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Psychogeography of Refugee Youth from Ukraine in Weimar, Germany: Navigating the Sense of Belonging in the Context of Liminality

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Abstract: This study looks at the sense of belonging among the youth who fled Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and currently reside in Weimar, Germany. Having fled the war in a time of transition to a more independent stage of life, refugee youth are finding themselves in a challenging context of liminality: both in terms of age and environment. Experiencing a feeling of uncertainty about their positioning in life and a new society, refugee youth are especially prone to feeling excluded and lost, which creates further challenges for their well-being. While the sense of belonging cannot be strictly defined, it is considered a vital factor for mental and physical well-being, as well as a core sign of social integration. To understand how to help newcomers foster their sense of belonging, this study tracks senses of (non)belonging among refugee youth following a weak theory and psychogeographic approach. The results demonstrate the 'dialectic' battle of opposites: how right-wing city rallies and pro-Russian symbolism in Weimar are triggering a sense of alienation and detachment on the one hand, and how signs of solidarity with Ukraine and connecting to local social groups invite engagement with the city, its politics and hence create a sense of agency, welcoming and belonging on the other. The results of the study have important applicability for human geography as well as the development of the theory on the sense of belonging among refugee youth in the context of liminality.

Keywords: psychogeography; refugee youth; liminality; belonging; forced migration; Russo–Ukrainian War; Eastern Germany

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background and Context

Following Russia's unprovoked attack on Ukraine on the 24th of February 2022, millions of people fled their homes in pursuit of safety from the Russian occupation and shelling. The military offensive by Russia in Ukraine has resulted in one of the largest forced migrations since World War II. Over 14 million Ukrainians were forced to leave their homes, 7.2 million of whom left Ukraine (UNHCR 2022; Albrecht and Panchenko 2022). In 2024, 971,430 refugees from Ukraine are currently living in Germany (UNHCR 2023), and around one thousand in Weimar, 10% of whom are young people, the focus of this research (Stadt Weimar 2023). Although initially, Poland was the primary refuge destination for Ukrainians, currently the largest number of refugees from Ukraine reside in Germany (Ukrainian Refugees by Country 2024).

Since March 2022, around one thousand refugees from Ukraine have registered in Weimar, with an overall population of 65,938 (Stadt Weimar 2023). This small city in the heart of Germany is famous for its dynamic history: swinging from being the capital of Weimar Classicism to being the founding place of the Weimar Republic, and home of the Bauhaus art school. It is also known for its association with National Socialism, as it was one of Adolf Hitler's favorite cities and the location of the Buchenwald concentration camp. Having gone through the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the

reunification of Germany, the city of Weimar has been in a constant state of change and is now a city that bears all the extremes of the political spectrum. One day on Weimar's main square—Theaterplatz—you will see a demonstration in support of Ukraine (mainly Ukrainians), the next day there will be the weekly "Montagsdemo", a far-right demonstration against the government and its support of Ukraine, disguised with messages "for peace", and a few days later there will be an art installation in the same place with a big and clear message: "Weimar has a neo-Nazi problem", which was immediately vandalized the day after.

The "Montagsdemonstrationen" (EN: Monday Demonstrations) originated in regular peaceful mass protests against state repressions and for more freedom in the GDR in 1989. They play an important role in the German popular perception of the events that led to the fall of the Berlin Wall in the same year. Thus, the "Montagsdemonstrationen" have become a lieu de mémoire connected with the expression of the will of the sovereign German people against the unjust actions of the state. After 1990, the tradition was continued in Eastern Germany against different policies and in 2014 the Islamophobic, right-wing initiative Pegida ("Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes") in Dresden called for Monday walks against the alleged Islamization of Europe. After some decrease in attention, the "Montagsdemos" were revitalized in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic and hosted protests against the government's protective policies. Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia in February 2022, the weekly protests have focused on Germany's support of Ukraine, calling for "peace" with Russia instead. Generally, there is a big overlap of participants in the "Montagsdemonstrationen" and voters of far-right populist parties like the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) (Freund-Möller et al. 2022).

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the increase in refugees in Germany contributed to the rise of the AfD, similar to its sudden rise after the war in Syria drew refugees to Europe. In the 2017 elections, the party became the third largest party in the Bundestag on the back of strong anti-refugee sentiment. When Russia launched its war against Ukraine, measures such as cutting off Russian gas supplies, support for Ukrainian refugees, and military support for Ukraine's defense were taken by the German government. Those unhappy with rising energy prices, the influx of refugees, and military support for Ukraine's defense against Russia found their voices heard by the AfD, which, according to a Deutschlandtrend poll, made the party's popularity skyrocket from 10% before Russia's war in Ukraine to 21% in 2024, two years later (Vohra 2023). In January 2024, Germany received another wake-up call after AfD politicians met with neo-Nazis to discuss a strategy for the mass deportation of asylum seekers and German citizens of foreign origin (Connolly and Kassam 2024). This study looks closely at how the aforementioned political climate affects the sense of belonging among young refugees in Weimar.

1.2. The Temporary Protection (TP)

People who fled Ukraine or were not able to return to Ukraine due to the Russian invasion were given Temporary Protection according to § 24 of the German Residence Act (§ 24 AufenthG 2023). Temporary Protection is granted to Ukrainian nationals as well as non-Ukrainian third-country nationals, who had a permanent residence in Ukraine at the time of full-scale invasion. Given the history of international law responses to previous refugee movements, Temporary Protection granted to those fleeing from Ukraine is seen as one of the most humane approaches, as it grants, among other things, rights to work and opportunity to claim social benefits. Although Ukrainian refugees did not receive the same treatment in 2014, when Russia occupied Crimea and Donbas, the effects of the full-scale invasion on the new legislature have been in stark contrast to the past and actively discussed, as it points out how international refugee law can be applied to negotiate a state's national whiteness contracts (Jackson Sow 2022).

Initially, TP was granted to Ukrainians in Germany until March 2024, and at the time interviews were conducted (January 2024), the protection status had just been extended until March 2025 (§ 24 AufenthG 2023, Absatz 1, 28 November). Currently, there is no

end to the Russian war in Ukraine in sight, which also poses questions about the future decisions of policymakers concerning the extension of the Temporary Protection. The length of the TP also affects the refugees' decisions, as many of them are reluctant to make long-term plans for their future in Germany due to the possibility of their legal right to remain in Germany being revoked and having to return to Ukraine.

1.3. Refugee Youth in the Context of Liminality

The impact of war on children and young people, and the distress caused by forced separation from parents, is significant and has far-reaching implications, including an increased risk of developing specific mental disorders (Bürgin et al. 2022). The participants of this study are between 18 and 26 years old, and half of them were still minors (under 18 years old) when they were forced to flee in 2022, which indicates their vulnerability to the negative effects of forced migration. Children's developmental needs and their right to grow up in a physically and emotionally safe and predictable environment are in stark contrast to their experiences as a result of war (Yule 2000), which is why extra measures need to be taken to assure not only their physical safety, but also emotional security and stability.

Depending on the source, there are different definitions of youth in Germany. We choose to follow the definition provided by the German Youth Strategy, which refers to youth as those aged between 12 and 27 (Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend 2019). Having fled the war in a time of transition to a more independent stage of life, and having a Temporary Protection status, with no clear vision of the future ahead of them, refugee youth are finding themselves in a challenging context of liminality. While there has been a focus on liminality as a challenging and formative human experience, little attention has been paid to how actors manage ongoing and potentially endless periods of liminality, as in the case of refugees (Alkhaled and Sasaki 2022). According to Turner (1991), liminality is defined by a critical moment of transition and ultimately reaggregation into society. The majority of refugee youth we interviewed fled Ukraine while completing the final year of their education and many of them view their current situation in Germany as a provisional measure until it is safe to return to Ukraine, all while having limited insight and agency regarding their future prospects, which aligns with the concept of perpetual liminality, characterized by an indefinite state of limbo (Johnsen and Sørensen 2015). Hence, the context of liminality applies to this study, both in terms of transition to the new environment, as well as to a new stage of life. As observed by Alkhaled and Sasaki (2022), pressure is particularly exaggerated among forcibly displaced actors, who are forced into a seemingly endless state of liminality, making it more difficult for them to maintain cognitive control through identity work and feeling a lack of agency, which can be seen as a structurally imposed condition (Howard-Grenville et al. 2011).

The experience of uncertainty about the future and feelings of exclusion and alienation in the new society present additional challenges that can have a particularly detrimental impact on mental well-being. The feeling of unfamiliarity with the urban environment coupled with the lack of support from familiar social networks at home exacerbates the trauma experienced by displaced people (Rishbeth et al. 2019). Improving a sense of belonging among refugees, on the other hand, is associated with positive effects on one's mental health (Kitchen et al. 2015). It is also considered to be a fundamental human need and a core sign of social integration (Ager and Strang 2008). Additionally, to the already established traumatic experience, what happens post-event plays a vital role in the development of further mental illnesses, which amplifies the importance of support after war-related exposures and its long-term effects for young people seeking refuge from war (Bürgin et al. 2022). It also serves as an argument that this support is vital and should be supplied no matter what the long-term plans of refugees are.

1.4. Sense of Belonging

Given that half of the interviewees were minors at the time of Russia's full-scale invasion and were separated from their parents on their way to Germany, which is an additional factor of distress, it is crucial to recognize the impact of the new environment on their sense of security and belonging. Antonsich (2010) argues that place-dependent legal factors can determine participation in society and the extent to which a feeling of safety and belonging is developed. However, which material and immaterial aspects of arrival infrastructures provide opportunities or create constraints to find a sense of temporary stability, beyond focus on the permanence or briefness of migration, is still largely unexplored (Zill 2023). As Wright (2015) points out, place also cannot be seen as the only entrance point to understanding belonging, due to the existence of other diverse affiliations with belonging such as gender, sexual orientation, (dis)ability and ethnicity. Our research investigates the role of the environment on the development of a sense of safety and belonging of refugee youth in Weimar, while considering the influence of gender and race-related factors on the sense of belonging.

While the scholarship on the sense of belonging among refugees is extensive, the aim to understand the sense of belonging in those studies is usually linked to assist a long-term integration process into a host society. The scholarship on the sense of belonging among young people with refugee or migrant backgrounds is primarily concentrated in school settings (Brar-Josan 2015; Gambaro et al. 2020; Dereli 2022; Martin et al. 2023). Furthermore, there is a lack of focus on studying the sense of belonging of those who are not planning or are not certain if they will stay in the place of refuge long-term. This can be explained by the fact that the role of the nation-state in managing and controlling migration has been the primary focus of earlier studies of forced migration (Zill 2023). This study showcases that sense of belonging has a powerful positive effect not only on those who are planning to stay in Germany long-term, but also on those who are still planning to go back to Ukraine. This study hence aims to add focus on studying how fostering a sense of belonging should be considered as a goal not only for those refugees who plan to settle in the receiving country long-term, but also for those who are finding refuge there temporarily. Our study results bridge the research gap in terms of understanding the sense of belonging in the context of liminality and uncertainty about the long-term plans for refugee youth.

When it comes to contextualizing the sense of belonging, a plethora of disciplines, from philosophy to geography, to psychology and political sciences, have attempted to pinpoint what this very familiar and yet confusing sense defines. Scholarship in both social and psychological sciences agrees that belonging is a fundamental human motivation that drives people to form social bonds and can foster the feeling of engagement with society (Maslow 1954; Kestenberg and Kestenberg 1988; Baumeister and Leary 1995). Drawing on Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of five needs, Baumeister and Leary (1995) have developed an influential "Belonging Hypothesis" arguing that belongingness "takes precedence over esteem and self-actualization" and that detachment from the social group would lead to "unhappiness, depression, and other woes" (Baumeister and Leary 1995, p. 506). It is also highly sought after when one's safety and security are threatened (Kestenberg and Kestenberg 1988). There have also been counter theories in psychology, such as one by Bockarova (2016) who challenged Baumeister and Leary's (1995) "Belonging Hypothesis" with an argument that the need to belong is an outcome of the need to meaningfully matter and hence cannot exist alone.

Hagerty et al. (1992, p. 172) define it as "The experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment". Similarly, Mahar et al. (2013) note that complex interactions between environmental and personal factors can either hinder or facilitate this dynamic phenomenon. Taking this into account, this study also investigates the impact of external efforts on the factor of belonging.

The sense of belonging has also been extensively addressed in studies of forced migrations (Anthias 2006; Antonsich 2010; Duyvendak 2011; Ehrkamp and Leitner 2006;

Yuval-Davis 2006; Brar-Josan 2015; Huizinga and Van Hoven 2018). Brar-Josan (2015) argues that belonging can be seen as a central notion to the refugee experience given the losses as a result of having to flee. Huizinga and Van Hoven (2018) add that a sense of belonging is crucial, especially for individuals seeking refuge from political hardship or war, and yet it is a matter that seems to be undervalued as a desirable outcome of integration policies. The field of forced migration scholarship examines the influence of social networks and patterns on the processes of inclusion and exclusion. Chen and Schweitzer (2019) emphasize that the health and overall functioning of refugee youth is largely influenced by their perceived sense of belonging, and how they experience being socially included or excluded in their communities. The idea of social inclusion and exclusion is articulated by Yuval-Davis (2006) who conceptualizes the politics of belonging, drawing attention to actors such as governments or dominant groups in power of deciding who belongs and who does not. Furthermore, Amisi (2006) employs the concept of social exclusion to facilitate an understanding of refugee action, with particular emphasis placed on the significance of social networks as a source of social capital among refugees.

