

The Role of Multilevel Governance in Building Institutional Capacity for Refugee Integration Policy: A Case Study From Norway



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RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

This article contributes to the research on institutional capacity building as a tool to improve the local implementation of welfare policies when successful implementation is contingent on cooperation across sectors of governance. Our case is the municipal, state and county–municipal cooperation on the establishing of an upper secondary school adapted to the needs of newly arrived refugees in Norway. While a lack of formal education has been identified as a major hindrance for the labour market integration of refugees, only a handful of municipalities offer upper secondary education that explicitly and efficiently targets the needs this group has for language training, income support and leniency with requirements for documentation of primary education. Our ambition is to investigate whether multi-level governance can increase the local institutional capacity to act on the identified need for formal education. Our analysis is based on a case study of two Norwegian municipalities that have developed a measure that efficiently meets the refugees' need for formal education. Our findings suggest that initiatives to increase institutional capacity can be important for the outcome of local integration measures. Strong institutional network capacity to plan, implement and manage policies and programs seem to be helpful in order to establish collaboration within and between levels, because it improves the municipalities' ability to respond and build relations across municipal and governance levels.

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INTRODUCTION

The integration of third-country refugees into the highly specialised labour markets of western countries has proven difficult (Djuve et al. 2017; Hernes et al. 2019; Søholt & Tronstad 2021). There are a number of explanations for this. For our study, the mismatch between the formal skills of the refugees and the skill requirements in western labour markets is of particular relevance. This plays out in combination with an identified failure to develop relevant educational measures that are adapted to the needs of the refugees (Djuve & Kavli 2015). Several studies identify difficulties in local collaboration relations as an obstacle to implementing measures in the introduction programmes for refugees. Here, a lack of coordination and collaboration across governance levels has been identified as the main issues that hinder with efficient implementation of high-quality measures in the introductory programmes (Bredal & Orupabo 2014; Djuve & Kavli 2015; Skutlaberg et al. 2014; Tronstad 2015).

The concept of integration is complex and has been given numerous interpretations and definitions (Djuve et al. 1999). For our purpose, which is to study the implementation of public policy, the definitions provided by such policies are crucial. In the period when data for this study was collected, the most relevant definition is to be found in the introductory act (2003). The act instigated the right and duty for newly arrived refugees to participate in an introductory programme, which includes language training, social studies and work- and education-oriented measures. The purpose of the act is to strengthen the opportunities of newly arrived immigrants to participate in the labour market and society, and their financial independence. Local implementation and street-level bureaucrat performance are impacted by a number of other factors, among them conflicting policies, local resources and competences, as well as organisational and individual norms and practises (Hupe 2019). Other definitions and understandings of integration are definitely relevant, to the extent they impact on local solutions and collaborations. This is particularly relevant due to the wide room for local interpretations and discretion. In the specific context of Norway, where municipalities are typically small, a loose regulation of the contents of the introductory programme, a division of responsibility for integration measures between administrative sectors and levels, as well as collaboration between these sectors and levels are crucial for the quality and continuity of the introduction programme (Djuve et al. 2017). As the responsibility to deliver the introductory programme is delegated to the municipalities and typically further delegated to one of the municipal sectors, the need for collaboration may however not be identified nor prioritised equally across the sectors and levels.

In 2021, the integration act was reformed (act of 1 January 2021). In accordance with the shortcomings that have been identified in this and previous research, the present act allocates a more prominent role for the counties in integration policy, particularly when it comes to providing upper secondary school. However, as the change in the integration act is quite recent, it has not yet been evaluated, and the effect on the shaping of and participation in upper secondary education is still uncertain. A formal re-allocation of responsibility for integration from one actor to another is not necessarily a guarantee for the roll-out of upper secondary education adapted to the needs of newly arrived refugees, across all counties and municipalities. This study aims to investigate the potential institutional capacity building might have in overcoming (some of) the challenges identified in the studies mentioned in the beginning of this paragraph. According to capacity building theory, webs of

relations between actors may help interlink diverse levels of governance, create more collaboration and increase the municipalities' capacity to handle local issues, as well as draw attention and resources towards refugee integration (Healey 2015; Healey et al. 1999).

