents, community resources and collective action. The findings reveal that throughout the HAWI project, residents with and without a refugee background formed a community and when confronted with the unexpected stressor of project closure, they decided to continue the project on their own. Their reaction can indeed be explained by mechanisms of community resilience, as residents became active agents in the context of change, deployed and further developed their resources and engaged in collective action, demonstrating collective efforts which are continuing until today.

**Keywords:** *active agents; collective action; community; community resilience; community resources*

## Introduction

In 2015, asylum applications throughout the European Union peaked to more than 1,3 million, which is a significant increase from 627'000 in 2014 (Eurostat, 2018). Consequently, the number of asylum seekers in reception centres and emergency shelters rose substantially. According to Pasel, Hagner, Drexler, and Boch (2016), such shelters provide limited privacy and impede the interaction with the local population which is likely to undermine the mobility of asylum seekers and eventually excludes them from the host society. Pasel et al. (2016) argue, that the situation of young, often male, asylum seekers within a new city resembles to a certain extent the position of students. Students and asylum seekers alike are new to the city and seek affordable housing and contact with others in order to start to build a future. Since students are usually expected to be rather tolerant, flexible and open towards new experiences, they are often considered as a suitable group to put in contact with asylum seekers through integrative housing projects (Pasel et al., 2016). As a result, one can observe an increasing trend of integrative housing projects in several European cities appealing to students and asylum seekers with and without status, such as 'Startblok Riekerhaven' in Amsterdam ("Startblok

Riekerhaven," 2018), 'Integrationsprojekt Kistlerhofstrasse' in Munich ("Integrationsprojekt Kistlerhofstrasse," 2018), or projects of 'Home not Shelter!' ("Home not Shelter! Gemeinsam leben statt getrennt wohnen," 2018). The latter aims to implement several projects in urban and socially mixed neighbourhoods closely located to educational institutions throughout Europe. According to Pasel et al. (2016), the initiative intends to support the integration of students with a refugee background<sup>1</sup>. Through a heterogeneous mix of residents and the stimulation of occasional contact in common spaces, new spatial and social forms of successfully living together can be created. Central to 'Home not Shelter!' is the participation and collaboration of all participants throughout the project development as this enhances self-efficacy and autonomy among the people involved (Pasel et al., 2016).

In collaboration with the next ENTERprise Architects and the aid organisation Caritas, 'Home not Shelter!' realised the first pilot project HAWI in September 2016 in Vienna ("Places for People," 2016). By providing spaces where students with and without a refugee background can easily interact, meet and engage in common activities, HAWI could enhance daily contact between residents to increase the belonging and identification as a social group (Pelzer, 2016). However, whereas the project was planned for three years, residents were informed in the beginning of January 2018 that HAWI would be closed by the end of June 2018. The decision by Caritas was explained by the 42 per cent decrease of asylum applications in Vienna, leading to fewer residents in HAWI and a shortage of rents which co-financed the project (Gaigg, 2018). According to several newspaper articles (Gaigg, 2018; Schrenk, 2018), the decision to close HAWI generated a lot of protest and opposition among the residents. For them HAWI did not only provide accommodation, but also a place where they could share a sense of belonging, engage in social interactions, and live in spatial proximity, which are according to Platts-Fowler and Robinson (2016), characteristics of a community. The formation of a community likely influenced the reaction of HAWI residents to the project closure, as they aimed to continue the project on their own (Gaigg, 2018). Here the question arose, how HAWI residents intended to continue the project and to what extent their reaction could be considered as community resilience.

Community resilience can be defined as "a positive, adaptive response to adversity" (Chaskin, 2008, p. 66). Resilience originally stems from ecology where the concept describes

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<sup>1</sup> The literature on integrative housing projects usually makes a distinction between *students* and *asylum seekers or refugees*, but as asylum seekers or refugees can be students as well, this distinction seems unsuitable. Therefore, this thesis will distinguish between *students with* and *without a refugee background*. In this thesis, students with a refugee background refer to asylum seekers.

how much change a system can resist without changing its structure (Mehmood, 2016). The concept of resilience gained increasing relevance in other disciplines, such as biology, applied science and social sciences. The latter usually refers to social resilience, or community resilience, which not only describes how systems, organisms or people react to stressors without changing its structure, but also how they adapt to the situation to create something new (Cheshire, 2015). Hence, communities are not only reactive but also proactive and have the ability to adapt and transform in response to change (Davoudi, 2012). According to this definition of resilience, stressors can provide opportunities for innovation and development (Cheshire, 2015).

Although, it is a concept gaining attention among policy makers and scholars, community resilience remains hard to operationalise. The literature on community resilience is not clear about which mechanisms influence community resilience and how they contribute to it (Kulig, Edge, Townshend, Lightfoot, & Reimer, 2013; Matarrita-Cascante, Trejos, Qin, Joo, & Debner, 2017). Moreover, scientific literature on community resilience is mainly based on a conceptual understanding and empirical evidence to demonstrate how various mechanisms contribute to community resilience remains scarce (Kulig et al., 2013). The few empirical studies which have been conducted usually refer to stressors and changes due to natural disasters (Fay-Ramireza, Antrobusa, & Piquerob, 2015; LaLone, 2012; Waters, 2016), whereas change due to societal and economic processes and political decision-making is less explored (Platts-Fowler & Robinson, 2016; Wilson, 2012). Additionally, existing research often undermines the agency of actors to deal with and influence stressors and changes (Platts-Fowler & Robinson, 2016). This research project is scientifically relevant as it adds to the scarcity of empirical research on how societal and economic processes influence community resilience by conducting an empirical study on how HAWI residents react on the stressor of project closure. Moreover, the operationalisation of the concept and the collection of empirical data adds to the scientific underpinning and grounding of the concept of community resilience.