Belonging is also seen as a shift from social naturalizations to the multiplicity and situatedness of individual attachments, which involve social, imagined, and sensual–material relations that are constantly renegotiated by actors in their everyday practices (Youkhana 2015). Reflecting on the fact that the sense of belonging is a phenomenon that has countless definitions and theories, this study follows the approach of Wright (2015) who considers belonging in generative ways and turns to weak theory to reflect on the texture, use, and practice of belonging. According to Sedgwick (1997), weak theory supports partial understandings and multiplicity and allows for both contradictions and inconsistency. Weak theory is open to possibilities, and surprises (Lee 2006) and practices attending and attuning to things (Stewart 2008, p. 72), rather than closing down, categorizing, judging, or modeling to achieve a 'right' answer. This approach is well suited to exploring the nature of ever-changing, transient senses such as belonging, and leaves plenty of room for nuance. Our study's focus on emotional associations and experiences of refugee youth in the city, allows us to consider how belonging is formed through emotional attachments. Turning to weak theory as a space for deeper exploration of the sense of belonging theoretically, this study further uses a psychogeographic approach to track the sense of belonging within the urban frame of Weimar.

1.5. Psychogeography

Psychogeography is a tool for analysis of how the design and space of a city affect the mental state of an individual and society in general, and how interpersonal connections to places and random routes are emphasized while exploring urban environments. According to Debord (1955), the term 'psychogeographical' can be applied to the findings arrived at by the research of an environment and its influence on human feelings. Feminist researchers who previously utilized the tools of psychogeography have proven how powerful this approach can be in exposing the fact that urban design is never neutral (Bridger 2013), which can be especially relevant for exposing how urban structures influence emotional and physical experiences of refugees. Contemporary scholarship on psychogeography argues that its methods can also serve as powerful tools for shaping and transforming how we think about ourselves, how we relate to others, and how we relate to our environment, which can facilitate social change (Bridger 2013).

The term "psychogeography" was coined by the Situationists in Paris in the late 1950s (Hanson 2007). The definition by Debord (1955) suggests the following:

> *Psychogeography could set for itself the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals. The adjective psychogeographical, retaining a rather pleasing vagueness, can thus be applied to the findings arrived at by this type of investigation, to their influence on human feelings, and even more generally to any situation or conduct that seems to reflect the same spirit of discovery.*

Although The Situationist International dissolved in the early 1970s without a rigid scientific psychogeographic method (Bruno 2002), the psychogeographic method has ever since then been primarily linked to the practice of dérive, which involves unstructured wandering through the landscape (Bonnett 1989). However, contemporary psychogeography has seen some shifts in approaches to investigating the emotional within the physical, and can be recontextualized adapting alternative methods, and digital platforms (Bruno 2002; Richardson 2015; Coverley 2006). This study does not apply the dérive method due to the fact that it would be challenging to cover all the areas in Weimar that are potentially relevant for research within the time frame of the interviews. The act of walking itself is also a subject of contestation, given that the public nature of the act highlights the identity politics of spaces (Richardson 2015), which is why we focused on applying the methods of drawing mental maps and photo elicitation interviews instead.

1.6. Aim of the Study and Research Question

Arriving in a city that, on the one hand, expresses strong solidarity with Ukraine, and on the other hand, hosts Monday Demonstrations with an opposite message can foster and simultaneously compromise the sense of belonging for young newcomers. To understand what role these and other factors play in the refugee youth's experience, how the refugee youth from Ukraine navigate this 'dialectic' in urban environments, and how it affects their sense of belonging, this study poses the following questions:

- What can the refugee youth's emotional experiences and association in Weimar tell us about their sense of belonging to a new locality?
- Which factors influence a sense of (non)belonging among refugee youth from Ukraine?
- How is the sense of (non)belonging impacted by the context of liminality?

This article offers a new perspective, studying the sense of belonging among refugee youth outside of the school setting, in the context of liminality, utilizing the approaches of psychogeography and weak theory. The paper contributes to the discourse on the sense of belonging among refugees (Kitchen et al. 2015; Huizinga and Van Hoven 2018; Mijić 2022; Haswell 2023; Dereli 2022; Mahmud 2021; Martin et al. 2023) through the use of psychogeography in forced migration studies and its relation to the context of liminality (Turner 1991; Alkhaled and Sasaki 2022).

2. Materials and Methods

This research focuses on investigating the sense of belonging, using a methodology designed to assess participants' senses within Weimar's urban environment. Inspired by a psychogeographic approach while emphasizing the need for a sensitive and youth-friendly methodological approach, mental mapping and photo elicitation interviews in combination with in-depth interviews were chosen as the research tools to respond to the aim of this study. In this section we present the thought process behind selecting the mixed methods approach consisting of interviews, mental maps and photo elicitation interviews for this study, as well as describing how the method was applied and analyzed.

2.1. Weimar's Urban Environment

While many Eastern German cities are experiencing significant difficulties with high unemployment and emigration due to post-1990-reunification and the painful economic transformation process followed by it, Weimar's urban resurgence has been achieved due to its consumer city approach and branding as a 'cultural and museum city' and 'tourist attraction' among other things (Bartholomae et al. 2017).

Despite its relatively modest status as the fourth most populous city in Thuringia with a population of 65,000, Weimar plays a definitive role as the state's cultural hub. The city of Weimar benefits from a rich cultural heritage, largely due to its association with Weimar classicists, the foundation of the Weimar Republic, the Bauhaus movement, and the title of 'Cultural Capital of Europe' (Bartholomae et al. 2017). The city's association with the period of National Socialism is, however, much less overt, and one is reminded of it through

the Buchenwald memorial and portraits of Buchenwald concentration camp survivors displayed throughout the city, as well as the recently opened Museum of Forced Labor.

Weimar is home to two universities: Bauhaus University and The University of Music Franz Liszt, each of which has a high percentage of international students (20–50%). Around 10% of Weimar's residents are foreigners and one in six residents of Weimar has a migration background (Stadt Weimar 2023). Generally, Weimar is often described as a university city as well as a fairly green city, in terms of accessibility to green spaces. The city consists of 21 districts, 10 inner urban and 11 sub-urban districts, and 2 of these districts, Weimar-West and Weimar-Nord, are Plattenbau (large panel system building) settlements, constructed during GDR times (Stadt Weimar 2023). At the moment this study was conducted, the district with the highest population of Ukrainian refugees was Weimar-West with 203 Ukrainians registered there.

2.2. Mental Maps

It is argued that the provision of alternative and diverse modes of communication and participation allows for the active engagement of war-affected youth (Green and Denov 2019). The combination of visual and artistic methods can have psychological benefits for war-affected youth by providing a means to communicate with the nonverbal mind and a way to safely access potentially traumatic memories (Green and Denov 2019). Taking this into account, in-depth interviews consisting of mental mapping and photo elicitation interviews (PEIs) were decided upon as a methodological framework to accommodate this specific need along with the aim of allowing a focus on the emotional aspect of interviewees' experiences in Weimar.

The concept of the mental map is firmly established in geographical and behavioral science (Götz and Holmén 2018). Edward Tolman's effort to explain navigational behaviors led to him introducing the concept of cognitive maps (Epstein et al. 2017) and Kevin Lynch's (1960) book *The Image of the City* is regarded as a pioneering work in the field of mental mapping (Götz and Holmén 2018). While the term "cognitive map" often has a neurological origin and connotation, "mental map" is often used in behavioral science and geography (Götz and Holmén 2018), and although these terms are often used interchangeably, 'mental maps' will be used as the preferred term in this article.

The term "mental mapping" is used to describe the process of projecting one's internal cognitive map onto a sheet of paper (Anzoise and Mutti 2012). Mental maps can be seen as a model of the environment that is built up over time in the individual's brain (Sarre et al. 1972) and serve as a tool of expression conveying the inner feelings of interviewees towards specific areas of the city, which communicates the primary associations, usage, and feelings connotated with the space that is drawn (Lynch 1960). In this context, the concept of mapping is founded upon a subjective perspective, whereby individual perceptions serve to inform spatial representations, acknowledging the notion of urban space as a collection of individual experiences (Yılmaz 2016). It is also a way of locating unconscious symbols and emotions associated with a particular space and channeling them on a piece of paper, which can elicit responses that might be difficult to obtain by other means (Saarinen 1974).

Guiliana Bruno (2002) posits that situationist mapping, in its investigation of the emotional dimensions of lived space as an affective traversal of the street, can be conceptualized as a socio-political psychoanalysis of urban space. Bruno (2002) hence emphasizes that a crucial aspect of the psychogeographic practice and the terminology is studying the unknown or unconscious relationships with spaces. It is only through an awareness of the influences of the existing environment that one can encourage a critique of the present conditions of daily life (Plant 1992), which is why one of the goals of psychogeography is to attempt to override the conscious mind and engage with the subconscious. As Gould (1966) argues, individuals' perceptions of the environment, space, and their differing evaluations of these elements result in the formation of mental images and maps that humans hold unconsciously and that provide crucial insight into the patterns of representation and struc-

tures of human behaviors and decisions. In addition, information obtained from youth's drawings, including mental maps, can highlight themes and culturally specific details that the research team would otherwise not have been able to explore (Green and Denov 2019). To a certain extent, we believe that mental maps provide the prerequisites for a psychogeographic reading of war-affected youth as they offer an opportunity for socio-political reflection and engagement as well as representation of the individuals, incorporating their personal associations, traumas, and identities, hence offering a unique lens through which the city is perceived.

Situationists claimed that the cognitive mapping tradition, referring to Lynch's (1960) method, cannot in fact meet the political challenge because it has failed to develop any comprehension of the need for detournement within a spectacular image society (Bonnett 1989). It can be argued that Lynch's approach to mapping does not have an inherent intention of driving socio-political change but is rather concerned with the examination of mental maps for the purposes of improving urban design and planning. Furthermore, Lynch establishes a connection between psychology and cartography, albeit in a behaviorist manner that fails to align with the notion of an individual's intrinsic personality. This is a crucial aspect of this study, as it pertains to the emotional dimensions of exile, which are shaped by personal experiences. Although Lynch's method is frequently employed and adapted to suit particular research objectives, it has not been subjected to empirical examination (Huynh et al. 2008). Generally, there is no fixed methodology associated with mental mapping and its application varies considerably among scholars and artists across different disciplines (Saarinen 1974; Casey and Wright 2008; Huynh et al. 2008; Gieseking 2013; Yılmaz 2016).

2.3. Photo Elicitation Interviews (PEI)

While the combination of methods in qualitative research is not uncommon, the method of integrating photo elicitation interviews with mental maps has barely been explored. One example of its use comes from the Study of Urban Landscapes by Anzoise and Mutti (2012) whose research showcases that each of these methods has its own strengths and limitations, and when used together they can bring more nuance and a unique perspective on the cases studied.

The method of photo elicitation is based on the premise that the inclusion of a photograph in a research interview can prompt the interviewee to reflect on and articulate aspects that may not be readily accessible through verbal communication. This approach is particularly popular in research areas that tackle social organization/social class, community, identity, and culture (Harper 2002). While mental maps allow exploring the interviewees' perception of Weimar in terms of their initial core images and memories of the city, the photo elicitation interviews aid in eliciting additional experiences, feelings, and thoughts about public places in Weimar, which were not featured on the mental maps. Furthermore, images evoke deeper elements of human consciousness than words, as well as stimulate the release of emotional statements about the informant's life, which is achieved by prompting the informant to recall memories and emotions (Harper 2002).

2.4. Data Collection

To investigate the sense of belonging of refugee youth, along with mental maps and photo elicitation interviews, we employed qualitative, in-depth, semi-structured interviews (Anzoise and Mutti 2012). One of the main arguments challenging interviews as the only method while researching with the youth is that language-based research requires the youth to use words to explain their perceptions, when they may not have the necessary vocabulary (Didkowsky et al. 2010). Meanwhile, visual methods make it easier for young participants in particular to feel more at ease and connect with the topic on a more profound level (Clark 1999; Clark-Ibáñez 2004), which is why it was deemed the most appropriate approach for the study. The entire process of interviewing participants lasted approximately

two to three hours, with brief intermissions for a break, and was comprised of the following elements:

1. Collecting the socio-demographic data (5–10 min);
2. Mental mapping (20 min);
3. Semi-structured interview about the drawn mental maps (20–40 min);
4. Photo elicitation interview (10–20 min);
5. Semi-structured interview about the general experience of belonging and belonging in Weimar (10–15 min).

In order to ensure that interviewees were able to fully express themselves, the interviews were conducted in the language in which the participants felt most comfortable (Welch and Piekkari 2006). The majority of interviews were conducted in Ukrainian, one was conducted in a combination of Ukrainian and Russian, and one was conducted in English. Mariam Kunchuliya's proficiency in all of the above-mentioned languages allowed her to conduct the interviews and analyze the data, and due to existing social contacts, no brokers were needed to get into contact with the participants.