Previous research suggests that in successful municipalities, local actors point to shared responsibility for integration between many actors in the municipality as a factor for success, as each actor separately does not have the capacity to fulfil their responsibilities but depends on participation from other departments and/or administrative levels (Busengdal et al. 2020; Djuve et al. 2017). Several other studies suggest that integration measures are often dependent on collaboration and coordination with a range of actors, including public employment services and qualification providers (Hooper et al. 2017; Lillevik & Tyldum 2018). Brorström and Diedrich (2022) emphasise that collaboration between diverse actors and levels is decisive for promoting the integration of refugees, yet achieving successful collaboration is often challenging.

Bjerck et al. (2019) find that some aspects of the challenges are sharing information between diverse actors in the municipality and achieving a common understanding of practise. Garcés-Mascreñas and Gebhardt (2020) point out that the efforts with refugee integration often lack collaboration-driven processes and agenda-setting. Bakkeli and Jensen (2015) suggest that both formal and informal relationships are important for establishing collaborations because these relationships provide insight into existing practises, the exchange of experiences and organisational learning, which in literature is frequently considered as building institutional capacity (Healey, 1998).

Djuve et al. (2017) find that municipalities with formalised plans for integration had a broader collaboration profile within and across governance levels than municipalities that had not anchored their integration practises in action programmes or municipal plans (Djuve et al. 2017). Heinesen et al. (2009) and Hansen et al. (2006) report similar findings in Danish benchmarking analyses on effective integration initiatives. Other studies have also shown that local political prioritisation of introductory programmes is a possible success criterion for integration (Berg 1996; Busengdal 2022; Rosdahl 2004; Skutlaberg et al. 2014). In planning theory, these processes are considered as building institutional capacity (Healey et al. 1999), because these mobilisation processes can increase the municipalities capacity to handle local issues and capture attention and resources (Healey 2015; Healey et al. 1999).

This points to institutional capacity building as an interesting theoretical field for studying local integration policies for newly arrived refugees. Our ambition is to investigate whether multilevel governance can increase the local institutional capacity to act on the identified need for formal education. We ask the following question: *How can relations between actors interlink municipal and governance levels in creating more collaboration and increase the municipalities capacity to handle local issues, capture attention and resources concerning refugee integration?*

The data consists of document analysis and semi-structured interviews with 20 informants, both municipal employees and local councillors. The article is based on Healey et al.'s (1999, 2000) and Cars et al.'s (2017) approaches to institutional capacity building, where we analysed the data using an abductive hybrid approach (Braun & Clarke 2006; Braun et al. 2014, 2018). The article contributes to research on municipalities' integration efforts and provides insights into networking and

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

There is a growing interest in the local governance of migrant integration, however, very little work has been done on the implications of this turn for the multi-level governance of migrant integration (Zapata-Barrero et al. 2017). The lack of collaboration and coordination among the various administrative and governance levels in relation to integration policy, stresses the need for multi-level governance among national, regional and local levels to improve the quality of public services (Zapata-Barrero et al. 2017). In the last decades, many studies have attempted to uncover new foci in such policy collaborations (Sørensen & Torfing 2016). According to Sørensen and Torfing (2009), these governance arrangements connect public actors from diverse governance levels and policy areas in collaborative processes that improve the handling of dilemmas and wicked problems in the public sector (Sørensen & Torfing 2016). Swyngedouw (2005: 1994–1995) defines collaborative governance as networks based on interactive relationships between independent and interdependent actors who share a high degree of trust despite internal conflict and oppositional agendas. In this context, concepts such as multilevel governance, network governance and institutional capacity building may serve as fertile approaches for alternative conceptualisations of service provision and problem solving in the policy area of integration.

The concept of institutional capacity is widely used to describe the overall context within which individuals and organisations interact. Capacity development is often a part of collaborations in multi-level governance and involves strengthening departments and agencies' capabilities to plan, implement and manage policies and programmes (Cohen 1995). In the municipal sector, the institutional capacity approach has been used to analyse the output/outcome of local initiatives and how relations increase interaction, change institutional dynamics and structure policy agendas (Agger & Løfgren 2008; Healey et al. 1999).