Besides its scientific relevance, this research also has societal relevance. As stated earlier, integrative housing projects are increasingly emerging throughout Europe, often involving students with and without a refugee background. In the media, there is a consensus that such projects have a positive impact on its participants, leading to increased interaction between different social groups and better integration of migrants (Gaigg, 2018; Tran, 2016; Van der Kooi, 2017). After examining two integrative housing projects in Germany and Austria, Pelzer (2016) found that such project might not lead to the desired outcome of integration and social interaction but rather result in conflicts due to individual and cultural

differences. By studying the interpersonal relations within HAWI, Pelzer (2016) noticed that the obligations tied to the project and the different background of residents often impeded their participation and interaction, and therefore contradict the media claims. Except for the scientific study conducted by Pelzer (2016), there is little research on the processes and developments within integrative housing projects. Since the media often demonstrates the success of such projects without empirical evidence to support it, it is interesting to conduct research to provide better insights into the internal developments within integrative housing projects. Moreover, the study on HAWI by Pelzer (2016) was conducted before the announcement of project closure. As it is likely that the new stressor of project closure and initiative of residents to continue the project on their own impacted the internal developments of the project, this research will contribute with new findings on HAWI.

Hence, this research aims to provide insights into how HAWI residents intend to continue the project on their own and sustain home. More specifically, the involvement of residents, the resources used and the actions taken will be examined to explain their reaction by mechanisms of community resilience. This objective led to the following question which stands central to this research: *How can the reaction of HAWI residents to the project closure be explained by mechanisms of community resilience?*

## **Theoretical framework**

This section will outline the theoretical framework of this thesis and elaborate on the concept of community resilience, followed by the three community resilience mechanisms of *active agents*, *community resources* and *collective action*.

### **Community resilience**

The concept of community resilience has become popular in examining how communities react to adversities and changes. A first wave of scholars has considered resilience as the capacity of communities to re-establish themselves into their pre-existing state after being exposed to stressors, which is also called *bounce back* (Beilin & Wilkinson, 2015; Skerratt, 2013). On the contrary, a second wave has suggested that communities do not necessarily go back to their pre-existing state but can also *bounce forward* and adapt to the new situation by absorbing stressors and transform themselves (Cheshire, 2015; Keck & Sakdapolrak, 2013; Mehmood, 2016; Platts-Fowler & Robinson, 2016). According to a conceptual research by Keck and Sakdapolrak (2013), there has been a focus on three types of capacities through which

community resilience can be understood: *coping*, *adaptive* and *transformative capacities*. Coping capacities are related to *bounce back* and refer to reactive measures of people using directly available resources for short term solutions to restore the well-being of communities without undergoing severe changes. On the contrary, adaptive capacities refer to pro-active or preventive measures of people to secure the present and future well-being of communities by using their past experiences, anticipate future risks, and adjust their daily lives which falls under the notion of *bounce forward*. Transformative capacities, also in line with *bounce forward*, go a step further and involve long-term perspectives for change which can lead to progressive development as well as radical functional and structural changes of communities (Keck & Sakdapolrak, 2013). To introduce new structures and functions and redefine a system, communities require the capacity to learn and innovate, access to resources and the ability to participate in decision-making processes (Keck & Sakdapolrak, 2013). This research will apply three mechanisms of community resilience which seem to reoccur throughout existing conceptual and empirical research: *active agents* which refers to the agency of community members to influence and effect change and the community as a whole (Brown & Westaway, 2011; Chaskin, 2008; Koster, 2014; Magis, 2010; Masik, 2018; Platts-Fowler & Robinson, 2016), *community resources* which are deployed and further developed to enhance community resilience (Magis, 2010; Matarrita-Cascante & Trejos, 2013; Matarrita-Cascante et al., 2017; Waters, 2016) and *collective action* which refers to the collective effort of a community to reach a common goal (Chaskin, 2008; Cottrell, 1976; Kulig et al., 2013; Magis, 2010; Norris, Stevens, Pfefferbaum, Wyche, & Pfefferbaum, 2008; Platts-Fowler & Robinson, 2016).

### **Active agents**

Throughout the literature on community resilience, it is increasingly acknowledged that community members actively participate in the response of communities to change and contribute to the communities' development and wellbeing which makes them *active agents* in the context of change (Brown & Westaway, 2011; Magis, 2010). Conceptual research by Brown and Westaway (2011, p. 322) has found that community members demonstrate agency which is "generally understood to mean the capacity of individuals to act independently to make their own free choices". By using their individual skills, networks and access to resources, community members can not only increase the well-being within a community, but also enhance the engagement of a community to act and to reach a common goal (Koster, 2014). According to a conceptual research by Wilkinson (1991), the agency of community members depends on their interaction and engagement with each other. Increased social

interaction and involvement can further enhance a “sense of rootedness” or “feeling at home”, which is also described as community attachment (Theodori, 2000). Empirical findings by Brennan and Luloff (2007) demonstrated that the attachment of community members influences their ability to identify community needs and to improve the conditions of their community. Hence, besides participation and proactive attitude, the agency of community members increases with their attachment to the community (Matarrita-Cascante et al., 2017). Community members can become actors who can purposefully and strategically anticipate, prevent, mitigate and respond to changes (Magis, 2010; Masik, 2018). Therefore, community members should be recognised as key stakeholders with regard to community resilience.

### **Community resources**

In order to take action and effect change, several authors have identified the importance of internal and external resources through conceptual (Chaskin, 2008; Magis, 2010; Matarrita-Cascante et al., 2017) and empirical research (Cheshire, 2015; LaLone, 2012; Platts-Fowler & Robinson, 2016). There is a general presumption, that the availability and accessibility of resources increases the resilience of a community (Magis, 2010; Matarrita-Cascante et al., 2017). Only if community members develop and deploy community resources, community resilience can be further enhanced to achieve shared community objectives and effectively respond to change (Magis, 2010). Community resources which are strategically invested to reach community objectives, are also referred to as *community capitals* (Magis, 2010). Whereas Bourdieu (1986) identified *economic*, *cultural* and *social capital* which dominate in conceptual literature, an empirical study by Platts-Fowler and Robinson (2016) revealed, aside from social capital, the importance of *human* and *political capital*. After conceptualising community resilience, Magis (2010) demonstrated the incompleteness of list of capitals and stressed the importance to recognise *human*, *political*, *social*, *natural*, *cultural*, *financial*, and *built capital*. Natural capital refers to resources from the natural environment; human capital refers to individual acquired attributes such as skills and knowledge; cultural capital refers to a shared perspective on norms and values; financial capital refers to the availability of financial resources; political capital refers to the access to power; built capital refers to the built environment, and social capital refers to social networks (Magis, 2010).