2.4.1. Sample

To study the sense of belonging, eight interviews were conducted with refugees who have Temporary Protection according to §24 of the German Residence Act (Aufenthaltsgesetz). The participants were sought through snowball sampling and online announcements through "Ukrainians in Weimar" groups on social media. The interviewees' ages ranged from 18 to 26, which corresponds with the age when Ukrainians usually graduate from school (at the age of 17–18) or university (at the age of 24–26) (Pashkovska 2016), and hence, find themselves in times of transition and liminality. All of the participants either had Ukrainian citizenship or a permanent residence permit in Ukraine at the time of Russia's invasion, meaning that they all have the same legal status in Germany (§24 AufenthG) thus making their experience more comparable. The participants also have a diverse range of backgrounds (see Table 1), which enabled us to ascertain how individual backgrounds affect the embodied experiences of participants in the city (Nast and Pile 1998). Before the full-scale invasion, the participants of this study resided in central and eastern Ukraine, regions especially affected by Russian attacks and from where the majority of Ukrainians have been forcefully displaced (IOM 2022). The majority of them also arrived during the initial months of the full-scale invasion, which aligns with the broader pattern of refugee arrivals from Ukraine to Germany (Statistisches Bundesamt 2024). All participants in the study are assigned pseudonyms for confidentiality purposes.

2.4.2. Mental Mapping

After collecting the socio-demographic data, participants were asked to draw maps of Weimar, while thinking about different experiences that are important to them, spaces, paths, people they meet, smells they feel, and general impressions they capture on their walks (Lynch 1960; Gieseking 2013). Interviewees had 20 min to draw and label their maps, on an A3 white paper sheet with colorful pencils at their disposal. After 20 min had passed, we proceeded with the semi-structured interview about the drawings. Participants were asked to introduce their map, the places and objects they had drawn overall, and then talk about each object drawn in-depth in an order they preferred. The questions posed during this phase of the interview can be divided into two categories:

Table 1. Research sample and socio-demographic data of the interviewees.

Interviewee Pseudonym	Gender Identity	Ukrainian Citizenship	Age	Legal Status in Germany	Marital Status	Education	Residence in Ukraine	Arrival in Weimar (Un/ Accompanied)	Arrival in Weimar (Month, Year)
Dmytro	male	yes	19	§ 24 AufenthG	not married	Ukrainian high school diploma	Kharkiv	unaccompanied	May 2022
Solomiya	female	yes	19	§ 24 AufenthG	not married	Completed first year of Ukrainian University	Dnipro, Chernihiv	accompanied, with family	March 2022
Yuliia	female	yes	18	§ 24 AufenthG	not married	Ukrainian high school diploma	Zaporizhzhia	accompanied, with older sibling	March 2022
Artem	male	yes	19	§ 24 AufenthG	not married	Ukrainian high school diploma	Donetsk, Kyiv	accompanied, with family	February 2022
Mykhailo	male	yes	18	§ 24 AufenthG	not married	First semester of University in Germany	Kyiv	unaccompanied	March 2022
Oksana	female	yes	26	§ 24 AufenthG	not married	Completed university degree in Ukraine	Zaporizhzhia, Kyiv	unaccompanied	March 2022
Svitlana	female	yes	26	§ 24 AufenthG	not married	Completed university degree in Ukraine	Kyiv region	unaccompanied	October 2021
Sergio	male	(no, but permanent residence in Ukraine)	26	§ 24 AufenthG	married	Completed university degree in Ukraine	Kyiv	accompanied, with partner	February 2022

First—questions about the technique of the drawing, for example: *Why did you decide to use this color for this district? Why did you choose to draw your map in a circle?* The second type of questions were centered on the relationship between the interviewees and the places they drew, with a pronounced emphasis on the emotional connotations and experiences associated with these places. Examples of such questions included: *Please describe your experiences at this location. Please describe the emotional response that this place/object elicits in you. What associations do you have with this place? What does this drawn symbol represent? What meaning does this object/place have to you?* These questions were aimed at stimulating a deeper reflection about the places/objects drawn and the meanings they carry for the participants.

2.4.3. Photo Elicitation Interviews (PEIs)

While there are a variety of approaches to carrying out PEIs in terms of how exactly the images are utilized in the study (Clark-Ibáñez 2004, p. 1509), the method we are following relies on interviewing based on pre-selected images. Interviewees were asked questions about their memories, experiences, and associations based on 34 pre-selected images of Weimar's public squares, green spaces, and landmarks. Similarly to Anzoise and Mutti (2012), the set of photos was chosen to see if people were able to recognize Weimar landmarks, which were not drawn on their mental maps, as well as to again facilitate reflection on what these urban elements mean to them personally. The dilemma commonly associated with PEIs is concerned with the process of image selection (White and Drew 2011; Anzoise and Mutti 2012). The type of images, that may be considered the most scientific for photo elicitation interviews, are visual inventories of objects, people, and artifacts (Harper 2002, p. 13), which determined our selection of static images of landmarks. Our approach to the selection of photos was made based on the following two criteria:

(1) Landmarks/spaces, in which refugee youth in Weimar are likely to have experience. This insight has been gained through the author's voluntary work with refugee youth (outside of research), as well as through their familiarity with the locations in question.
(2) The landmarks in Weimar, which are generally considered as well-known among residents, thereby a likelihood of a joint understanding is enabled.

As a result, 34 pre-existing images were selected by the researchers, which covered Weimar's most known public areas, including every public square, green space, and landmark. Even though these images cannot represent empirical truths or "reality," they can be leveraged as a tool to expand on questions, while allowing participants to convey unique aspects of their lives (Clark-Ibáñez 2004). The interviewees were shown a series of images and asked if they recognized the place. When answered positively, they were then asked to share their memories and associations with the place in question, in the same manner as the questions posed during the interview about the mental maps of the participants.

2.5. Data Analysis

2.5.1. Mental Maps Analysis

The maps were further analyzed by applying analytic techniques (Lynch 1960; Nathansohn and Zuev 2013; Gieseking 2013) along with the thematic coding applied for the transcripts of the interviews. The selection of analytical techniques and components is informed by the categories proposed by Gieseking (2013), given that the research objectives exhibited some parallels. The final 24 analytics (Table 2) were divided into four categories, adjusted to the specific aim of this study. Mechanics of Method (MOM) includes eight analytics and focuses on the representation of reality, Drawing Elements (DE) is a category that underlines the way a map is drawn, Narratives of place (NOP) introduces the ways in which elements of place shape understandings of identity, and the last category, Personalization, (P) combines personal associations and emotions about the space (Lynch 1960; Gieseking 2013). The following analytics can be used to examine the accuracy

of participants' space perception, but this study applies them solely to gain insights about the meaning the components carry in relation to the space interviewees drew.

Table 2. Categories of analytic techniques and components.

Analytic	Category
Text Labeling	Mechanics of Method (MOM)
Text Labeling: Acronyms. Slang, Abbreviations	Mechanics of Method (MOM)
Count of Drawn Items	Mechanics of Method (MOM)
Reside Near Place Now	Mechanics of Method (MOM)
Last Residence in Place	Mechanics of Method (MOM)
Enjoyed Mapping Process	Mechanics of Method (MOM)
Drawing Anxiety	Mechanics of Method (MOM)
Time Limit	Mechanics of Method (MOM)
Borders	Drawing Elements (DE)
Center	Drawing Elements (DE)
Included Elements at Various Scales	Drawing Elements (DE)
Use of Color	Drawing Elements (DE), Personalization (P)
Symbols	Drawing Elements (DE), Personalization, (P)
Legend	Drawing Elements (DE)
Includes Non-Human Animals	Drawing Elements (DE), Personalization (P)
Includes Activities	Drawing Elements (DE), Personalization (P)
Districts	Narratives of place (NOP)
Landmarks/Notoriety/Popular Elements	Narratives of place (NOP)
Personal Paths	Narratives of place (NOP)
Include What Possesses Personal Meaning	Personalization (P)
Discuss Emotions through Physical Space	Personalization (P)
Cultural Factors/Traditions	Personalization (P)
Proximity	Personalization (P)
Includes Depiction of Self in Map	Personalization (P)
Remembering Intimate Spatial Details	Narratives of place (NOP), Personalization (P)

The analytical elements were selected for the examination of emotional aspects rather than for the investigation of user experiences. For this reason, in our analysis, we included new analytic elements, such as "Includes Non-Human Animals" and "Includes Activities" (Table 1), which allowed us to open a new perspective of refugee youth's interaction with nature in the city and its effect on their mental health and sense of safety. The introduction of new analytics has enabled a more comprehensive understanding of the significance of both social and creative activities. These include, for example, the making of music in public spaces or the engagement in leisure activities at open-air swimming pools during the summer months (Figure 1). The analysis of mental maps through the aforementioned categories allowed for a detailed examination of each mental map, and then compared the data altogether to see if there are any trends in participants' drawings.

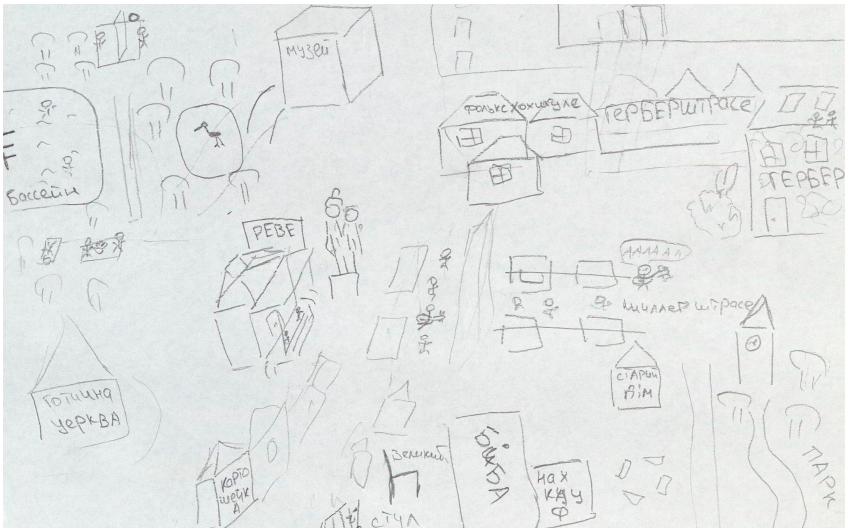


Figure 1. Example of a part of the mental map drawing depicting a bird (Includes Non-Human Animals) as well as playing table tennis, swimming, street music, talking on the roof (Includes Activities).

2.5.2. Interviews Analysis

As both the photo elicitation interview and the mental mapping interview constituted part of the general interview together with the follow-up questions (Table 1), they were analyzed as a single unit. The interviews were translated and transcribed into English and then subjected to manual thematic coding. Following the preliminary phase of generic coding, a total of 87 codes were identified. Next to a second phase of refinement, the initial 87 codes were consolidated into 30, which were then refined into groups (Thorne 2008). These groups constituted the final themes, which are presented in the results section.

2.6. Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Trauma-Oriented Approach

The methods we employed were chosen with the age and circumstances of the participants in mind. Half of the participants had arrived in Germany as minors (under 18 years old), some of them without guardians, which puts them in a significantly vulnerable state. In order to respect participants' needs and address the challenges they face not only for research, but also for challenging the status quo purposes, it was important to us to follow the Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework, which aims to understand and address societal issues while emphasizing democratic processes of participation with others (Baum et al. 2006). Qualitative methodologies and mixed methods research designs also facilitate the exploration of more contextually specific processes related to youth resilience (Ungar 2004), which also aligns with the objectives of the PAR approach. Furthermore, we have discovered that the fact that mental maps are unique for every participant and the discussion centers on their drawings also allow participants more space and agency in determining which experiences they want to focus on and how the discussion is shaped in the process of this research. Overall, the chosen visual methods fostered the co-production of meanings and knowledge as well as allowed us to see every day experiences in the city from the refugee youth's eyes.

Considering the fact that all participants have experienced fleeing the armed full-scale invasion, tackling emotions and association had to be approached extremely thoughtfully, as it can easily be a trauma-triggering experience (Mukasa 2022). In order to respect this aspect for participants, ethical and trauma-informed approaches were taken (Wilson and Darling 2020). Huang et al. (2014) define a trauma-informed approach as a program, an organization, or a system that is able to recognize the impact of trauma, respond by incorporating knowledge about trauma policies and practices, and seek to reduce the likelihood of re-traumatization. To ensure safety, trust, and collaboration, it was important for us to commit to transparent communication throughout the whole

process, inform interviewees in advance about the emotions-oriented nature of the study, emphasize the ability to withdraw consent of participation at any moment and check if the participant was comfortable during the interviews, offering breaks and warm beverages (Wilson and Darling 2020).

Such approaches aim to reduce power imbalances, minimize harm, and even stimulate community social action by involving youth as "active agents" and experts in their own experiences rather than as "passive objects" to be studied (Green and Denov 2019), which also aligns with the framework of the PAR approach.

3. Results

In order to link the outcomes of both the interviews and mental maps analyses, the data from mental maps was analyzed via analytic components, and compared while the interviews were thematically coded and subsequently refined into the five core themes. In this section, we talk about the results of mental maps analysis and interviews analysis, how they have been linked and further expand on the core themes of the findings.