Healey et al. (2000) and Cars et al. (2017) use this concept to distinguish the following three forms of capital that may be deployed in community studies: Intellectual capital (knowledge resources), social capital (relational resources) and political capital (mobilisation capability). Knowledge resources are the shared understandings, ideas and experiences in local governance dynamics acquired through social interchange. These processes frame and shape conceptions of actions, develop and legitimise actions (Healey 1999). Relational resources are the formal and informal relations and bonds that assign mutual trust and enable knowledge resources to be shared (Healey 1999). Mobilisation capacity is the municipalities' capability to mobilise and act (Healey 1999). When institutional arenas mobilise the knowledge and relational resources of an organisation, politics, or nearby services, institutional capacity may increase (Table 1).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The article draws upon a qualitative case study of two Norwegian municipalities (one rural and one urban). The rural municipality is located in western Norway, has a population between 3,500 and 10,000, an agricultural municipality with

<p>Knowledge resources</p> <p><i>Intellectual capital</i></p>	<p>The range (selection and reach) of knowledge resources.</p> <p>The frames of reference that shape conceptions of issues, problems and opportunities.</p> <p>The extent to which the range and frames are shared among the stakeholders.</p> <p>The integration of different spheres of policy development and action.</p> <p>The capacity to absorb new ideas and to learn from them (openness and learning).</p>
<p>Relational resources</p> <p><i>Social capital</i></p>	<p>The number of stakeholders involved in relation to the potential universe of stakeholders concerned with an issue or in relation to what goes on in a policy area.</p> <p>The location of the power to act.</p>
<p>Mobilisation capacity</p> <p><i>Political capital</i></p>	<p>The opportunity structures.</p> <p>The institutional arenas used and developed by the stakeholders to take advantage of opportunities.</p> <p>The repertoire of mobilisation techniques that are used to develop and sustain momentum.</p> <p>The presence or absence of critical change agents.</p>

Table 1 The three dimensions of institutional capacity.

Note: The three dimensions of institutional capacity are based on Healey et al. (2000). The analysis is informed by these three dimensions of institutional capacity building.

relatively small towns and a labour market region approximately 30,000. The urban municipality is located in northern Norway, has a population between 20,000 and 50,000, with larger conurbations and a labour market region approximately 80,000. The municipalities score high on national integration statistics, which suggests they have succeeded in getting a high number of refugees into permanent employment or training. The two municipalities that are studied have shown the ability to implement relevant measures for labour and education, and they have demonstrated the ability to implement an integration measure that stands out as particularly relevant for the needs of newly arrived refugees, but that very few Norwegian municipalities offer. The measure in question is upper secondary vocational training that (1) was adapted to the needs of participants with poor Norwegian skills, (2) had language training integrated into the vocational training, (3) provided income support for the participants over the four years of the vocational training and (4) was also open to participants who could not provide documentation of lower secondary schooling. This measure is hereafter referred to as specialised upper secondary training (SUST). In the vast majority of local municipalities, this option is not available.

We have chosen to make an interpretation across the cases, which gives us more insights in their approaches; therefore, the study is not a comparative study. Moreover, the interview data does not provide an adequate foundation for comparison as the case municipalities are quite similar; they have chosen similar solutions and have relatively similar approaches.

A case study allows an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon by presenting that phenomenon in its completeness as well as from multiple angles (Stake 2010; 2006). However, the findings of qualitative research may be valid and relevant beyond the studied cases (Thomas, 2016). In our context, an examination of the studied municipalities can provide insights, ideas and experience-based knowledge regarding institutional capacity building and multi-level collaborations in the policy area of integration.

The project has been approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD). The article's data material consists of a document study of plans and strategies

in the studied municipalities and 20 semi-structured interviews. We interviewed politicians and municipal employees (chief municipal executive, municipal leaders, and employees from health, culture, education, the planning office, and the refugee office administration) and employees in the Norwegian Welfare Administration and Upper Secondary School. Furthermore, we analysed planning documents, strategies, and relevant case documentation in the selected municipalities. More specifically, we studied documents related to the introduction programme, master plans, action programmes, thematic plans and sector plans.

The informants were contacted after approval from the chief municipal executives in the case municipalities. We selected our informants based on the hypothesis that the informants would provide differing experiences, perspectives and knowledge about the topic because of their varying administrative responsibilities and involvement in various parts of integration efforts.

We coded the transcribed interviews using NVivo's digital tool for analysing qualitative data, and we used the six steps from Braun and Clarke's (2006), Braun et al. (2014, 2018) thematic analysis to find overarching themes in the interview data. The findings from this part of the research process prompted us to examine the concept of institutional capacity. We chose Braun and Clarke's (2006), Braun et al. (2014, 2018) steps partly because they were suitable for abductive hybrid approaches.