According to conceptual research (Chaskin, 2008; Keck & Sakdapolrak, 2013) and empirical studies (Fay-Ramireza et al., 2015; LaLone, 2012; Platts-Fowler & Robinson, 2016; Waters, 2016), social capital is considered to play a key role to build and maintain community resilience. Social capital can be described as “the glue which holds a community together” and

is defined by the internal and external networks of a community (Fruechte, 2011, p. 1). Such networks enable the exchange and further enhancement of resources such as knowledge, ideas, and values which can generate norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness and strengthen the community (Fruechte, 2011; Putnam, 2007). In line with Putnam (2007), Magis (2010) distinguishes between *bonding* and *bridging* social capital. *Bonding* capital refers to close ties within groups consisting of people who are alike and enhances in-group cohesion. *Bridging* capital refers to loose ties between different groups which can expand their resources by being exposed to differences (Magis, 2010; Putnam, 2007). Magis (2010) further added *linking* social capital which refers to vertical relations of groups with people who have more power. By having various social ties, communities can create multiple links to multiple groups which further enhances their access to resources and opportunities (Magis, 2010). Although, social capital seems to play a key role in community resilience, this research will consider all capitals identified by Magis (2010).

### **Collective action**

Conceptual research by Chaskin (2008) and Magis (2010) revealed the importance of action with regard to community resilience. More specifically, Chaskin (2008, p. 67) identified community resilience as “a collective attribute and foundation for action”. The active participation and involvement of community members makes them active agents (Magis, 2010) who can not only encompass individual but also *collective action* (Davidson, 2010). Collective action refers to the collective effort to reach community objectives. The efficiency of collective action can be further enhanced if diverse autonomous groups collaborate to accomplish a common objective (Magis, 2010). According to a conceptual research by Chaskin (2008), there are three sorts of community actions. Firstly, *regrouping*, which indicates the reorganisation of community resources to fulfil community needs. Secondly, *redevelopment*, which involves activities and arrangements to react to external pressures. Thirdly, *resistance*, which refers to the disagreement of a community with certain measures and how such measures are adapted to their own demands.

According to Cottrell (1976), there are four steps towards collective action of a community: community members commonly identify the needs of the community; reach a consensus regarding their goals and priorities; agree on ways and means how to implement such goals; and mutually take action. However, if there is mistrust, conflict or disagreement among community members, collective action is likely to be impeded (Norris et al., 2008). Therefore, community members must have a positive and proactive attitude to successfully



collaborate, organise activities and engage in collective action. Purposeful and strategic action of communities can also be referred to as “bottom-up politics of struggle and resistance” (Platts-Fowler & Robinson, 2016, p. 769). Empirical findings by Camps-Calvet, Langemeyer, Calvet-Mir, Gómez-Baggethun, and March (2015) and Cretney and Bond (2016) further revealed the importance of informal common spaces where communities can meet, interact, exchange knowledge, and develop social cohesion. Hence, it seems that collective action is influenced by several variables, such as the collaboration between community members, the organisation of common activities and events, and common spaces where a community can meet and enhance social cohesion.

### Conceptual model and sub questions

To examine the reaction of HAWI residents to the closure of the project, the community resilience mechanisms of *active agents*, *community resources* and *collective action* are applied. Within the theoretical framework several variables influencing these mechanisms are identified and therefore included in the conceptual model below. The conceptual model demonstrates how these variables and mechanisms are related to community resilience (*Figure 1*).

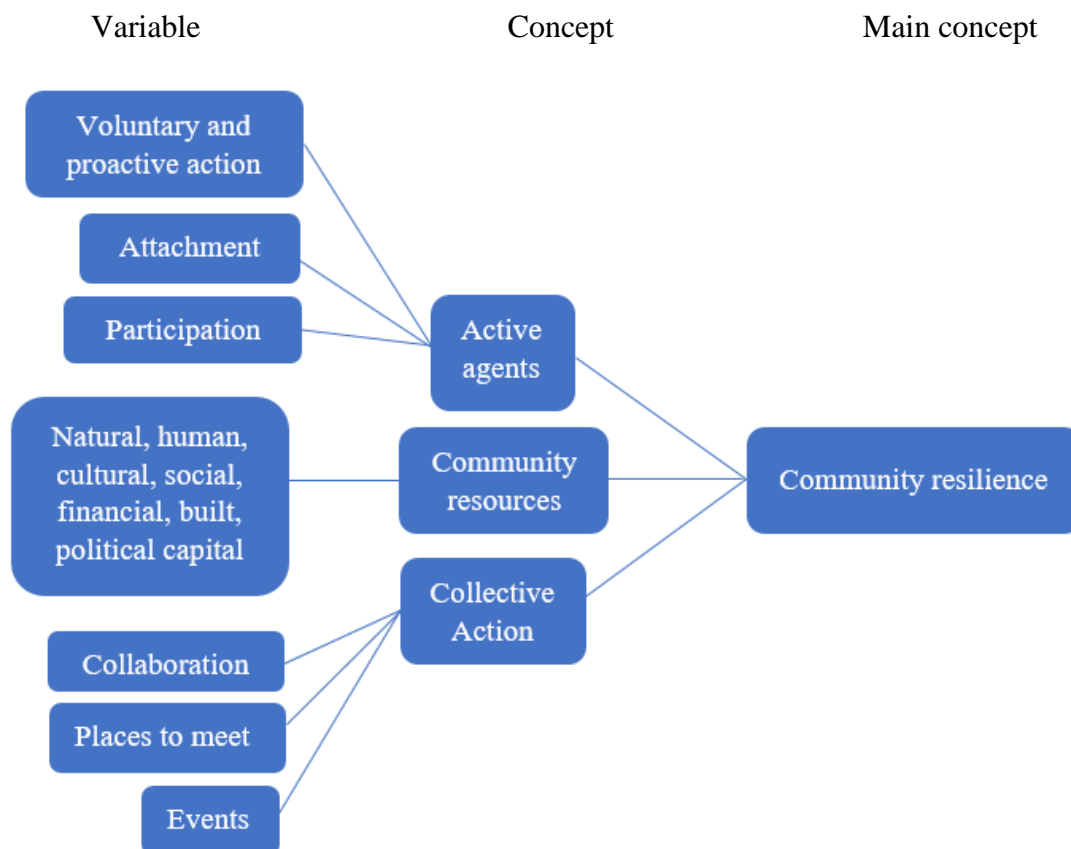


Figure 1 Conceptual model

Derived from the conceptual model, several sub questions have been formulated to answer the main research question of this thesis: *How can the reaction of HAWI residents to the project closure be explained by mechanisms of community resilience?*

1. Can HAWI residents be considered as active agents in the context of the project?
2. Which community resources do HAWI residents use to continue the project?
3. How do HAWI residents engage in collective action?