3.1. Mental Maps Results

3.1.1. Mechanics of Method (MOM)

Mechanics of Method include a number of analytical techniques that reflect the conventional understanding of how a map conveys a realistic representation of spatial reality, in addition to examining the level of engagement of participants in this process (Gieseking 2013). In this study, on top of being interested in analyzing whether or not it reflects a realistic representation of Weimar, we want to analyze the reasons for the representation given.

All the mental maps drawings have text labeling and some also have acronyms, slang, and abbreviations. Some drawings had fully been labeled in the German language, while the rest had a mix of labels in German, Ukrainian, or Russian language as well as transliterated names. For example, the word Spielplatz—German for playground, written as шпільплатц. Here, the German word is not translated to Ukrainian (which would be дитячий майданчик) but transliterated into the Cyrillic alphabet. Three participants used partially transliterated labeling on their maps, which shows that they know the name of the place in German but prefer to write it in a Cyrillic alphabet. One map was labeled in English, one in Russian, and three fully in the German language. The majority of participants used German terms (or transliterated versions of them) for labeling their maps, as well as abbreviations and slang used locally, for example, the label Біба (Biba). Bib is a word many students in Weimar use to refer to the Bibliothek—German for library. Biba, however, is a Ukrainianized version of this local slang, because library in Ukrainian is бібліотека (biblioteka), hence the added "a". The frequent use of labeling in a German language or its transliterated version, as well as extensive use of local abbreviations and slang, demonstrates most of the participants' familiarity with locality. It also points to the possibility that participants who use local slang also have more social connections with the locals, which correlates to the results gained from the interviews.

The analytic "count of drawn items" indicates that drawings can be divided into two categories: (1) the number of drawn items is between 3 to 7 and (2) the number of drawn items is between 15 to 31. Three participants whose maps depicted less than seven items drew spaces and landmarks that are the most meaningful and representative to them of Weimar. For example, one mental map drawing has only three elements, but they are the most memorable for the interviewee as they are associated with positive feelings (Figure 2). The drawings in the second category depict the representation of Weimar in a more conventional mapping style, for example, the drawing in Figure 1, where the participant has drawn many items, most of which had a memorable connection to them. Participants, whose drawings had more items drawn on them, also showed a high understanding of locality and engagement with the city during the interviews' analysis, but not necessarily higher than those whose count of drawn items was lower; hence it does

not indicate that the count of drawn items correlates with participant's knowledge and engagement with locality.

Figure 2. Example of a mental map drawing with the count of three to seven items (places) drawn.

Five participants indicated their current place of residence, and two also indicated their last residence on their mental map drawings. All the participants had to change their residence at least once since they arrived in Weimar. The fact that the majority have drawn their current place of residence and labeled it with "home" shows that they feel comfortable with identifying it as their home, which is a significant indicator for the development of a sense of belonging. Those who drew their previous place of residence, also tend to have had positive experiences there, while those who did not draw their previous place of residence, when asked about it, said that they have negative associations with it, which is why they decided not to draw it.

3.1.2. Drawing Elements (DE) and Personalization (P)

The elements of the drawn mental maps also represent the subjective perception of the drawer. For example, when Yuliia was asked about why she drew her mental map in a circle, she answered that the sheet of paper is large, but Weimar is small, so she wanted to emphasize that by circling a smaller frame within the frame of the sheet given to her. The use of color or lack of it has also been used to signify specific emotions or associations towards an item drawn. Six out of eight participants used color in their drawings. When asked about it, participants explained why a certain color was chosen by them. Most of the colors used were self-explanatory: the park was drawn in green, places like Caritas or Jobcenter (which have red logos) were drawn in red, Ilm River and swimming pool in blue, etc. However, there were also a few maps, which colored their mental maps with symbolic colors. For example, Dmytro's drawing had colored the city center in yellow, as he explained, because it is a center/core, like the core of an egg is yellow, and the district where he lives with his family is in orange, because he associates it with warmth, and orange is a warm color, and the same goes to the district he drew in blue—the opposite, representing being cold and an unfamiliar part of Weimar for him.

The use of symbols was indicated in five mental map drawings. Sergio's drawing had a symbol of the road, which represented his impression of Weimar's roads being of good quality, and the symbol of the sickle, which he drew because he considers German people very hardworking, and this was important for him in relation to his experience in Weimar. At his job, he perceives people as very hardworking and serious, which he also associates with a slight lack of friendliness and coldness. Two maps used symbols, which highlighted the positive attitude towards the items drawn, like stars—to indicate where the most important people for them live and favorite associations with the place, or hearts—indicating their own and their partner's home. These symbols do not only show extra appreciation and warmth towards the items drawn, but also demonstrate the

participants' attachment to these places and in some cases, people who live in the buildings, which were highlighted with a star or a heart.

3.1.3. Narratives of Place (NOP)

The components and techniques categorized under the NOP category include those analytics that help us to understand how the physical, remembered, and imagined space relates to the way it is perceived and lived (Gieseking 2013, p. 22) As it was mentioned above, when talking about the use of color, some participants identified districts in their drawings. One participant colored the districts according to his personal interpretation and labeled them in his own terminology, whereas another participant labeled one district Weimar-Nord with many question marks, and another part of Weimar (Weimar-West) she labeled as "this is unfamiliar to me". Although the two latter districts have a high population of Ukrainian refugees living in them, it shows that to her they are not familiar territory.

One of the most common landmarks drawn by participants was the Goethe–Schiller Monument, commemorating two of the most prominent German writers, who lived in Weimar. Located in the heart of the city, it is one of the biggest sights of the city, which one passes by regularly when one lives in Weimar. All participants engaged in drawing landmarks, e.g., museums, parks, university campus, castles, and other monuments. This also indicated that participants were very well aware of the city's significance in German history and culture and are also active observers and users of the landmarks they drew.

3.2. Interview Results

In order to link the outcomes of both the interviews and mental maps analyses, the data from mental maps was analyzed via analytic components, and compared while the interviews were thematically coded and subsequently refined into the five core themes:

- Finding safety;
- Gaining an understanding of the new locality;
- Strengthening the connection with the city through further social engagement and vice versa;
- Developing a sense of growth and agency in a context of liminality;
- Negotiating the sense of belonging between solidarity and hostility.

In order to link two datasets together, the outcomes of the maps analysis were simultaneously compared with the information extracted during thematic coding. For example, it was found that all mental maps included the component of Landmarks, and the one Landmark all mental maps had in common was Ilm Park which we elaborate on in the "Finding Safety" subsection "Role of Green Spaces".

The aforementioned five themes may be regarded as core paths to the sense of belonging experienced by refugee youth in Weimar. It is crucial to acknowledge that the processes described cannot be perceived as linear or isolated from one another. In fact, one factor often leads to another, and vice versa.

3.2.1. Finding Safety (Physical and Mental)

Looking at the experience of forced migration from a trauma-informed perspective, it is important to rebuild the normal within the abnormal (Bürgin et al. 2022). Finding safety is one of the core steps that can give an individual the necessary energy to focus on processes that allow them to arrive both physically and emotionally to a new place.

Role of Informal Arrival Infrastructures

In Germany, refugees fleeing the Russian invasion have been granted a legal status of Temporary Protection (§ 24 AufenthG 2023), which allows them to live and work in Germany while the protection is in place, which currently has been extended until March 2025. However, in order to receive this legal status, and have the access to social and financial support it provides, one had to go through a very complicated and especially in the beginning, messy, bureaucratic process. This was particularly hard for refugees

who were minors and arrived in Weimar without parents or legal guardians. All of these processes would be extremely challenging to go through without the help of locals, and every interviewee pointed out how they were helped by a local person, whether it was their friend, relative, or a volunteer.

Host Families

For example, Dmytro and Myhailo both arrived in Weimar as minors without parents or guardians to local hosting families they never met before. They found these families through either distant connections or websites that were set up to find people who were willing to accommodate Ukrainian refugees. These local German families then became their guardians and hosts until Dmytro and Myhailo turned 18; these families also helped them go through the initial bureaucratic processes. Similar experiences happened for those who arrived together with their parents and were also initially accommodated by German host families who not only allowed them to have access to short-term shelter, but also provided help with navigating German bureaucracy and being introduced to the city through the perspective of locals. It was also strongly perceived and reflected on as an extremely helpful experience seen as a sign of solidarity and welcome. This also made interviewees feel safer not just on a physical, but also on an emotional level.

Informal Refugee Shelter Run by OMA

A large number of refugees from Ukraine arrived in Germany's state-run emergency shelters. In cities like Berlin, in the midst of the housing crisis, refugees are struggling to find accommodation, which creates feelings of despair, danger, and being stuck in a limbo (Hessey 2024). Although Weimar state-run shelters have also served as arriving infrastructure for many Ukrainian refugees, the interviewees of this study have not experienced it firsthand. Therefore, the findings of this research reflect the experience of a very specific group of refugees in Weimar.

A big role in providing support to Ukrainian refugees was carried out by formal social support services like Caritas, Diakonie, and AWO who offered a lot of counseling for Ukrainian refugees and adjusted to the language needs by engaging Ukrainian or Russian-speaking volunteers. However, the first place refugees knew as a place of support was an informal refugee shelter run by OMA (Other Music Academy). OMA is a non-profit organization that uses an abandoned school building for cultural events and projects, but they also provided space for Syrian refugees in Weimar in 2015 and for Ukrainian refugees in 2022. In March 2022, the shelter was organized and built up urgently by volunteers, who also picked up people from the Ukrainian border, ensured COVID-19 safety measures, cooked, translated, and helped people either reach their next destination or go through the process of registration and housing search in Weimar.

OMA was a place that almost every Ukrainian refugee in Weimar was aware of because this was where they could always get food, rest, and get help from volunteers.

> *I liked OMA, at first there was food, a cafe, you could play the guitar there, there was a piano. But I always went there with new friends to drink coffee. It was the only place where at that time my stepfather would let me go . . . in OMA we rested, just played there and later had some concerts. And there I also met some volunteers. They helped me a little. I asked questions like, how long they studied German, how it was to find friends and understand how everything works here. And it helped me a lot, they shared that there are a lot of students here, it's a lot of fun, and you can learn German, it's not very difficult". I felt like, well, okay. It doesn't look as bad as it could be. It calmed me down a bit.* (Solomiya)

As we can see, this was also seen as a trustworthy place and provided a sense of calmness, rest, and safety for the refugee youth who used this place not only for physical needs like food or help with registration, but also for social needs like meeting people and learning more about Weimar. Later, OMA also became a hub for a lot of cultural events with Ukraine-related themes, which draws many Ukrainians there to this day.

Role of Symbols of Solidarity

On top of the examples mentioned above, refugees in Weimar talk a lot about how a sense of solidarity in the city makes them feel welcomed and supported. Whether it is a banner or a demonstration for Ukraine, the sense of solidarity with Ukraine makes them feel safe and more connected to the new environment.

> *There was some psychological support from the fact that you are not alone here, that there are people around you, that there are people with the same views, that they care.* (Oksana)

> *So they hung the flag, and it meant so much to me, this readiness and even support, even simple in some small acts, really impressed me. And I was proud to be a part of this community.* (Svitlana)

> *Then next to a big chair there is a banner with the Ukrainian flag hanging above it. By the way, one of the few aspects to which I first paid attention in Weimar are Ukrainian flags. There was one near the Nahkauf, near Bauhaus, on the Market Square; While walking around the city again and again, I paid attention to this. It felt good, it felt like support. Hilfe hilft (Help helps).* (Mykhailo)

Interestingly, the effect of even small symbols of solidarity like seeing locals hanging Ukrainian flags or posters condemning Russian aggression can raise morale and a feeling of safety in the new place. Considering the circumstances that led refugees to end up in Weimar, seeing signs of support for Ukraine made them feel that they are "not alone" in this fight, which had a powerful effect on their confidence and trust in the community.

Factors that Jeopardize the Sense of Safety

The experience of feeling unsafe in the city by refugee youth from Ukraine has shown that experiences vary drastically depending on factors such as race, gender, and subculture identity. Refugees who have been victims of racism in the past do not feel as physically safe in Weimar as those who are perceived as white. They are a lot more reserved when it comes to engaging with the city and are a lot more hesitant to participate in demonstrations because they fear race-based violence.

> *I don't always participate because I'm being careful. I'm still not so long here . . . You don't want to be violated. I don't want violence.* (Sergio)

Furthermore, gender is a significant factor in determining the level of safety experienced by refugees during interviews. The number of reports on gender-based violence among women displaced from Ukraine is considerable (Samber 2023), and Weimar is not an exception in this regard.

> *I dont go there often, and I am very uncomfortable there, because somebody who tried to sexually hit on me when I was still a minor works there.* (Solomiya)

The interviews with female respondents revealed a pervasive prevalence of catcalling, car honking, and sexual harassment, some of whom were still minors and in vulnerable circumstances when having these experiences. Fortunately, measures were taken early on to address these experiences. However, the respondents still reported avoiding certain locations in the city and feeling distressed and less safe in the city as a result of these experiences.

Refugees who identify with subcultures or leftist movements also perceive the potential for their identity to be visible and perceived as a threat in certain locations that are associated with right-wing youth.