We used the three dimensions of institutional capacity (Healey et al. 2000) as theoretical preconceptions to categorise the empirical material. By altering between the inductive and deductive approaches, we achieved a thorough understanding of the interview data. Our analysis functioned at two levels. First, we carried out a separate empirical analysis for each of the three dimensions of institutional capacity as set out by Healey et al. (2000) to understand the importance of every dimension and to see how local initiatives are linked to each dimension. Second, we considered what local network initiatives for capacity building have been made in order to interlink diverse levels of governance and create more collaboration that can increase the municipalities capacity.

ANALYSIS

The analysis is informed by the three dimensions of institutional capacity building and uses empirical data on how the local municipalities worked with the implementation of vocational training. However, we have also included some data on the mobilisation processes for integration measures in the introduction programme in general, as this may also have contributed to the outcome.

KNOWLEDGE RESOURCES: RECOGNITION OF MUTUAL DEPENDENCY AND SHARED UNDERSTANDINGS OF PROBLEMS

Knowledge resources are acquired through social interchange, where municipal actors share understandings, address problems and shape frames and conceptions of action (Healey 1999). In our case, municipal actors need not only to find ways to cooperate with each other, they are dependent on the county. The county is responsible for approving upper secondary education, which means that no such measures can be established without the involvement of the county. Shared frames of knowledge and openness to new measures and policies are also believed to impact the local ability to implement new integration measures (Djuve et al. 2017). In this section,

we analyse the shared frames of reference among the relevant actors regarding the local obstacles to better integration of refugees in the labour market and the possibilities of improving local integration measures, as well as their understanding of the interdependency between them. According to the theory (Healey et al. 2000), both of these factors will increase the institutional capacity to act. Hence, we would expect to find both in our case municipalities.

The empirical findings strongly support the hypothesis that there is a shared understanding of problems across municipal services (Bredal & Orupabo 2014). The informants from the municipality as well as from the National Welfare Administration (NAV) emphasised their awareness of the fact that many newly arrived refugees lacked education and formal training or lacked documentation of the formal training that they had received. Moreover, they agreed that the refugees had substantial challenges with the Norwegian language, which made participation in regular education difficult. One informant from the county said the following:

It's not easy in rigid Norwegian systems to complete upper secondary education. Besides, many had an education that they couldn't get approved. For example, a nurse from Ethiopia does not satisfy the requirements for a health professional in Norway.

This statement suggests that the conditions they work under are challenging because the established systems are adapted to a more homogeneous group with equal prerequisites in terms of language, primary school and educational background. Furthermore, the informants expressed that there was very little demand for unskilled labour in the local labour market. These statements illustrate that a number of actors working with the refugees have a shared understanding that the refugees don't really fit into the existing educational systems.

These understandings are also shared by informants in the municipality's introduction program. According to these informants, the programme, which focused mainly on measures aimed at supplying language training and skills in social studies, sometimes in combination with Active labour market policies (ALMPs) and other kinds of training provided by the local NAV office, while what the participants actually needed was upper secondary education. The informants stress that despite the efforts of the introduction programme and the local NAV to integrate refugees into the labour market, it was almost impossible for the refugees to find (secure) jobs. Often, according to the informants, the refugees repeatedly participated in the courses provided by the NAV in their quest to find work. Most jobs required at least vocational training, but participation in formal vocational training was not a realistic option for the refugees, as existing vocational training was not adapted to the needs of linguistic minorities and did not provide financial support during training. Furthermore, the informants said they were well aware that they were dependent on cooperation across services and sectors in order to establish the kind of educational measure they saw fit. A statement from the leader in NAV goes as follows:

It was an acknowledgment that, separately, none of us managed to provide suitable training for refugees. Representatives from the NAV, the county and the municipality sat down, recognising that we had shared interests and challenges, and made something that could actually provide results, which was a starting point for the collaboration.

These findings are in accordance with the theory (Healey et al. 2000) that recognition of mutual dependency and shared understandings of the problem enhance institutional capacity. As we interpret these findings, in order to establish upper secondary education adapted to linguistic minorities, provide financial support during training and a waiver of the requirement to provide documents of elementary schooling, several municipal services and governance levels need to be involved. The awareness of this among the actors, and the shared understanding of the reasons for why integration into the labour market is difficult for many refugees, might have increased the institutional capacity in case of municipalities.