## **Methods**

Having established a theoretical framework for this research and formulated a research question and several sub questions, this section reflects on how the research was conducted and which research methods were applied.

For this thesis, the method of qualitative research including semi-structured interviews is chosen to convey the personal experiences of the respondents, which increases the trustworthiness of research. In contrast to open-ended interviews, semi-structured interviews prevent respondents to get off topic, are useful to gather interpretations and motivations of the people and provide the opportunity to elaborate on concepts which are mentioned in the literature (Massengill, 2015). All interviews were structured with a topic list which was created after operationalising the concepts discussed in the theoretical framework (see Appendix A1)<sup>2</sup>.

To find respondents, I initially contacted a project manager of Caritas supervising the HAWI project. As Caritas asked me not to conduct any interviews with current HAWI residents nor in the HAWI building, I used several means to find respondents such as Facebook group messages, Facebook private messages and the personal network of the people I contacted. In this manner, I contacted many residents without a refugee background. Residents with a refugee background turned out to be more difficult to contact, as they often did not reply to my messages or because they were preoccupied with their current asylum procedure. Throughout the first interviews it became clear that most residents actively involved in the continuation of the project already moved out and that also non-residents are involved. Therefore, the target group was expanded from HAWI residents to people who are involved in the continuation of the project, regardless whether they have lived in HAWI or not.

The field work was carried out during ten days in April 2018 in Vienna where I conducted 21 interviews. The respondents included 12 former residents without a refugee

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<sup>2</sup> The topic list serves as a basis for interview questions. However, the topic list is not limited to the concepts discussed in the theoretical framework, but receptive to additional concepts if identified throughout the findings.

background, one former resident with a refugee background, one current resident without a refugee background, three current residents with a refugee background, and four external stakeholders. One interview with an external stakeholder was conducted via Skype after the fieldwork in Vienna (for an overview of the respondents and their characteristics, please see *Appendix A2*).

To conduct interviews, I met the respondents in public and private spaces where they felt comfortable. This enabled respondents to openly share their experiences and perspectives which increases the trustworthiness of research (Shenton, 2004). All interviews have been conducted in German and were adequately translated into English to present the collected data as accurately as possible, which adds to the trustworthiness of this research<sup>3</sup>. Respondents participated voluntarily and gave permission to use the collected material which was audio recorded and later transcribed. The collected data was coded with the programme *Atlas.ti* and divided into different sections according to the topic list used for the interviews to analyse it and demonstrate first results.

As with all research, the researcher must be aware of his/her biased stance and ability to influence the respondents, which in my case was to be a student like most respondents and sharing similar perspectives. Therefore, it is necessary to distance oneself and avoid predispositions and subjective reasoning which can influence the respondents and the interpretations of the collected qualitative data (Neuman, 2014). Hence, as a researcher I applied an open attitude towards the respondents and measured the data in a self-conscious way which enhances the trustworthiness of research (Shenton, 2004). Moreover, by demonstrating the true experiences of respondents supported by several quotes, the authenticity of the collected data can be assured (Neuman, 2014) and the trustworthiness of this research guaranteed (Shenton, 2004).

## Findings

The following paragraphs will demonstrate the empirical findings of this research. The findings are chronologically structured along three major moments regarding HAWI: the development of HAWI until the confrontation with an unexpected stressor, the resistance to the project closure and the project continuation until today.

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<sup>3</sup> For the purpose of conducting all interviews in German, the topic list was first created in English and later adequately translated.

### **The development of HAWI until the confrontation with an unexpected stressor**

At the Architecture Biennale in Venice 2016, the next ENTERprise Architects and the aid organisation Caritas Vienna presented a project under the theme ‘Places for People’ in which students with and without a refugee background would live together. After receiving many positive reactions, a property owner provided a suitable space of two floors in an empty Siemens headquarter located in the South of Vienna to realise the project ("Places for People," 2016). An interview with a Caritas employee revealed, that Caritas approached an architect of ‘Home not Shelter!’ to start the integrative housing project HAWI. ‘Home not Shelter!’ is an inter-university initiative established by the non-profit organisation ‘Hans Sauer Stiftung’ and aims to create integrative housing solutions for migrants and students to find new forms of living together (Pasel et al., 2016). According to an architecture student of the TU Vienna who is part of the ‘Home not Shelter!’ initiative, several architecture students, also known as the “Traudi group”, started the building process for HAWI in summer 2016. Together with future residents they converted multiple office spaces in the former Siemens building to living spaces and several common rooms. Eventually, HAWI offered a total of 140 living spaces of which 45 were intended for unaccompanied minors with a refugee background, who lived in a separate part and obtained supervision of the youth welfare system. The other part consisted of 95 living spaces for students with and without refugee background (Pelzer, 2016).

Respondents without a refugee background came from various European countries and got to know about HAWI while looking for a student accommodation in Vienna. The main motivation to move in HAWI was the practical reason of finding an affordable room, but some respondents added the social rationale of living together with people from different cultures: *“I did not have so much contact to refugees and thought, it would be cool to become more active and this project was like: wow!”* (former resident without a refugee background). Respondents with a refugee background indicated that they applied for a room in HAWI as it was recommended by an acquaintance. They also liked the idea of sharing a room with fewer people than in the reception centre. Moreover, by closely living together with other students from Austria or elsewhere, they could expand their social network and practice the German language. Throughout the interviews, it became apparent that the motivation of people to become part of HAWI also influenced their involvement throughout the time they lived there. Residents who moved in HAWI due to a personal and social interest were proactively contributing to the project by organising common activities or supporting others with improving their language skills or advice on legal matters regarding their asylum application. Most respondents believed that their main contribution was to be open towards others, listen

and talk, and spend their spare time together and, thereby, learn about different cultures and backgrounds to get to know and understand each other better.