> *About this place, about this square. I rarely go there, because a few months ago, one of my friends was beaten up there very badly, because he is a leftist. I just fear going out in the evening, because I'm alone and with my hair and piercings. On top of this being an Ausländer (foreigner) . . . well, I hang out with folks who are ANTIFA, and because of that you just walk down the street, I don't know, through the library in the evening, and there are already dudes with cool cars standing there, honking, screaming at you. Because*

from the beginning of me being here I looked a little emo. There were comments, and also because I speak another language. (Solomiya)

At the same time, while having a negative experience in regard to safety, refugee youth in Weimar still feel overall safer to express their identity in this context compared to their circumstances at home:

I feel more free here because if I were to go somewhere with this hairstyle and this strange make-up and wearing colorful stuff like this in my hometown, I could get in trouble . . . it's also easier to be queer here. (Solomiya)

Another big factor that jeopardizes the safety of Ukrainian refugees comes in the form of Russian presence, be it the name of a street, a statue of a Russian figure, or hearing the language:

I don't want to perceive people purely because of where they were born, but, from experience, this is rather an exception when people are really reflected at such a level, that despite their origin, they understand what is happening and separate themselves from this toxicity and imperialism, and chauvinism and so on. Therefore, as soon as I hear Russian, I immediately go somewhere else because here it can mean a real threat. (Svitlana)

The worst effect on the feeling of safety, however, comes from the weekly Monday Demonstrations. These demonstrators, often walking along with far-right, neo-nazi groups, are demonstrating against the German government and its support of Ukraine, disguised with messages "for peace". They feature the Imperial German Flag, Russian federation flag, and many flags with the peace sign. Ukrainians in Weimar perceive these demonstrations with strong feelings of hurt, anger, threat, despair, and existential hostility.

Well, the war started, and maybe a month, maybe two passed. I was leaving work, and I was passing by here, and I saw those people. They handed out flyers and stood with russian flags, stood with all that. And I was so shocked, I was so surprised. I could not understand. It caused me a storm of emotions. After that, I walked all the way home, so broken. When I came home I cried. I could not understand what was happening. I couldn't believe that it was reality . . . It feels like you see people who don't want you to exist. It's against your existence. (Svitlana)

This winter, when I passed by the Theater Platz, well, I saw them there, and I burst into tears, because it was disgusting to see it all. Seeing the policemen who are supposed to protect them was disgusting. And I thought only about what they support and what russia is doing to my country and to the people in my country. And I was just super hurt that this was happening because they were allowing this to happen. I was passing by, I was writhing and showing that I was angry. I looked at the policemen (grims face) And then I couldn't and started crying. That's all. (Yuliia)

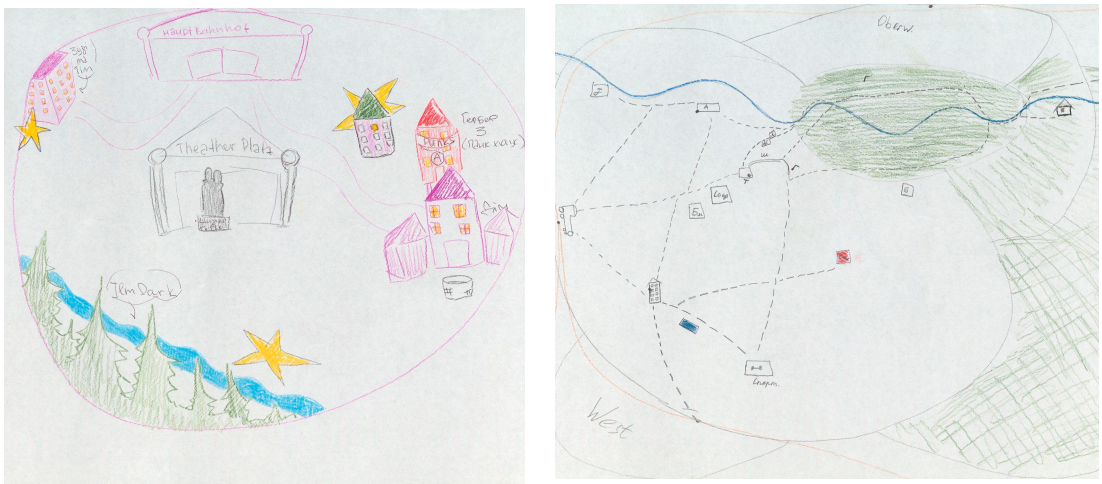
I try not to go out on Monday nights because I really don't like it. Not even that it's scary, I just hate to even think about it. I don't want to, and every time I hear it, everything tightens up inside. (Solomiya)

What you see is you live in the cultural capital, you live in a city that has experienced a lot, you think that the locals. Well, you have to learn from history somehow, learn some lessons from history, but you see that people don't, people don't pay attention to it at all. (Mykhailo)

It is evident that refugee youth in Weimar perceive Monday demonstrations as pro-Russian, and they feel very threatened and intimidated by them as well as the people who attend them. The fact that these are happening every Monday and so many people are demonstrating makes Monday evenings unbearable. Almost everyone who was interviewed avoids going outside on a Monday evening, not because they are afraid of violence, but because these demonstrations and their messages feel supportive of Russia. For individuals who have endured Russian violence and were forcibly displaced from their homes as a result of the Russian invasion, seeing local support for their aggressor feels not only cruel, but it also feels threatening and mentally violent.

Role of Green Spaces

Mental mapping is a great tool to track which spaces one associates with safety and comfort. It was very telling to see that one thing that every participant drew on their mental map was an image of Ilm Park, a large park close to the city center (Figure 3).



(**a**) (**b**)

Figure 3. Examples of mental maps depicting Ilm Park. (**a**) Yuliia's mental map of Weimar (**b**). Artem's mental map of Weimar.

Green spaces indeed proved to be important in establishing a space for refugee youth to process a lot of emotional baggage, find mental relief, spend quality time with family and friends, connect with nature, do homework and reconnect with hobbies, and interests they had before fleeing.

One interviewee, Solomiya, drew a heron on her mental map (Figure 1) and when asked about it, said:

> *I really like to see what they are doing. How they react to certain things, how they walk, what they do . . . It really helps to ground yourself somehow.* (Solomiya)

The sense of grounding is what a lot of interviewees describe when talking about their interactions with green spaces in Weimar. In a world where one flees a war and has to leave part of their family behind, the pain and sorrow can be overwhelming, and the whole experience can be mentally unbearable. Access to nature and observing even something so ordinary as a bird building a nest can serve as a reminder of something very usual and normal in times when nothing seems normal anymore.

> *I think at some point it (Ilm Park) was saving my sanity very much. Because there is a moment when you move to a new city and you don't have many friends and that's why you walk a lot in the park by yourself with headphones, or read a book in the warm season. I probably already know every stone in the park, but still I walk there almost every day. That's why it's big on my map.* (Oksana)

Interestingly, the majority drew Ilm Park on their map larger than it actually is in relation to proportions. This can also be a reflection of their high engagement and connection with the park. Many report that it was the place for them to take long walks and process emotions, but it is also a place where many find normalcy and activities they are used to doing back home. Some are using it more for sports and going to the park to go jogging or biking. Others are going there to find inspiration.

> *In the park you just cross over those places that you fell in love with visually, and which you somehow enjoy going to. Especially in combination with your favorite playlist, as well as the feeling of being able to sit down, take a sketchbook to draw, write poems, when the mood strikes.* (Artem)

Lastly, Ilm Park is also an extremely important place for social connections. It provides relief from the heat in the summer and offers many locations where people can sit down on a blanket with friends, play games, and just hang out. These experiences are also very needed for refugees, as they help build social connections and make room for new positive experiences. Ilm Park is one of Weimar's treasures and it can definitely be seen as a place of nurture and recharging for many young refugees from Ukraine.

3.2.2. Gaining an Understanding of the New Locality

> *I think, if you don't know something, it's a kind of a fear, even a banal comparison with the darkness. That we are afraid because we don't know what's out there. It's the same with the city.* (Dmytro)

When we think about where we belong, it is hard to imagine a place we barely know or understand. Building connections with the city and its people cannot happen automatically, and to be able to connect, one needs to be able to navigate and build a certain fluency in the city. The more we are able to engage with the city and the more the city allows us to be engaged with it—be it through its residents or infrastructures—the less foreign it becomes. When interviewees described how they were gradually getting to know Weimar, it was evident that the more they knew and understood—the easier it was for them to engage with the city. Active interest and engagement in turn leads them to strengthen and deepen meaningful connections with the city, hence fostering a sense of belonging to Weimar.

Size of the City/Weimar Urban Fabric

In regard to learning about the city, the size of Weimar emerged as a significant factor. All the interviewees attributed their sense of familiarity with the city to this factor, which they perceived as fostering a connection and a sense of belonging to Weimar. Many of those with friends who are refugees from Ukraine in larger cities like Warsaw, Munich, or Berlin observed that refugees in Weimar appear to have a more positive experience of connecting with the city and its people, and that they tend to develop confidence within the city relatively quickly compared to their friends.

> *I've never lived in a very small city, it's a new experience for me. Because Zaporizhzhia is not small, Kyiv is not small. But I like it in a way. I know a lot of people and there is a strange feeling of a community because you walk down the street and you meet people you know. And this, too, I think, has changed my perception of myself a little bit. In general, I gained a lot of self-confidence during my stay in Weimar. I stopped being so stressed in Weimar. Not that it changed my personality, but the mindset a little bit, and it grounds you in a way. And I think it had a good effect on my mental state. And especially on my post-traumatic state. I think that people who live in big cities with the same background as mine, maybe they experience a lot more stress. Weimar takes away this factor.* (Oksana)

All the people we interviewed previously lived in large Ukrainian cities, so living in a town with 60 thousand residents feels very new and unusual for them. Majority of them credit Weimar's size for being able to connect to it faster. Another big factor is being able to quickly meet new people and communicate with others, which can help people access support networks and generally make a faster way of getting to know new places and communities because of the physical proximity.

> *-After all, everything in Kharkiv was good, you know everything, you get more and more attached to a place. And it's like tearing off a plaster and gluing it to another place. And it takes some time before you can stick completely to one place. And the bigger the city, the harder it is to stick to it.*
>
> *-So you think that the size of the city aids that?*
>
> *-Yes, confidence, confidence that you know everything here, you belong.* (Dmytro)

Weimar reflects this example in this sense, but it is not merely the size, but also the walkability that makes it so approachable and easy, and to quote Dmytro "get glued to".

The city center can be easily covered in a day, cars can barely drive through it, and its short distances and high proximity make it quite a walkable city. The majority of interviewees experience the city either by walking or riding a bicycle, which can also be seen in the paths they draw on their mental maps. This also comes across in almost every interview—the fact that one always sees familiar faces on the streets of Weimar, makes them feel less isolated and alone. It also creates more chances for social interactions on the streets, leading to better social engagement (Figure 4).

(**a**) (**b**)

Figure 4. Examples of paths drawn on mental maps. (**a**) Oksana's mental map of Weimar. (**b**) Mykhailo's mental map of Weimar.

Role of Youth Initiative talentCAMPus

A big role in building up an understanding of Weimar for refugee youth and children was played by talentCAMPus—a 10-year-old holiday education program for refugee children from Syria and now also Ukraine between the ages of 9 and 18 years. When refugees from Ukraine started arriving, it could take months before they found schools, kindergartens, or German courses they could attend. talentCAMPus served as a platform for refugee youth to learn German, make new friends, and get to know the city. For example, Solomiya had a negative first impression of Weimar, which started to change after she started attending talentCAMPus:

> *I mean, the first impressions were kind of negative. And then VHS (talentCAMPus) started. We went there, and I made some friends there, walked around Weimar a little bit, and went on some excursions. And then I started to like it more.* (Solomiya)

Apart from German classes, talentCAMPus organized lots of activities like museum visits or taking participants on bike rides or to a swimming pool in the summer. But mainly, it was a place to build new connections and meet peers.

> *I just really, really wanted to communicate with someone, and just have some kind of contact with other people. And there were Ukrainians there who were in the same situation and even people my age. And it helped me a lot to start living again. And plus I tried to learn at least a little German there. It helped to orient myself more, it was not scary to go to the store. And through VHS I found a local friend and he introduced me then to other people. And simply because of this, I already started to find some contacts with other places and people in Weimar.* (Solomiya)

For many, like Solomiya, this place was a crucial starting point to find friends, community and start feeling like life goes on. Mykhailo, who was 16 years old at the time of his unaccompanied arrival in Weimar, decided to start volunteering at talentCAMPus three days after arriving because they were lacking people who could translate for the children, and he had already studied German in Ukraine and spoke it well. He believes

that this initiative provided much-needed socialization and a place to distract children from hardships:

> *Socialization, first of all, very cool. Secondly, we found something for the children to do, so they had something to distract them. Maybe they went through something, or maybe they have some problems at home, and so this project was a place for them to play and be children. I think it was a point where there was a lot of connecting. A lot of contacts came about because of this, even after the kids were scattered to different schools, they still communicated with each other. I mean, I see it regularly when I pass by there, I see our children meeting at the same spot, even now that the project is over. Perhaps due to the fact that it is a small town. And that there is a lot here, everyone knows everyone. Relatively speaking, it helped me make my way there. Conventionally speaking, and with VHS, for example, that is, to somehow connect everything with each other. You can really get something really cool through acquaintances. And they can also find people through acquaintances who would be useful.* (Mykhailo)

This project opened a lot of doors in terms of gaining access to Weimar. It provided participants with a basic knowledge of German, excursions, and an overview of the city, but most importantly—it connected refugees with each other, and partially, with the locals. How this newly built understanding of Weimar led to a higher engagement with the city will be expanded on next.