Healey (1999) stresses that such processes frame and shape conceptions of actions, develop and legitimise actions. One crucial network initiative for capacity building might have been the initiative to bring the relevant actors together and share acknowledgements and understandings of problems and recognise mutual dependency.

RELATIONAL RESOURCES: ACTORS WITH VARIOUS LOCAL COMPETENCES

In institutional capacity building, relational resources are seen as the number of stakeholders involved in relation to the universe of stakeholders (Healey et al. 2000). In this section, we investigate which actors interpret and shape the understandings, ideas and frames of references and which key relations carry measures forward. In theory, these relations are both formal and informal relations and bonds that assign mutual trust, and each actor may have valuable local competence of local conditions and potential collaboration partners. Hence, we would expect to find several actors with various local competences in our case municipalities.

According to the informants, to create a customised educational programme for refugees, it was necessary to establish collaborations between the municipality, the NAV, and the county municipality. In many other municipalities, such attempts at collaboration have failed (Djuve et al. 2017). Besides, previous research (Brorström & Diedrich 2022) emphasises that achieving successful collaboration between sectors and levels is often difficult regarding refugee integration because, although it can be time-consuming to agree on collaboration agreements (as we refer to), it is more time-consuming and challenging to manage to engage actors to following up their responsibility after a collaboration agreement is sealed. One informant from NAV expressed the following:

The most demanding job of implementing the measure has been to find key people who support the measure. We have received a recognition that if we work together, i.e., collaborate at the administrative level, have a cooperation agreement and are clear on responsibilities and what role each partner should take, we can actually make it happen.

These statements suggest that the conditions they work under are related to that the necessary collaboration partners are not established partners and they need to find key relations who support the measure with upper secondary school, even though at the national level, completing secondary school is explicitly introduced as a national policy priority (Ministry of Education and Research 2018).

When we collected the interview data in 2019, according to the informants, one major problem was the lack of executive decision-making power when establishing

collaborations across governance levels. Any municipality that was to establish the necessary collaboration with the county and NAV to establish SUST needed to do so without a clear line of command.

In 2021, the integration act was reformed (act of 1 January 2021). In the present act, the counties are given a more prominent role in integration policy, particularly when it comes to providing upper secondary school.

However, in regular education programmes, students take 2 years of schooling, and then 2 years of internship, which is reversed compared to SUST. When the students completed the internship before the formal training, they had to approve some of the internship in advance, in addition, they were promised apprenticeships from the municipality, which is not normal practise. Typically, students take the exams before they go into an internship. However, according to the informants, the refugees got much better language training by taking the internship before formal training, and the language training gave them better skills to fulfil the exams. One informant said the following:

We challenged much of what were common educational models in Norway because we saw that it would be too tough to follow the regular educational program where they are two years in school and two years as an apprentice in a company.

The quote suggests that it was necessary to challenge common educational models to implement the measure. Their argument was that there were no suitable education programmes for adult refugees and that the refugees were not allowed to participate in ordinary upper secondary education, even though completing secondary education was explicitly introduced as a national policy priority in the new Integration Strategy in late 2018.

The theory on institutional capacity building and relational resources implies that in our successful municipalities, unusual relational resources were present, and even though the integration act was reformed and the counties were given a more prominent role, our findings indicate that the most important relational resources were to be found in NAV.

In both studied municipalities, the NAV leader was pointed out as a main actor in initiating the collaboration. This collaboration seems to have taken two forms: One is the organisational integration between NAV and the municipal refugee service. The other is the systematic collaboration with the county. NAV is a particular institution in the sense that it comprises both a state employment service (among other state services) and a municipal social welfare service. In some municipalities, the local refugee service is located within NAV, in others not. In the rural municipality, the chief municipal executive stressed that the service must be anchored in the NAV for the municipality to be able to provide a suitable refugee service. This organisational solution was something that she had implemented in several other municipalities. She claimed that it supplied the municipalities with more relevant integration measures as well as resources in terms of competences and funds and connected the refugees more closely to work-oriented measures.

In the case of municipalities, it seems that the NAV leaders have played key roles in mobilising actors, agenda setting and supplying economical resources. The organisational allocation of the introductory programme within the NAV may reduce

some need for interservice cooperation. Regardless, from our point of view, it's still necessary to find a way to include the county. According to the municipal informants, it was relatively laborious and difficult to involve actors from the county municipality because there was a lack of a line of command. In theory, it is referred to as the lack of formal relations and bonds that assign mutual trust.