*“We did a lot together, we went outside, swimming, drinking or partying. But it is difficult to say what I have learned. I come from a very conservative culture and there were many things I could not understand. Through this project I understand now much more. For instance, when I was in Iran my image of homosexual people was very different from now. I used to think these people are very strange and now I know they are just normal and can be good friends of mine.” (former resident with a refugee background)*

According to all respondents, the time spent together contributed to a sense of community which was generated in HAWI. A couple of respondents specified that this sense of community was not shared by everyone which was mainly due to the allocation of residents on two distinct floors and the large size of the group. As a result, several mixed subgroups were formed, who established close friendships and a strong sense of community. A few respondents added, that with the new study semester, many people moved out and in which led to a different composition of residents who had to get used to each other. The newcomers were often referred to as the “second generation”. However, despite the size of HAWI and its dynamics residents could get along well.

*“The cool thing about HAWI was that it was so big that many subgroups could be formed so that all in all it worked out again. There were many different people with whom it might not have worked out if we were only living with ten people, but because there was this big community and smaller subgroups which could stay among themselves, it worked out. I would say that this big community feeling ‘we are HAWI’ never existed, rather in smaller groups.” (former resident without a refugee background)*

The interaction between residents was further enhanced through the design of common spaces, which was by many respondents considered as a vital element to create a sense of belonging and a sense of community. Although, residents got irritated by dirty dishes or nuisance of roommates, HAWI offered a place where people from different backgrounds became united, tolerated and accepted.

*“Everyone there is a resident and everyone liked or disliked things and this was very nice. The perception of each other changed. Initially you think he is an Afghani refugee, but in that moment, he is just your roommate or friend.” (former resident without a refugee background)*

When asking residents what HAWI personally means to them, they often responded with “friendship”, “commonality”, “tolerance”, “family” and “home”. Especially respondents with a refugee background indicated that it felt like a second family where they could forget about everything they have lost. Moreover, through the close interaction with others, they made many friends and rapidly improved their German language skills. This was also experienced by a current resident with a refugee background: *“I did not have many friends here in Austria and here we were like a family. The others always helped me with my German and other things I had to learn for school. It was great, like a family.”*

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of January 2018, residents were informed that the managing board of Caritas decided to close HAWI by the end of June 2018. The decision was made due to a lack of financial resources to fund the project caused by decreasing numbers of asylum seekers. Moreover, Caritas told the residents that the upper floor had to be closed by the end of February 2018 to use it for other purposes. Consequently, approximately 50 residents had to find an alternative accommodation within six weeks. It seemed, that the close friendships which emerged throughout the project, the experience with people from other backgrounds, and the feeling of being accepted by others, influenced the reaction of HAWI residents. During the interviews, respondents expressed their anger, sadness, frustration and incomprehensibility about the soon closure. *“In general, it was terrible, for days afterwards we did not discuss about anything else and what we do now and...why would they destroy this community? Just like that” (former resident without a refugee background).* Furthermore, respondents with a refugee background who are still living on the upper floor indicated that they are most afraid of going back to a reception centre. Hence, the announcement of the project closure was for many devastating news and as a current resident with a refugee background recalled it: *“I could not sleep that night, because we cannot find such a place anymore. We refugees, we all have to go to another refugee reception centre.”*

### **Demonstrating resistance**

To discuss the “HAWI rescue operation”, many residents gathered in the HAWI common rooms several times a week. Throughout the interviews it became apparent, that HAWI served

as a place to meet and prepare to engage in collective action. Many respondents indicated that they were positively surprised by the amount of people who were present at those meetings and how previously less active residents became mobilised. A certain fighting spirit emerged and a sense of community was intensified.

*“When we heard that HAWI will be closed, I had the feeling that there was a short time where a real sense of community existed. In this moment, during two or three weeks, everyone pulled together. That was really cool, I did not expect that.” (former resident without a refugee background)*

Respondents repeatedly shared their frustration and anger with Caritas staff members and asked them why the decision was made without involving them in the negotiation process or giving them the opportunity to make suggestions on how to ‘save HAWI’. Shortly thereafter, residents were informed that the director of Caritas would give an interview about the project closure to the television station Österreichischer Rundfunk (ORF) in a HAWI common room. Residents recognised this as a great opportunity to officially express their disappointment and anger and gathered the evening before to make posters with slogans in German and Farsi criticising Caritas, rehearse a song and collect photos of their time in HAWI. This was supplemented by a structured concept indicating who will tell what and ask which questions to challenge the manager of Caritas. In this manner, residents managed to publicly confront Caritas but, despite their activism, the decision to close the project remained unchanged. Nevertheless, residents were proud that they actively demonstrated their disagreement. *“To show that residents do not play a passive role, but are actively against the decision of Caritas” (former resident without a refugee background).*

To gain more public attention and support, a list with associations and media contacts was established and used to send several press appeals. A former resident who was taking actively part throughout the project indicated that she was selected as HAWI spokesperson to give several interviews to the press. Another current resident was responsible to set up the Facebook page ‘Don’t worry – be HAWI’ to update on the “HAWI rescue operation”. Respondents generally indicated that all residents tried to contribute with their own knowledge and skills to ‘save HAWI’.

*“And we said we will not give up, we will not let HAWI down, we will try to save it. And we really did everything possible. We tried to raise attention, we tried to do crowdfunding, we used the media to call attention on the topic and [...] the thought*

*behind it was to put Caritas under pressure through the media to say, no we do not close this now. I personally think that Caritas thought: we just tell that it will close and they will accept it. They did not expect that we would resist that much” (current resident without a refugee background).*

Besides their own knowledge and skills, residents also used their social network of family and friends to ask for support. In this manner, they could increase the attention on the issue or gain access to valuable contacts and institutions. Moreover, residents contacted two architects who renovated a workshop on the same property as HAWI in collaboration with residents with a refugee background. According to one of the architects, they wanted to help HAWI residents as the sudden project closure showed a lack of recognition and unfairness. Therefore, the two architects met with people who are involved in similar projects and the property owner to find alternative solutions. Moreover, they created a declaration of intent and distributed it among HAWI residents to demonstrate that the majority would like to stay in HAWI or, at best, become part of a similar project. The signed documents were delivered to Caritas with the request to reconsider their decision, but the documents were never further processed.