3.2.3. Strengthening the Connection with the City through Further Social Engagement and Vice Versa

Initiatives like talentCAMPus or OMA can be seen as vital platforms which bridged Weimar and refugee youth from Ukraine. Through them, new connections with the city and a lot of contacts were built through which newcomers continued to further learn about other places of support, education, and activism. In this section, we want to take a look at how connections with the city can be built through local German, Ukrainian and international communities.

There are numerous instances of such interactions. For instance, Dmytro became aware of a local theater group engaged in a social initiative, namely the documentation of love stories from the Weimar-West, and decided to take part:

> *I didn't really know anything about Weimar-West before this project. I was there just a couple of times when I was walking around, looking at what was there. I saw that the architecture was very different from the rest of Weimar, but that's it. After this project, first of all, I learned a lot of new things and I liked it because I want to know more about the place where I live. And my attitude to this neighborhood has changed from seeing it just as an ordinary residential area.* (Dmytro)

Engagement like this deepens the connection with the city and helps refugees meet new people. The three most common experiences we identified were within a local, German association for youth called Gerber (which interviewees mostly referred to as Punk House), the Ukrainian community and the international community.

Engagement with the City through the Punk House

The Punk House or Gerber was drawn by a few of the interviewees, and when it came up during the photo elicitation interviews, almost everyone said their first impression of it was that it was a drug den. The Punk House, which is located in the center of the city, strongly contrasts with its tidy pastel-colored surroundings: the facade is covered in graffiti, there is a big ANTIFA ZONE mural on the side of the building, and a telephone hanging from the roof. The first impressions of our participants, however, do not reflect their attitude to the place now that they have experienced it from the inside.

> *And the first time I saw it, I thought it was some kind of drug den. Well, really. But then, one of my friends had some other acquaintances. And I went in, and saw that, in principle, there are adequate people there. Of course, it looks very interesting, because it's*

> *a little like here, that all the walls have something painted on them, something is hanging, something is stuck on the ceiling, or some kind of graffiti. And this is very cool because there is no such location in Ukraine, which was completely in the hands of teenagers. You can draw everything that your soul thinks could fit here, and you can implement it here. It's very cool. Besides, there are also a lot of German teenagers there, and you can get to know each other and chat. I don't know, there's something to learn there, about Weimar itself, or about German education. It's also very interesting, and besides, there are parties there.* (Dmytro)

The so-called Punk House is run by an official youth organization Haus für Soziokultur e.V. The members of the association are supported by professional social workers. The active members of the association are the local Weimar youth, who through their work at talentCAMPus have been able to meet Ukrainian youth, some of whom became close friends, and also became active members of this youth organization. Although the level of active engagement and sense of belonging with this community varies from one individual to another, some feel more connected to the place than others, everyone we interviewed has appreciation of having a place like this specifically for the youth in Weimar. Many see it as a place outside of home or German language courses, where they can just relax and hang out. It can be seen as a third place and a safe alternative to home for some.

> *And I just have another problem with the fact that I don't feel very free at home, because I have big problems with my family right now. And I really don't like just being at home. I try to be there as little as possible. I just sleep there and even that is not always. Therefore, in Gerber, this place helped me a lot, because I had a place where I could hide and not be at home. To not sit somewhere on the street starving . . . And now I feel more free there. You just come, sit, rest, watch, talk to someone, play some games, or just hang out. You can prepare something to eat there. And I really like the fact that there is such a place here, in Weimar, where, I don't know, you can feel free and calmly do whatever you want.* (Solomiya)

Having a place to go to when one wants to hide from problems at home is extremely important for the sense of safety and support, and often these places are easier to access when you already have a support network to turn to. In the case of refugees, it can take a long time until such support networks are built, hence there are a lot fewer alternatives to turn to when one needs mental space. This is why the existence of third places such as the youth initiative Gerber can play a big role in providing a support pillow for the youth in need.

> *Because in reality, there are no such places where you can just go in, sit down, nobody will say a word to you. Besides, it's warm, it's interesting, just to be there, to see what's hanging on the walls, some graphics, various inscriptions, to read. Because sometimes there are some interesting socio-political expressions in German, or some more cultural expressions in terms of something from a movie or from some songs, from books, so you can learn a lot about Germany from just studying the walls there.* (Dmytro)

Initiatives like Gerber also allow newcomers to access local communities and to start engaging with local culture and projects. For example, many of the interviewees volunteered in the house during events that were organized or took part in maintenance activities. Some were also involved in applying for funding for a community garden project, which they will execute in the upcoming months. These kinds of activities can be seen as place making. Hence, taking an active role in a local community motivates and teaches young people to also engage and influence their surroundings.

Refugee youth from Ukraine who visit the Punk House feel welcomed and safe in this place, but they still struggle with language barriers, which is why they do not fully feel like their involvement can be compared to the locals. Nevertheless, the communication barriers are declining with time. The majority of the refugee youth between 18 and 26 years old are too old for German high schools and do not have the necessary proficiency in German to be studying at German universities, so for many of them in Weimar, Punk House is one

of the only places to practice their German with local peers outside of German language courses. Through connection to Gerber, many deepen their understanding of Weimar, as their local friends would often take them to events or locations that are mostly known to locals only. They organize events, sometimes perform together, attend local fairs, and take walks in nature. This way, many start feeling a little bit like locals, which creates a sense of belonging in the long term.

Ukrainian Community

While building a connection to Weimar through local German peers is a great way to strengthen ties and the sense of belonging with the locality, there is enough evidence to claim that in the case of Weimar, the refugee youth can develop a sense of belonging without necessarily feeling a strong connection to the local German community. This means that significant social bonding is taking place, whereas social bridging happens less extensively and seems to be more horizontal than vertical (Ryan et al. 2008). Not having a strong tie to local peers, but consciously feeling like a part of the Ukrainian or an international community also has a strong effect on engagement and sense of belonging in Weimar and can be linked to the concept of social capital and benefiting from the support due to having ties within this community (Lamba and Krahn 2003).

The majority of the youth we interviewed identify as active in the Ukrainian community. Some of them are more active than others, but the range of activities is broad: They take part in weekly demonstrations of "Solidarity with Ukraine", perform Ukrainian songs and dances at Ukrainian events, volunteer as translators if their German is already fluent, take part in projects, such as making candles or camouflage nets for Ukrainian soldiers in the trenches, and collect money for Ukraine by organizing exhibitions or other types of cultural events. There were even instances such as collecting signatures for renaming Weimar's Moscow Street to Kharkiv Street because a lot of refugees from Kharkiv were accommodated on this street. Although the priority is of course to provide people shelter, accommodating refugees who are fleeing from Russian aggression on Moscow Street can be seen as symbolically cynical and difficult for some people living on this street to get used to. The city, however, did not approve this petition in the end. The majority of these activities are organized by an official association called "Ukrainian Community in Weimar" who were founded in 2022 after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Some members are local German individuals who strongly support Ukraine, but the majority of active members are Ukrainian refugees who came to Weimar as a result of Russia's full-scale invasion.

The process of organizing events such as exhibitions or demonstrations among others, demands knowledge of local infrastructures, such as how to ask for permission from the municipality, where to lend equipment from, or how to communicate announcements to the public. Youth who actively volunteer for the Ukrainian community learn how these processes work, and in the process meet new people, and establish an understanding of German bureaucratic and legal rules. The effect of volunteering could also be seen in some of the mental maps, for example, Mykhailo labeled some places like a Church shop on the map, because this is where he picks up the wax for the abovementioned candle project. He also drew the Catholic church on the map, because in its basement the candles are made.

During photo elicitation interviews, people associated a lot of locations with their volunteering or participation in the Ukrainian cause. For example, almost everyone associated Theater Platz—the main square of Weimar—with the Sunday Demonstrations in support of Ukraine. The square in front of the Bauhaus Museum - some associated with their performances at the concert organized by the Ukrainian community to collect donations. Labor—a pop-up exhibition venue in Ilm Park—is associated by the majority as a venue where a Ukrainian exhibition of banners in support of Ukraine took place. Another location is Mascha—a cafe and dance venue, which in the first months of invasion became a place where people could bring clothes, food, and hygiene items for refugees. This is also where one of the interviewees started volunteering on the second day after coming to Weimar. All these and many other locations in Weimar were discovered by our participants

as a result of their active engagement with the Ukrainian community and cause. These first-time encounters brought people to these locations because it had something to do with Ukraine, but then they became pinned on their mental maps, which makes these places seem more approachable and accessible for future engagements.

International Community

Some refugees from Ukraine are believed to have a stronger connection to the international community in Weimar than to local German or Ukrainian communities. Others feel like they have a strong connection with both. Sergio, who had lived in Ukraine for almost 10 years before the full-scale invasion, although has a strong connection to Ukraine and Ukrainians, does not feel like an active part of the Ukrainian community in Weimar. Another example is Oksana, who quickly after arriving in Weimar, found a job at a local bakery where most of her colleagues are international and where the language of communication is English. Knowing English, she did not have challenges connecting with her co-workers. It also led her to keep expanding her friend circle within the international community in Weimar and become a part of it.

> *I guess it's just Weimar, living here has opened up so many opportunities for me to learn more about other cultures or other countries. Now the circle of friends I have in Weimar is very international, for example. People from completely different continents, speaking completely different languages, and yet they all have the same problems, relatively speaking. It has opened up more for me not only in some educational terms. I'm happy that I have a lot of international friends now.* (Oksana)

Almost all interviewees also state that Weimar, and especially taking part in German language courses, has given them an opportunity to meet people from all over the world—an experience new to them. Almost everyone says that this has made them a lot more open-minded and helped to unlearn certain prejudices and stereotypes.

> *For all my seventeen years, before we came to Weimar, I had no international contacts at all. And here there is a huge diversity. I can sometimes just read about a country, understand its culture, and then talk to a representative of that culture and compare my knowledge, and to be honest, it's sometimes amazing, because no matter how you do it, you are learning something for yourself to improve your understanding of the whole world.* (Artem)

> *You know, to visit a place, you sometimes just need to meet a person from that place. You don't even have to go there. And that was the most interesting thing for me, just to dive into their world a little bit, talking to them. And they showed me, for example, a cafe in Weimar where you can get the most authentic taste of Chinese or South Korean food. Plus some new places that I didn't know about.* (Dmytro)

During photo elicitation interviews, places associated with participants' new friends, who are also foreigners, were mentioned frequently. For example, one church in Weimar was associated by two participants as a place where a child of their new friend from the German course was baptized. By connecting to people from other countries and being able to share the common experience of being a foreigner in Weimar (horizontal bridging), young people also find common ground and support in navigating and actively engaging in the new environment as a foreigner.

Engaging with the City through Street Music

Two mental maps had music symbols drawn on them, and as a result, we found out that two people we interviewed turned out to be street musicians. Their experience is fascinating and can teach us a lot about the effect of street performances on the perception of the city. Solomiya and Dmytro both, independently from each other, play music and sing on Weimar central streets in the summer. They describe it as an overall very positive experience because on top of being able to perform, which they enjoy doing, it is also a great way to earn some cash. The audience is usually very curious and attentive to their

craft. Unlike Dmytro, Solomiya also had previous experience in playing street music and believes that people in Weimar are a lot more ready to stop and listen to music, to pay attention to the artist, and sometimes even to have a little conversation with them about their music, compared to her observations in Ukraine.

> *And it is precisely on Schiller Strasse and Theater Platz that it often happens that someone stops and listens to you. Well, that feels great and cool.* (Dmytro)

> *People here listen to me. And . . . There is some kind of feedback even when they don't stop. There are some who stop and just listen. There are some who, when they approach, ask what this song is, in what language. And they just pay some attention to me.* (Solomiya)

It was important for Solomiya and Dmytro to feel seen and listened to. They perform mostly Ukrainian songs; some are self-written, and it means a lot for them to have a chance to share a part of Ukrainian culture with the locals. They describe how suddenly their role changed from a regular by-passer to a performer, and how claiming this space to perform their songs made them feel more like a part of the city. The Weimar audience has been quite kind and respectful to them, which also had a positive influence on their sense of safety and motivation to perform.

> *They pay more attention not to themselves, but to what is happening around them, and are not so much in a hurry, not so busy with something. Well, plus it was still summer. And before you go out to play more for yourself, and not just to earn money, you can meet someone you know there, sit together, chat. And it really helps you to feel like a part of this city.* (Dmytro)

Interestingly, playing street music does not only make the city pay attention to you, but also vice versa:

> *Because when you're just walking down the street, you're walking with the crowd. And when you stand and play, and watch people pass by, for, I don't know, an hour, you stand in one place and play music. And you see people passing by, what they are doing, then they go back, then you meet someone you know, then you see how someone bought ice cream, sat down, began to eat the ice cream, then the child started running, etc. And you just see all this fuss from the other side. You kind of stop at that moment. It somehow makes you pay more attention to the people and the city.* (Solomiya)

Unfortunately, the city of Weimar is currently introducing a number of new restrictions for street musicians, which for example, does not allow them to play on the streets in the city center. They will also require an official license, which almost surely will stop people like Solomiya and Dmytro from performing since this bureaucratic process can seem too overwhelming to even consider going through. As a result of this policy, Weimar will miss out on a lot of potential street performances, and take away space for performers to build connection to the city through their music.