In the rural municipality, NAV was of the opinion that upper secondary school would be a suitable measure for many of the participants in the introduction programme and contacted the principal in upper secondary school. The principal involved some of the teachers, which significantly increased relational resources to carry the measure forward.

To allow those participating in the introduction programme to enrol, major adaptations were needed, including expanding the training to 4 years and dedicating the whole first year to a combination of practise and language training. These changes needed to be approved by the county municipality.

At this point, according to the informants, the healthcare worker programme at the local upper secondary school was in danger of being closed down, which may have increased the motivation of the school's staff to take action to persuade the county municipality to participate in the collaboration (at this point, the counties did not have a prominent role in the integration policy). The informants from the upper secondary school were quite enthusiastic about the adaptations, partly because communication with the NAV occurred when they were facing the risk of being shut down. Still, they had a hard time mobilising the county municipality. According to the principal, the county municipality was concerned about whether it could finance such an expensive measure and whether the measure was suitable. However, the staff from the upper secondary school were invested in the case and spent considerable time and effort on meetings with the county municipality representatives. One of the informants from the upper secondary school said that this collaboration would never have happened if the county municipality were not located in a nearby area. Hence, actors with valuable local competence of local conditions and collaboration partners seem to be an important relational resource to increase institutional capacity to act. These findings suggest the importance of network initiatives for capacity building involving a range of actors with various local competences to implement relevant integration measures.

MOBILISATION CAPABILITY: WORKING MORE HOLISTICALLY AND SYSTEMATICALLY WITH INTEGRATION

Mobilisation capacity is a municipality's capability to mobilise and act (Healey 1999). In this section, we investigate the mobilisation capacity acquired through institutional arenas, change agents, and mobilisation techniques (Healey et al. 2000). We analyse their efforts for mobilising the knowledge and relational resources to interlink diverse municipal levels in creating more collaboration, and increase the municipalities capacity concerning refugee integration.

OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURES AND CRITICAL CHANGE AGENTS

According to Healey et al. (2000) access to 'change agents' who can concentrate efforts and prevent dissolutions is necessary. These people, in the Norwegian context otherwise often referred to as 'ildsjel (fiery souls)' (see Svendsen and Berg 2018),

have been identified as crucial for service quality in a number of studies. However, from our point of view, an obvious risk is that measures become too dependent on these individuals. One of the strengths of mobilisation capability theory is the tools to analyse what these fiery souls actually do and where they are organizationally located, not only to identify their importance. In the studied municipalities, critical change agents seem to have played important roles in bringing about the measure we investigate. It may also have been important that these agents were located in the top administration of the relevant organisation. Several informants stressed that for this kind of collaboration to succeed, it needed to be endorsed by top management at the relevant administrative levels. One informant said the following:

A leader who takes responsibility and is involved is a key success factor for such collaboration. Because it opens many doors, and it does something to people when they meet an engaged leader. It becomes challenging to say no when they meet someone with an outstanding engagement.

These statements suggest that the measure in question was dependent on committed leaders. The politicians and several department leaders in the rural municipality described the chief municipal executive as a significant actor or change agent. They stressed the importance of her initiatives to put refugee integration on the political agenda, find more suitable integration measures in the introduction programme, and strengthen collaboration across governance levels. This suggests a need for capacity building network initiatives from agenda setters with executive decision-making power.

At the same time, informants from both studied municipalities highlighted the NAV leader (a municipal employee) as being the most important change agent for implementing the vocational training programme. In the rural municipality, the NAV leader actively participated in sharing understandings, addressing problems and shaping frames and conceptions of action among diverse actors across municipal sectors and governance levels. When he received funding to establish a refugee consultant position, he suggested spending the funds to mobilise the various sectors in the municipality that he saw as relevant for integration efforts. One informant from the health sector described the situation as follows:

I believe it has been a factor of success in the municipality that we have taken resources into schools, kindergartens, distributed resources into health care, and that immigrant integration is something we solve together. All the departments in the municipality contribute to the field of integration. Because once you dedicate the responsibility to a few people, the others don't take the same responsibility.