### **Project continuation until today**

Despite the unsuccessful efforts to keep the project in its initial location, the motivation to continue the project on their own remained. When asking about their motivation to continue, respondents often indicated the great time and experiences they had throughout living in HAWI. Moreover, it was repeatedly mentioned that a project like HAWI is important to demonstrate how successful such initiatives can be and how enriching they are for its participants. *“It broadens your horizon. You start to question all prejudices, learn and accept new perspectives, and you start to reflect upon yourself, how others perceive you and how you behave” (former resident without a refugee background).*

To continue with the original idea of the integrative housing project HAWI, a crowdfunding campaign was launched which raised almost 2000 Euros to find common apartments for residents with and without a refugee background. However, time pressure, the uncertain status of residents with a refugee background and high rents created too many obstacles. Eventually, many residents without a refugee background moved out as soon as they found a room, whereas most residents with a refugee background moved to the upper floor of HAWI. With the dispersal of residents and the closure of HAWI by the end of June, the place



which connected them will increasingly disappear. Many residents expressed their fear that this will eventually destroy the community.

*“I think that one can wish, that the community will be maintained, that we still regularly see each other. Not that everyone goes separate ways and nobody sees each other anymore, but that the spirit of HAWI will continue to live.” (former resident without a refugee background)*

Additionally, respondents repeatedly mentioned that money was a scarce but important resource to search for alternative solutions and continue the project. Residents tried to contact various institutions who could provide financial support but money remained scarce and contributed to the diminishing hope in the continuation of HAWI.

*“It does not work anymore. Because here it is all about money and a HAWI...when you have a project like HAWI, then you cannot earn money. If you do not earn money, then you do not do it. Everything here is about money.” (current resident with a refugee background)*

As people became more dispersed and the future of HAWI became more hopeless and uncertain, the number of people involved in the process of project continuation decreased. When asking former residents without a refugee background why their participation in the continuation of HAWI decreased over time, the increasing hopelessness of change became apparent. *“My wish would be that the system would change, that is also why I was not so active. I do not see any hope how we small people could change anything” (former resident without a refugee background)*. This was also experienced by current residents with a refugee background.

*“Now, like the others, I also lost my interest because we spend so many evenings together and we discussed and discussed but it did not result in anything. Then we said, for a project or a cause we have to invest so much time and it does not even exist, this is a waste of time. It will not work anymore. When they say no it is no.” (current resident with a refugee background)*

Many respondents observed that, in comparison to people who moved in HAWI for simply practical reasons, people who moved in HAWI with a social motive were more actively engaged in the project continuation and partially remained active until today. It required a lot of time and energy to search for possible solutions which many residents could scarcely spare

as they were studying and working. *“And students are also very preoccupied. I cannot go somewhere every week and talk one or two hours without any result”* (current resident with a refugee background). Residents who already moved out of HAWI were less confronted with the time pressure to find an accommodation in six weeks, however, time remained scarce and respondents often argued that if more time would have been available, more could have been achieved.

Throughout the interviews it became apparent, that residents with a refugee background usually participated less in the continuation of the project<sup>4</sup>. According to some respondents, this could be explained by their poorer language skills, fewer knowledge on how the system works in Austria and more urgent issues as their asylum procedure. A former resident added, that people might be less likely to openly resist a decision made by an institution like Caritas if they come from a country where protest and freedom of speech was restricted. Many residents with a refugee background therefore might fear that overt activism could negatively influence their uncertain legal status in Austria. Hence, mainly residents without a refugee background were actively involved in the project continuation and remained partly involved until today. These active residents also invested a lot of time and energy throughout the project and were generally interested and skilled in organising and mobilising people, which seemed to be crucial characteristics for the continuation of the project.

*“It was important that me and the people who had this hope and who thought it is worth to fight were there. To encourage others and be compassionate with people we are friends with, so that we can pull others along with us.”* (former resident without a refugee background)

The motivation to continue the project was not only shared by residents, but also by others such as architecture students who created the interior room structures in the beginning of the project. The personal involvement in the beginning of the project together with the drive of HAWI residents mobilised the Traudi group to participate in the process of project continuation, followed by their supervising professor and co-founder of ‘Home not Shelter!’. An interview with an architect of ‘Home not Shelter!’ revealed his shared ambition to find alternative solutions for HAWI, as the project demonstrates that living together creates a certain

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<sup>4</sup> This does not mean that residents with a refugee background were not active at all. There were a few who always shared their opinion and would have been willing to do more if they knew how.

normality and security among people, which is one of the core principles of 'Home not Shelter!'.

The increasing interest of several stakeholders in continuing HAWI led to the decision of Caritas to officially coordinate the process of project continuation. A remaining core today consists of a few former HAWI residents without a refugee background, the Traudi group and their supervisor, and a Caritas employee. They discuss the current situation regarding HAWI and possible further steps during regular group meetings. Whereas former residents contribute with their experiences made during living in HAWI, Caritas and the Traudi group and their supervisor provide their expertise and network. During their first meeting, the idea to realise a HAWI 2.0 was developed but as it turned out to be a challenge to find a large property to house more than 100 people, the idea of a HAWI 2.0 was put on hold. Instead, the group agreed to appeal to various student houses in the hope that they could provide affordable rooms to current HAWI residents with a refugee background. In this manner, they could live together with other students and continue with the initial idea of HAWI instead of returning to a reception centre. To promote the idea among several student house managers, an information event has been planned to present photos and reports of experiences. To make the collaboration between the core group members more efficient, several tasks were divided as follows; residents examined the juridical situation of residents in the asylum procedure and gathered photos and wrote reports on experiences, Caritas examined how the organisation could provide social support, and the Traudi group, contacted various student houses.