The statement suggests that the informant believes that working across sectors and departments helps them to capture attention and resources concerning refugee integration, which is part of the main ambition with multi-level governance. According to the chief municipal executive, in consultation with her, they agreed to spend the funds on efforts to share the responsibility for integrating refugees across all municipal sectors. This initiative made language training, work practise and apprenticeships a shared responsibility across administrative sectors. However, it's more uncertain if the diverse actors across municipal levels actually take responsibility or if it causes fragmentation of responsibility. In other words, no one takes responsibility because each actor bears responsibility.

According to the chief municipal executive, they mobilised the executive management team and included the integration topic in multiple sector plans, which are actions that are often referred to as important for increasing capacity within a field. Furthermore, she expressed that they employed the municipality's planning system to involve the municipal administration, enhance political support and distribute sector responsibility, which involved actors from the health, culture, education, planning and agricultural departments. Other studies have suggested that local political prioritisation through planning is a possible success criterion for refugee integration (Berg 1996; Djuve & Kavli 2015; Rosdahl 2004; Skutlaberg et al. 2014). These wider aspects of capacity building within the integration field may have contributed to institutional capacity that helped also the implementation of SUST.

Some informants stated that the NAV leader's initiatives and the positive response from the chief municipal executive were crucial for implementing the upper secondary vocational training measure, as this had contributed to the involvement of all municipal sectors in integration work. Some informants said that when the integration topic became part of the agenda in multiple municipal departments and the departments received funds and opportunities to participate in and impact integration efforts, it became easier to collaborate on integration measures across sectors and governance levels. This may have contributed to that the missing line of command was replaced by the conception of a mutual interest to cooperate, pointing to what Healey (1999) referred to as communities with local openness and strong local mobilisation capacities to adequately respond to external pressure.

BUILDING INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY TO ACHIEVE POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

Building institutional capacity is building the capacity to act according to a conceived problem, also when the capacity to act involves several sectors and levels of governance. In both studied municipalities, many of the informants talk about how crucial it is with political and administrative support to implement integration measures. The informants typically talk about these mobilisation processes for integration measures in the introduction programme in general terms, and do not necessarily link it to individual measures, such as the SUST. Even so, these processes illustrate how the local actors have worked to build institutional capacity relevant for their ability to implement such a measure.

Planning is one of several tools applied in order to ensure the implementation of local policy. An informant from one of the planning departments underlined the following:

The politicians decided that the integration theme should be included in the municipality's planning practice because it should be part of everything. The politicians agreed that the diversity and integration efforts should be a part of the program of action and all the theme plans in the diverse departments, such as health, housing, development, education.

The statement suggests that municipal planning is applied as a tool for local political prioritisation of refugee integration. However, such plans have been made in a number of local municipalities that have never been able to implement SUST (Djuve & Kavli 2015). As we see it, plans alone seem to be an insufficient measure.

In the urban municipality, they also talked about the importance of plans, but also about how they systematically expanded the selection and reach of the actors

involved and developed a way of working more holistically with integration, appointing a spokesperson for integration efforts in the top administration. The chief municipal executive in the urban municipality emphasised the following approach:

It is not that long since we created this understanding of working holistically with integration. However, we are aware of getting this thinking under the skin and finding a shared understanding. We make it part of the municipal plans, we have prepared an integration coordinator position and we work with the [integration] theme and try to include the theme everywhere in the organisation.

These statements may indicate that planning is important for working holistically with integration and capture attention and resources across municipal and governance levels. However, from our point of view, they seem to be of much more importance when backed by executive leaders and represent a shared understanding of problems and solutions. This points to the joint importance of all three aspects of the capacity building theory: knowledge resources, relational resources and mobilisation capacity. Our findings on the three aspects are summed up in [Table 2](#).

	IDENTIFIED RESOURCES	LOCAL NETWORK INITIATIVES
Knowledge resources <i>Intellectual capital</i>	Shared understandings of problems. Recognition of mutual dependency. Addressing coordination and collaboration challenges.	The NAV embarked on several initiatives to establish local understanding that low labour market participation was the main issue in the field of integration and that training at the upper secondary level was necessary to maintain stable employment.
Relational resources <i>Social capital</i>	The network initiative depends on actors from both the municipality, the NAV (state) and county municipality. Actors with various local competences and responsibilities in different sectors.	The NAV leader organised the refugee service as part of the NAV. The NAV also contacted the local upper secondary school. The staff from upper secondary school were invested in the case and spent considerable time and effort on meetings with the county municipality representatives.
Mobilisation capacity <i>Political capital</i>	Administrative and political support. Working more systematically and holistically with integration. The planning system and processes is employed to distribute sector responsibility.	Local leaders served as critical change agents who put integration on the political agenda, advocated for the specific measure of vocational training and gained administrative and political support, including the necessary funding.