Generally, many respondents agreed that the compromise to offer housing solutions in student houses would be most realistic, but prefer realising a HAWI 2.0. During the last core group meeting, the architect of 'Home not Shelter!' introduced the idea of handing in a project proposal to the International Architecture Exhibition (IBA) 2022 in Vienna to find partners who are interested in realising a HAWI 2.0. As the number of asylum applications has been decreasing rapidly and the following developments are uncertain, it became clear that a HAWI 2.0 would no longer aim at asylum seekers, but at asylum seekers who have obtained a residence permit. However, what will precisely result from these ideas and efforts remains unclear for now. Overall, it seemed that whereas some residents lost their hope and accepted the situation, others are optimistic and hopeful that the project will continue in a similar form in the future, and as a former resident with a refugee background explained: *"I hope, if there will be a HAWI 2.0, it is going to be as cool as HAWI 1.0."*

## Discussion

Throughout the interviews it became clear that there is no such thing as a ‘HAWI community’ but that several subgroups emerged where residents with and without refugee background developed a strong sense of community. Residents who moved to HAWI with a social motive were generally more proactively involved and contributed to the well-being of the community which is, according to Matarrita-Cascante et al. (2017), a characteristic of active agents. Through their proactive involvement and social interaction, residents developed close relationships and often referred to each other as “family”. The generated feeling of community and home can be related to the concept of community attachment as defined by Theodori (2000). Once residents were confronted with the stressor of project closure, the threat of losing their community generated a lot of resistance. It is interesting to note, that the stressor of project closure also mobilised residents who were less active before. According to Brown and Westaway (2011), community members who actively respond to change can be considered as active agents. Therefore, in the context of HAWI, the stressor of project closure increased the number of active agents. Hence, whereas some residents became active agents due to their proactive involvement and attachment to the community, others became active agents due to the fear of losing their living space to which they generated a certain attachment.

To effectively respond to change and enhance resilience, community members use their community resources (Magis, 2010). As HAWI residents lacked financial capital, which can be explained by their status of being students and/or having a refugee background, they deployed and further developed their directly available resources which demonstrated their coping capacities (Keck & Sakdapolrak, 2013). Initially, residents used their personal knowledge and skills to ‘save HAWI’ which can be defined as human capital (Magis, 2010). During frequent group meetings, residents primarily identified what they need, such as time, money and commitment, reached a consensus on the common goal of maintaining HAWI, agreed on what actions they want to take and commonly engaged in action, which are the four collective action components as identified by Cottrell (1976). To plan and engage in collective action the findings revealed the importance of HAWI as a common place, which is similar to findings by Camps-Calvet et al. (2015) and Cretney and Bond (2016). HAWI served as a common place, where residents could meet and exchange knowledge to plan the course of action, such as using their social network to each other and to family and friends, which is an example of what Magis (2010) and Putnam (2007) have identified as bonding and bridging social capital. Hence, by making several arrangements, organising activities and demonstrating

their disagreement, residents engaged in the two community actions of redevelopment and resistance (Chaskin, 2008). In this manner, residents tried to maintain HAWI in its existing state and made an attempt to *bounce back*.

After realising that the decision of Caritas to close the project will persist, residents deployed their social capital by contacting external stakeholders to expand their resources, which is an example of what Magis (2010) identified as linking social capital. One could argue, that external stakeholders who participated in the continuation of the project became additional active agents who contributed with their human and social capital. The findings revealed that their main motivation to participate was not proactive involvement or community attachment, but the moral belief that a project like HAWI does not deserve such a lack of recognition. The decision of approaching and collaborating with external stakeholders and in this manner reorganising community resources can be further related to what Chaskin (2008) described as regrouping and enhances the efficiency of collective action (Magis, 2010). Hence, residents proactively responded to change and adjusted to the new situation which showed their adaptive capacities (Keck & Sakdapolrak, 2013) and an attempt to *bounce forward*.

Whereas external stakeholders started to participate in the project continuation, the participation of residents decreased. Despite the common goal to continue HAWI, several factors such as time pressure and the uncertain legal status of residents with a refugee background impeded their engagement. The fact that more residents with a refugee background were actively involved in the project continuation might be explained by their higher human and social capital. Generally, many residents with and without a refugee background lacked a persistent common belief that the community can resist change, which Magis (2010) identified as cultural capital. Moreover, the diminish of HAWI as a shared living space, built capital (Magis, 2010), further contributed to the decrease of active agents and revealed that, in the case of HAWI, social and built capital held the community together. In sum, residents deployed their human, social and built capital to continue HAWI but the lack of financial and cultural capital impeded their engagement. In contrast to Bourdieu (1986) and Platts-Fowler and Robinson (2016), this research revealed the importance of human, social, built, financial and cultural capital which are five of the seven capitals identified by Magis (2010).

Derived from the findings, a core group of active agents including former residents without a refugee background and external stakeholders collaborated closely to discuss possible future solutions and engaged in collective action. As they discussed short-term as well as long-term solutions, such as collaborating with student houses or realising a HAWI 2.0, the core group seemed to aim at progressive developments in the future and showed their

transformative capacities (Keck & Sakdapolrak, 2013). Most importantly, several former residents are still actively involved in the continuation of the project today. As part of the core group, they take part in the decision-making process on the future of HAWI and in this manner demonstrate “bottom-up politics of struggle and resistance” (Platts-Fowler & Robinson, 2016, p. 769).

Overall, this research provided an answer to the question whether the reaction of HAWI residents can be explained by mechanisms of community resilience. The findings revealed that throughout the three phases of HAWI, residents became active agents, deployed and further developed their community resources and engaged in collective action. After being confronted with the stressor of project closure, residents undertook several efforts to maintain HAWI (bounce back) and continue HAWI on their own (bounce forward). Considering the few residents still actively involved in the project continuation and the inability of effecting the decision made by Caritas, one might question the resilience of HAWI and its community. However, HAWI residents actively resisted the decision of project closure by using and further developing their resources and engaging in collective action. Moreover, despite the diverse involvement of residents in demonstrating community resilience, the integrative housing project HAWI brought students with and without a refugee background together who developed a strong sense of community which persisted despite the stressor of project closure, and as a remaining core still meets regularly to exchange information and discuss possible solutions, one could argue that the idea of HAWI has been resilient enough to continue with in the future.

Several limitations of the research should be mentioned. A first limitation of this research is that the field work was conducted for ten days and the processes regarding the continuation of HAWI are still in progress. Due to the lack of a longitudinal study it might be too soon to take any conclusions on how resilient the community is. It is likely that the dynamic feature of community resilience and its mechanisms lead to rapid change in the number of active agents, the access to community resources and the engagement in collective action. To examine the developments regarding the continuation of the project and the possible outcomes in the future, longitudinal research will have to be conducted to demonstrate additional findings. A second limitation is that only 17 of more than 100 residents who lived or still live in HAWI were interviewed. This research chose to interview current and former residents who have been actively involved in the project continuation. Due to the lack of time, not all residents who have been actively involved could be interviewed, leading to a limited number of perspectives. Moreover, respondents often referred to other residents or stakeholders who were

not interviewed for this research, which undermines the trustworthiness of their statements. Conducting interviews with more residents and stakeholders could therefore alter the trustworthiness of statements and provide supplementary perspectives. A third limitation is that this research examined community resilience in the context of a very particular case. To examine whether the conclusions of this research also apply to other integrative housing projects under similar circumstances, empirical research on other integrative housing projects should be conducted.

In spite of these limitations, this research contributed to the scientific understanding of community resilience and more specifically of the mechanisms of active agents, community resources, and collective action. Whereas the findings revealed the same variables influencing collective action as described in the theoretical framework of this research, it became apparent that additional variables such as hope, moral beliefs, uncertainty of legal status, and time pressure can influence active agents. Moreover, a strong interrelation between the variables of proactive action, attachment and participation could be identified. The research further demonstrated that besides human and social capital, the availability of built, financial and cultural capital are important strategically invested community resources for active agents to engage in collective action and enhance community resilience. It became apparent, that what kind of capital a community can develop and deploy, depends on the characteristics of community members. Moreover, the three phases of HAWI demonstrated, that the mechanisms of active agents, community resources and collective action have dynamic features as they continuously changed over time and led to fluctuating community resilience. Unlike stated in the theoretical framework, the dynamic feature of community resilience and its mechanisms should be acknowledged when conducting future research on how communities react to unexpected stressors. In addition to the theoretical understanding of community resilience and its mechanisms, this research adds to empirical studies on community resilience in relation to societal and economic processes.

This empirical research also demonstrates societal relevance as it adds to the scarce scientific literature on internal developments of integrative housing projects, which is an emerging phenomenon throughout Europe. The findings provide insights into how residents of an integrative housing project developed a sense of community and how this community demonstrated resilience once confronted with the unexpected stressor of project closure. The findings can be useful for initiators of similar present and future integrative housing projects and revealed the importance of involving residents in the decision-making process on project developments. Furthermore, this research can provide advice for residents of integrative

housing projects on how to deal with and react to possible unexpected stressors such as project closure. In the case of HAWI, the attachment and proactive involvement of residents, their ability to reorganise and mobilise and their common engagement in action demonstrated their capacity to resist from bottom-up. If residents of integrative housing projects can take part in decision-making processes from the beginning of the project and access sufficient resources, their ability to resist unexpected stressors is likely to increase and can enhance community resilience in the future.



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## Appendices

### Appendix A1: Topic list

<b>General</b>	Demographic characteristics  <i>age, gender, occupation, current or former resident, length of stay in HAWI</i>  Could you describe HAWI to me?  How did you get in contact with the HAWI project?	
<b>Concept</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Questions</b>
<b>Active Agents</b>	Attachment	What was your motivation to participate?  <i>Practical reason of housing and/or the social part of the project</i>  What were your experiences throughout living HAWI?  <i>personal role/ function, activities, relations, living together</i>

		<p><i>Skills/ knowledge/ social networks developed throughout project</i></p> <p>Did a sense of community develop? If so, how?</p> <p><i>How did it change throughout the project?</i></p> <p>What does HAWI personally mean to you?</p> <p><i>Friends, relations, participation, security, inclusiveness, trust</i></p>
	<p>Proactive action</p>	<p>How were you involved throughout the project?</p> <p>How were other residents involved throughout the project?</p> <p>What was your personal reaction to the project closure?</p> <p>How did other residents react to the project closure?</p> <p>Why did you want to continue with the project?</p>
	<p>Participation</p>	<p>How have you been involved in the project continuation?</p> <p><i>If you are not involved anymore, why?</i></p> <p>How have other residents been involved in the project continuation?</p> <p><i>Were there certain differences? If so, how would you explain them?</i></p>

<b>Community resources</b>	Resources for the continuation of the project	<p>What was your personal contribution to the project?</p> <p>What was the contribution of other residents to the project?</p> <p>What resources were used to continue the project?</p> <p><i>Skills, knowledge, money, social networks, building, etc.</i></p> <p><i>How were these resources developed?</i></p> <p><i>How did you access these resources? How were they deployed?</i></p> <p><i>Were there any interim results?</i></p>
<b>Collective action</b>	Places to meet	<p>Where did you meet to discuss the project continuation?</p> <p><i>Why did you meet there?</i></p>
	Events	<p>What kind of activities were organised as a reaction to the project closure?</p> <p><i>How were they organised?</i></p> <p>What kind of activities were organised to continue project?</p> <p><i>How were they organised?</i></p>
	Collaboration	<p>How was the collaboration between residents/ other stakeholders to continue project?</p> <p><i>Changes/ developments over time</i></p>
<b>Future outlook</b>	What are according to you the next steps to continue HAWI?	

	<p>What do you hope for?</p> <p>Would you like anything to add?</p>
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**Appendix A2: Overview respondents**

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Relation to Hawi</b>
1	Female	20	Germany	Student	Former resident
2	Female	23	Austria	Student	Current resident
3	Female	18	Austria	Student	Former resident
4	Female	22	Germany	Student	No resident but visited regularly
5	Male	25	Bosnia Herzegovina	Student	Current resident
6	Female	21	Germany	Student	Former resident
7	Female	22	Germany	Student	Former resident
8	Female	22	Czech Republic	Student	Former resident
9	Female	22	Germany	Student	Former resident
10	Female	18	China	Student	Former resident
11	Male	24	Afghanistan	Student	Current resident
12	Female	25	Austria	Student	Traudi group
13	Male	27	Iran	Student	Current resident
14	Male		Austria	Architect	Supervisor Traudi group, Home not Shelter!
15	Female	23	Austria	Student	Former resident
16	Male	25	Afghanistan	Student	Current resident
17	Male	22	Serbia	Student	Former resident
18	Male	20	Afghanistan	Student	Former resident
19	Male	38	Austria	Student	Former resident

20	Male	23	Austria	Student	Former resident
21	Female		Austria	Architect	Workshop on property
22	Male		Austria	Caritas employee	Initiated Hawi project