DISCUSSION

Participation in the labour market is one of the main goals of the national integration policy, and completing secondary school is explicitly introduced as a national policy priority (Ministry of Education and Research 2018). However, refugees with low formal education struggle to get a foothold in the Norwegian labour market, and access to education is difficult for newly arrived refugees. Establishing measures as discussed in

Table 2 Institutional Capacity Facilitated by Local Network Initiatives. Table 2 is a summary of the findings and shows how institutional capacity was facilitated by local network initiatives and how local initiatives are linked to each dimension in the studied municipalities.

this article, presupposes collaboration across municipal sectors and across governance levels. Few local municipalities have succeeded in establishing such measures for the participants in the introductory programme (Djuve et al. 2017).

Our findings suggest that local capacity building network initiatives have increased the municipalities' ability to implement measures in the introduction programme and handle local issues. Dedicated local leaders have served as critical change agents. They have worked systematically in order to establish a shared understanding of what the main 'problem' of integration is, and to establish an understanding of common interests across sectors and governance levels. These processes are related to increased knowledge resources (Healey et al. 2000) and seemed to have interlinked diverse levels of governance and increased the municipalities capacity to handle local issues.

Our findings indicate that the most important relational resources (Healey et al. 2000) were to be found in NAV. In both municipalities, the NAV leader is identified by the informants as having played a key role in establishing the collaboration needed in order to implement SUST. In the rural municipality, a key capacity building initiative was the contact made to the upper secondary school made by NAV, resulting in long-term interactions with the county, carried out by upper secondary school staff. In the urban municipality, the initiative also came from NAV, which suggests that it was necessary to collaborate across governance levels to arrive at a combination of needed measures.

In 2021, after the interview data was collected, the government legislated a line of command through the new integration act, which has given the county municipality a more prominent role in integration efforts. This means that the governance deficit may be reduced, at least after the changes regarding the flexibility of the content of education programmes for migrants are legislated in the Education Act (in July 2023). However, according to our findings, the county municipality was concerned about whether it could finance such an expensive measure and whether the measure was suitable. These findings make it rather unclear whether the county has sufficient resources to finance such an expensive measure or if the measure is considered as more suitable now that they have a prominent role in integration efforts. Such a measure needs major allocations of existing programmes, and a line of command will not necessarily engage the relevant actors needed or give the municipalities the capability to mobilise and act across sectors and governance levels. Legislating a new integration act can only increase the capacity to act if the county municipality is willing to adapt existing vocational training to the needs of linguistic minorities.

In both studied municipalities, political and administrative support to implement integration measures is seen as the municipality's capability to mobilise and act across sectors and governance levels (Healey 1999). In the rural municipality, one local network initiative for capacity building was to spend funds on efforts to share the responsibility for integrating refugees across all municipal sectors. However, it's rather uncertain if the actors across municipal levels actually take the responsibility, or if the result is the fact that no one takes the responsibility because each actor has the responsibility. Another capacity building initiative was the local political prioritisation of refugee integration through planning practise. However, from our point of view, plans alone seem to be an insufficient measure because plans have been made in a number of local municipalities that have never been able to implement SUST (Djuve & Kavli 2015). Although, plans seem to be of much more importance when backed by executive leaders and in processes where they represent shared understandings,

because then planning interlink diverse sectors in creating more collaboration, which is the main purpose of multilevel governance.

CONCLUSION AND RELEVANCE TO PRACTISE

In our study, weak local institutional capacity to respond to and implement national integration policies was amended by local capacity-building initiatives. In the two studied municipalities, these initiatives strengthened institutional capacity and seemed to have interlinked diverse levels of governance, and increased the municipalities capacity to handle local issues. Our study suggests that strong local institutional capacity facilitated by local initiatives can explain municipalities' ability to respond to and implement national integration policies that require collaboration across governance levels and sectors. The findings also indicate that the results hinge upon relational resources and change actors, as well as support for integration work at the top administrative level in all the major municipal branches. This may be one of the explanations for why so few municipalities have been able to implement SUST.

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The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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