3.2.4. Developing a Sense of Growth and Agency in a Context of Liminality

Most of the refugee youth in Weimar between the ages of 18–26 find themselves in a very pivotal time of their lives. Even if you take the context of war out, this period can be seen as a stage of liminality, the age of transitioning to independence, when young people learn to develop agency and develop control over their lives. This process has been of course forcefully sped up by the war forcing many to learn how to be independent before they were fully ready for it. This can be seen in Mykhailo's reflections on how he was given a role of a supervisor to look after children in the talentCAMPus, while still practically being a child himself. On top of this, being forced to move to a new country adds a challenge to also learn how to navigate in a new environment, new language, and new social sphere. The uniqueness of this group of people, as mentioned above, lies in the struggle of being too old for compulsory school education in Germany. Many of them graduated from their Ukrainian high schools online while already in Germany, but are not yet able to start studying at colleges or universities in Germany because of the language

barriers. This has also been reflected upon by Oksana who pointed out the awkward feeling of being a young person in a student city like Weimar, but not being a part of the university in Weimar:

> *There is this strange moment when you are a young person of university age, but you are not a student in Weimar. It's such a strange thing, really. I think not many people talk about it here. if you're young and you want to develop and so on, Weimar is a great place for that, in my opinion. But you have to find a way to enter the community. People think you are studying at university. And this sometimes brings some discomfort, because you feel like an outsider, that you cannot support these same topics. It's a little easier for me because I know a lot of people from the student community. For example, my friends who have been connected to the university. I even visited some classes as a guest, including the Ukrainian Cities class. It's a little easier for me because I know people, but I don't have a direct strong association with the university. This is such a tricky point in Weimar, I would say to be a youth in Weimar.* (Oksana)

This liminality and the sense of being stuck in between creates additional turbulence and challenges for these young people, and they have to additionally learn how to navigate and develop new strategies in times of uncertainty. The majority also believed the war would end fast and they would come back to Ukraine in a month or two, which is why all those who were still studying at school, brought their Ukrainian textbooks (but bringing almost no extra clothes for instance) to continue preparing for exams. Being able to build new strategies in the context of liminality is a difficult and energy-intensive process. Those who reflect on going through these challenges and growing in the process, also have a stronger feeling of confidence and belonging to Weimar.

While discussing mental maps and diving deeper during the photo elicitation interviews, a lot of memories came up that participants themselves were surprised to remember. For example, one person when discussing her mental map, remembered some complicated feelings she felt towards the locals and herself in the beginning:

> *At that time, in the beginning, I had absolutely no friends here. I remember I really envied people here. For example, I was walking in the park, and some young people were hanging out there, doing homework after school, sitting on the stairs, stuff like that. I really wanted this too, I remember feeling very sad and telling myself that in a year I would sit the same way, I promised myself. I remember thinking that people have an interesting life, but they don't have the same problems. They are just living normal lives now, nothing has changed for them. Just school, holidays, something else. It was very surreal for me. And then, six months later, I don't know, I myself was already sitting there with these people. I played the guitar at the Theater Square. That's why we often sit there with friends, and sometimes we just play music for money.* (Solomiya)

While telling this story, she felt a sudden realization about this complicated feeling and how drastically her experience has changed in the last two years. Having space and time to think about this more, she realized that she managed to develop a certain sense of belonging and find a silver lining in her experience. The process of reflection through the mental maps also allowed her to come to this realization and celebrate her ability to become more independent and overcome certain hardships in times of uncertainty.

> *I think I've grown up and have changed. Two years is long, and being 16 is quite a young age to face all these hardships. And a lot of it is thanks to the conditions I had in this situation, for which I am grateful. Well, yes, I went through difficult realizations of everything to the possibility of feeling completely calm in this place.* (Artem)

> *For me, moving here was something like the beginning of a new, more mature life. Because before I lived with a family, but here I am, in principle, alone. And it's, you know, like this novel "City" by Pidmohylnyi. And it was, you know, something like that. Yes, this is not Kyiv, but here I had to completely search for my new self, create it, because here, after all, everything fell on me to prepare for myself, to deal with documents myself, to rely on myself from the financial side and be more open to change.* (Dmytro)

To a certain surprise, almost everyone looked back at their last two years in Weimar with a feeling of gratitude and appreciation for the growth and change they experienced on the way. Forced migration is an extremely brutal process and it would be deceptive to assume that mostly positive outcomes come out of it. The painful feelings and effects linked to having to leave one's home and life behind cannot be compensated by anything, but it becomes evident that with time, if the external conditions are adjusted to the needs of newcomers, refugee youth can manage to find ways to adjust to the new reality, and even make new meaningful connections and experiences. Some of them also reflect on how their experience in Weimar helped them gain independence, and confidence and build a certain sense of agency. It can also be seen as a form of building up resilience. This sense of built-up resilience and growth also seems to deepen appreciation and connection to a place and communities which played a role in supporting them during a difficult time, which also fosters a sense of belonging.

> *I want to have an influence, a positive influence of course. And like I said if you want to make an influence or you want to make a positive change then of course the place has to be home first. You cannot be an outsider to make a change.* (Sergio)

What Sergio and others say about the fact that outsiders cannot have an influence reflects a lot on the importance of the sense of belonging for further engagement in local society. Engaging with the city and local communities also fosters the sense of belonging, so we can see how one factor leads to another and vice versa. The more people engage with the city in a meaningful way, the more they feel like they belong and the more they want to engage further.

3.2.5. Developing a Sense of Belonging between Solidarity and Hostility

Place attachment is often seen as a critical component of belonging. To test this, a lot of questions targeted the sense of connection to Weimar and its communities, as well as what interviewees considered home and where they felt at home. It is certain from the interviews that although the majority hesitate to call Weimar their home, everyone we interviewed feels an attachment to Weimar and a sense of belonging to a certain extent.

> *Well, home is anywhere. Home is anywhere I find myself. I make the place, I find myself home. You know, when I was in Ukraine, I stayed in Ukraine for ten years, but I lived there for ten years. So it was home and it's still home. Ukraine is still my home. You know I miss it anyways. But I'm in Weimar, and Weimar has given a lot and so it is home now. So when I'm here I feel at home of course. When I travel around and I come home, I'm happy to be back to Weimar. Because it has become home.* (Sergio)

As Sergio points out, home can be made, and it does not have to be attached to one place only. Being able to feel at home in multiple places can reflect an individual's connection to multiple places at the same time, which also reflects their sense of belonging to multiple places. A big part of developing a sense of connection and belonging is also played by being actively engaged with the city. Many believe that their active role makes them feel like a part of the city.

> *At first glance, it just seems that Weimar is very small, there is nothing interesting here, but in general, if you know the city, then you know everything can be found here. There is an active life here and I like to be a part of this active life.* (Solomiya)

A sense of belonging, as mentioned earlier, is also strongly linked to the feeling of safety, comfort, and trust in the city. It is also a feeling that almost everyone longs for:

> *Belonging? It is very important for me, because I have a very big fear of not being liked, that I will impose myself, that I will have no place.* (Solomiya)

> *-What is a sense of belonging for you?*

> *-Trust.*

> *-And how does this trust manifest itself?*

-It manifests itself in general by the fact that I know I'm safe here. And I know that if I want to do something in this place, go somewhere, see someone, it will be comfortable, easy, and fast.

-And do you feel this trust here, in the city of Weimar?

-Yes

(Yuliia)

Probably, first of all, belonging is the comfort of being around. As a socially anxious person, I don't feel comfortable putting myself out there, and if I feel that I don't belong here, then it's very difficult to deal with it. Therefore, I think that for me it is about comfort, about understanding, about being understood . . . A sense of security, of course, too. Because if you belong here, people won't look at you with hostility or show some kind of aggression. Of course, it's easier for me in this regard. People might think I'm German if I don't speak. Let's say so. But this is the kind of thing that, in principle, I did not encounter very much. I was fortunate to. (Oksana)

It's what makes me connected to the city, when the basic commodities are available, and also your job. And then you feel connected to the city, because you can survive there . . . So these are some of the things that make me feel connected to this place. And I mean the amazing atmosphere. The people. Where the people are not racist. Yeah. So you feel cool and connected to that place because you just feel comfortable. (Sergio)

Belonging for me is having memories and connection . . . Just the simplest walks with friends, gatherings somewhere, I don't know, even helping a grandmother cross the road, or helping when someone just lost something, that's what it is, simple uncomplicated human kindness, help, cooperation, what ordinary people do.

-And do you feel it here?

-Yes, I do. I think I feel the sense of belonging here so far also because Germans and Germany have been so helpful. (Dmytro)

Following the descriptions of the sense of belonging of interviewees, it can be said that the safer and more welcomed people feel in the city, the more they feel like they can trust it, which in turn makes them feel more eager to engage with the city. Those, who do not feel safe to engage with the city, like Sergio, who is concerned about the risk of race-based violence, feel less safe and less trust to put themselves out there. Similarly, the sense of trust in the city is compromised in situations when refugees do not feel welcomed, feel humiliated, violated or scared because of the way they are treated or because of what they observe in the city.

Feelings of exclusion and humiliation can be seen as factors that compromise the sense of safety, inclusion, and overall belonging. In the case of Weimar, a big role is played by the political and social contrast, which swings from expressing solidarity with Ukraine and expressing dissatisfaction with the latter. Monday's right-wing demonstrations, attacks on pro-Ukraine rallies, verbal and physical threats, and political and race-based violence are some of the many examples of hostility our interviewees reported on. When asked what could be done to foster a sense of belonging, most answers centered on the need for locals to become more open. There is a strong need for refugees to feel seen, listened to, and understood. This includes understanding how some symbols in the city trigger people who have fled Russian invasion and consider taking it into account to make them feel safer in the new locality.

Derussify! Get rid of or contextualize Pushkin monument, get rid of the names like Moskau Straße, or Russischer Hof. When people come to you, when you find out that a person is from Ukraine, do not say hello in Russian, learn a Ukrainian word Vitayu instead. If you have memorized one Russian word, you can very easily memorize one Ukrainian word. It's as simple as that. In fact, I don't think people like me need that much. Locals just need to realize that these things are very triggering, and they need to pay attention to it, because they have the opportunity to do it, they have the privilege to

> *do it, and they need to be willing to do it. I think that it would be desirable, I would really like to see more Ukrainian representation in the city . . . It would make the city feel so much more comfortable, so much more at home.* (Yuliia)

There have been a lot of efforts from the Ukrainian community in Weimar to communicate with the city about renaming certain streets or asking to hang a Ukrainian flag on the Weimar city council. While many cities in the world like Tallinn, Warsaw, Sofia, or New York City have taken action to rename their streets as a sign of solidarity with Ukraine, it has not become a standard practice, and in the case of Weimar, these efforts were rejected. On the main square of Weimar, Theater Platz, there is still a banner "DIPLOMATIE! JETZT! FRIEDEN" (Diplomacy! Now! Peace!) which many Ukrainians asked for it to be taken down, as for many refugees it is surreal to see that there are still people who do not take Russian aggression seriously and still believe that diplomacy can work with a country that broke and continues violating international law and committing war crimes on a daily basis. The signs for peace or doves in the city are also seen by Ukrainian refugees as cynical because it creates a false image of two countries fighting on equal terms—it is also often used by the Monday demonstrators who advocate against military support of Ukraine—which Ukrainians see as a cruel request to capitulate and give up their freedom to Russian occupation. While many people use these symbols without evil intentions or with a bit of ignorance, many do it intentionally and understand the message it sends. What seems like small things that locals might not even pay attention to, can scream volumes for refugees who are deeply affected by these hidden messages.

Nevertheless, most of the interviewees believe that the city of Weimar and its people have been supportive of refugees from Ukraine. There is a lot of sense of gratitude and will to become more actively engaged with the city.

> *I think of Weimar with great honor. With respect to people who have done a lot for me, the people I met during all this time in Weimar. I want to thank Weimar for bringing me to these people and for the shelter it provided me with.* (Yuliia)

> *Considering the circumstances under which I ended up here, I have had a very successful integration process with the community and the city. This is something that I would like to wish for those people who will stay here for some time, and especially for those who plan to stay here for a long time, I hope they feel connected to the city because otherwise, it's scary.* (Mykhailo)

> *Anywhere I go, I like to identify with the people. I am trying to come out the most, come out, and mingle with German people. So I don't see myself as just a passerby, but I want to make an impact in the city in a way that I can—positive. But I'm still thinking and planning on how I can do it. And those will be number one—I have to improve my German. Number two, I want to believe there is something I can do politically. Maybe. And yeah, it'll be cool to see someone of my skin color in the Weimar Parliament! That's what they mean. Bringing a different kind of idea.* (Sergio)

While discussing their experiences, a great amount of attention was paid to the senses participants described as they walked us through their mental maps or when they recalled a memory during the photo elicitation interview. The range of emotions was wide: there were stories of grief, disappointment, relief, anger, gratitude, falling in and out of love, inspiration, exclusion, fear, humiliation, friendship, self-growth, pride, sadness, confidence, and a lot more. When tracing these emotions and stories behind them to the sense of belonging, it became evident how much the sense of belonging can fluctuate depending on the day-to-day experiences of refugee youth. As a result, the sense of belonging can hardly be seen as a destination, it is, however, a highly fluid and constantly negotiated process, which heavily relies on factors like safety, understanding, engagement, and sense of agency within a new environment.

4. Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the negotiation of the sense of belonging in the context of liminality and to identify the factors that influence this process. The study on refugee youth from Ukraine in Weimar revealed the challenges connected with the context of liminality and political exclusion that hindered the process of belonging. Feeling like they are constantly in-between, and unable to plan ahead because of the unpredictable nature of Russia's war in Ukraine, makes refugee youth in Weimar feel lost in terms of planning their education and career paths. This finding resonates with Alkhaled and Sasaki (2022), whose focus on forcibly displaced actors pointed out that the seemingly endless state of liminality adds further challenges to maintaining a sense of agency. In the case of this study, however, there is also evidence that while participants report on the negative effects of a sense of uncertainty and liminality, they still were able to build meaningful connections with the city and local social groups. It showcased the external factors which on the other hand played a role in shaping a sense of safety, familiarity, and engagement, which in turn fostered the sense of belonging within the context of liminality. Overall, it was found that despite not having clear plans of staying in Germany for a prolonged period, refugee youth were able to develop a sense of belonging in Weimar to a certain extent. Therefore, this study argues that the sense of belonging among refugee youth should be examined not only in the context of integration policies but also in the context of liminality, as the benefits of belonging are just as relevant and vital for individuals who do not plan to fully relocate to a city or country of refuge.

The analysis of interviews and mental maps has enabled us to identify the main themes, which have been further developed into factors that play a crucial role in promoting a sense of belonging among refugee youth in Weimar:

- Finding safety;
- Gaining an understanding of the new locality;
- Strengthening the connection with the city through further social engagement and vice versa;
- Developing a sense of growth and agency in a context of liminality;
- Negotiating the sense of belonging between solidarity and hostility.

The study findings confirm that the psychogeographical approach is highly effective in capturing senses, including the sense of belonging. The in-depth interviews in combination with photo elicitation interviews and mental mapping were effective tools for uncovering a diverse array of emotional and embodied experiences. They demonstrated the intertwined nature of Weimar's tangible and intangible infrastructure and the participants' emotions and memories. This aligns with the arguments put forth by scholars who advocate for the use of visual methods in studying the impact of the environment, particularly when it concerns working with war-affected youth (Downs and Stea 2011; Bridger 2013; Yılmaz 2016). The aforementioned approach also allowed participants to feel more engaged, and to have agency in the telling of their stories, which also supports the (Green and Denov 2019) argument that such approaches do not only minimize harm, but also stimulate community social action by involving children and youth as active agents and experts in their own experiences, rather than passive objects under study. Hence, by offering youth varied modes of communication, expression, and engagement, visual methods offer a substantial contribution to the field of research with war-affected youth. Furthermore, we would like to strongly advocate the use of a combined method of mental mapping and photo elicitation interviews for the purpose of researching a sense of belonging within an urban environment.

Besides a few exceptions, the integrated use of mental mapping and PEIs has not been actively explored. However, the fact that people have a differentiated perception of the environment inspired us to apply an approach that fulfills the potential of both techniques. The combination of visual methods is argued to have psychological benefits for war-affected youth by providing a means to communicate with the nonverbal mind and a way to safely access traumatic memories (Gantt and Tinnin 2009), which our study further confirmed.

Interviewees eagerly participated in mental mapping and photo elicitation interviews, which facilitated the process of reflection and recalling their associations, memories and emotions connected to the space. This finding corresponds to Harper's (2002) argument that visual methods can have a positive effect on accessing individuals' experiences in ways that non-visual methods can struggle to reach (Harper 2002).

The idea of longing to connect with Weimar and its people as well as reflecting on the growing connection to Weimar has been strongly present throughout this study, which deeply reflects research that emphasizes that human nature seeks belonging. The majority of participants emphasized how the sense of safety, familiarity, and solidarity fosters their sense of belonging. Scholars like Antonsich (2010), Zill (2023), Blokland and Nast (2014), Bürgin et al. (2022), and Haswell (2023) have also emphasized the importance of safety and familiarity factors during the process of refugee resettlement, and Mazzola and Backer (2021) looked into the role of solidarity on vulnerable migrant groups. In our results, we look more closely at the impact of solidarity on the sense of belonging, as it turned out to be a pivotal factor for the majority of participants.

Our findings show that belonging is an active process, which requires both the newcomers and the local society to actively engage with one another, which also reflects Wright's (2015) idea that people and places cannot be seen as static and that their belonging is made through their coming together. This concept is consistent with the notion of social capital, which provides an effective framework for understanding the challenges refugees face in becoming integrated and contributing members of society (Morrice 2007). It also adds to the argument of Yuval-Davis (2006) who defines belonging as the interaction between groups who desire to belong and those in power who determine who belongs and who decide on the inclusion or exclusion of individuals. Drawing on studies that examine the role of urban infrastructures and arrival infrastructures (Zill 2023; Meeus et al. 2018; Nettelbladt and Boano 2019), this study confirms that when urban structures make it easy to access and accommodate social and physical needs of refugees, it benefits those who struggle to navigate in the new environment. Access to local youth initiatives and social projects like OMA, talentCAMPus, and the Punk House, or being able to volunteer for the Ukrainian Community in Weimar helped the refugee youth to understand their new environment better, engage with the locality, and feel more accepted and appreciated. These results support Zill's (2023) findings that informal, citizen-provided infrastructures are crucial in meeting the needs of refugees during periods of uncertainty.

Additionally, the significance of Weimar's urban structure, neighborhoods, and green areas is in line with Spicer's (2008) assertion that the surroundings in which refugees and asylum seekers are placed play an essential role in their settlement and sense of belonging. Weimar's size and walkability facilitated a sense of familiarity and frequent urban encounters. This supports Huizinga and Van Hoven's (2018) view that everyday neighborhood places play a role in the emergence of refugee (non-)belonging through social (non-)encounters with others. Having relatively easy access to nature and parks in Weimar allows refugee youth to ground themselves and have space for processing their thoughts and fears. It also serves as a space of nurturing, both mentally and physically, which supports the argument of Rishbeth et al. (2019) that access to green spaces could help enhance a sense of comfort in the midst of highly stressful experiences and is important for the well-being and, potentially, for the integration of asylum seekers and refugees.

One of the main factors that foster the sense of belonging among refugees in Weimar is their sense of engagement. Many participants articulated the importance of volunteering for the Ukrainian community and establishing a Ukrainian presence in the city, be it through rallies, concerts, or even street music. These activities form a significant part of their identity and allow them to feel a little bit at home while being far from it. On the one hand, this finding can be seen through the lens of studies that argue that an immigrant's stronger sense of attachment to their own community is a result of discrimination and feelings of exclusion (Kitchen et al. 2015). While this plays a role to an extent in this specific case as well, being active in the Ukrainian community in Weimar is also strongly influenced by

participants' will to do what is in their power to bring Ukraine's victory closer. Volunteering and activism also helped a lot of interviewees feel their agency, participate in social projects outside of the Ukrainian community, and overall foster their sense of belonging, which supported their engagement with the city. This also resonates with the argument that those who feel more connected to the locality have a higher chance of developing a sense of agency and as a result becoming place-makers themselves (Kreichauf and Glorius 2021; Çağlar and Schiller 2018; Zill 2023). This finding also serves to reinforce the significance of social networks as a source of social capital among refugees (Amisi 2006). Through active engagement with the Ukrainian community, a lot of refugee youth also build new connections with the city and locals, who support or assist the projects that the Ukrainian community initiates. Coming back to Yuval-Davis' (2006) argument about permission to be included in a society being granted by external structures, this finding further proves that refugees who do not feel forced to hide their identity, in order to "fit in", feel safe to bond with a new locality while staying committed to their identity and values. The permission to "fit in" is also undeniably a question of race, as many Ukrainian refugees in Europe today, continue to stay invisible, similarly to Bosnian refugees in the 1990s (see Colic-Peisker 2005) due to their perceived whiteness. This invisibility, however, ceases to exist the moment refugees interact with the locals and are confronted with language barriers, and their perceived socio-economic position, which further determines how refugees' social networks will be built and how their social capital is being negotiated in the resettlement process.

When it comes to factors that pose threats to the youth's belongingness, the refugee youth in Weimar shared stories of physical and verbal threats, and gender- and race-based violence, and reported how witnessing weekly Monday demonstrations makes them feel extremely anxious and humiliated. Race and gender are the two factors that influenced the interviewees' feeling of safety in the city the most. Refugees of color, for example, have a lot more concern for their safety and feel cautious about participating in political demonstrations. Gender-based violence also added to distress and avoidance of certain places in Weimar. These results yet again demonstrate the various dimensions that add barriers to an already extremely challenging and existentially threatening experience of being forcefully displaced and indicate how individual and institutional racism and sexism affect the feeling of safety and belonging.

Everyone we interviewed avoids going outside on Monday evenings. Participants report feeling anxiety, anger, alienation, helplessness, and sadness as they encounter what they see as pro-Russian demonstrators, among whom the majority are also supporters of the extremist German right-wing AfD party. Similarly, right-wing signs or pro-Russia symbolism in Weimar made refugee youth feel fear and alienation. Yuval-Davis (2006) states that "a notion of belonging becomes activated where there is a sense of exclusion". This experience is on the contrasting scale of the sense of solidarity with Ukraine and welcome, which many refugees experienced at the beginning of the full-scale invasion, and which made them feel safer in Weimar and more eager to engage with the new locality. This finding makes it evident how the sense of belonging intertwines with the politics of belonging. It strongly resonates with Anthias' (2006) argument that the two concepts are affected by various factors and negotiated with each other.

5. Limitations

This study researches experiences and tracks the sense of belonging among a group of people within very specific circumstances. First of all, refugees from Ukraine in Germany have been granted a Temporary Protection status, which legally differs from other legal asylum statuses in Germany and allows refugees access to social support and the labor market, hence simplifying the process of engaging with social infrastructures. This has played a crucial role in the general experience of being a refugee in Germany, and has had a lot of positive outcomes, which refugees without this status possibly did not have access to.

Most of the interviewees are perceived as white, and their perception of safety in the city is contrasted with interviewees who are people of color. This shows that the embodied experience of white refugees in Weimar cannot be compared to the experience of POC refugees and that refugees of color face additional challenges, which create obstacles to the sense of belonging. A larger study with more participants would have allowed a more rigorous examination of the effect of racism on the sense of belonging. Additionally, the interviews took place two years after arrival in Germany, which could have consequences in the ways belonging was being formed.

The fact that the interviews were conducted in Ukrainian, English, and a mix of Ukrainian and Russian, led to a degree of language inconsistencies, which could potentially impact the study's reliability. Furthermore, most of the refugees we interviewed had not gone through the refugee dispersal process and did not arrive in an emergency shelter like the majority of refugees from Ukraine, but directly into a host family or somebody they had a close or distant connection to within Weimar. This resulted in them having initial contact with Weimar through the person or a family that hosted them, which also made it easier to navigate the city and find support structures. This also might be the reason why so many of them had positive experiences with the city and developed a sense of belonging, but this cannot be generalized or used to reflect the experience of the majority of refugees from Ukraine, especially those who are still living in refugee camps.

6. Conclusions

The sense of belonging can serve as a huge support for refugee youth, and it contributes to the wellbeing of an individual and communities in general. This study aimed to answer the question of how it can be developed. There are numerous factors in play, but what is certain from this research is that it is an active rather than a passive process, where an individual has to have enough resources to be able to experience belonging. The resources that are needed for it have to be channeled into finding energy, time, and often finances, to find shelter and physical safety, learn a new language, build new connections, engage with a new environment, and find a role in a new place. This is a demanding process already for those who are in relatively comfortable conditions in their lives and do not have to deal with fleeing war and grief for the life they are forced to leave behind. That being said, this active role and responsibility in fostering the sense of belonging must not lie on the shoulders of an individual in general, especially when it comes to people in extremely vulnerable circumstances, whose levels of resources for taking on such a demanding role are extremely scarce.

The access to mental, social, and financial resources determines how the process of arrival and developing a sense of belonging will take place. Having external help that provides partial structures and resources needed for the sense of belonging to develop can aid tremendously and share the burden of those in vulnerable conditions, making it more possible for them to handle a challenging and often traumatic transition. And contrary to that, when the hosting community is passive or even worse, purposefully excluding the newcomers, it jeopardizes the process of fostering belonging, and creates a sense of exclusion, and detachment. The negative effects of the latter on both individuals and societies cannot be underestimated. As in many other places, Weimar is a city where both of these processes are happening simultaneously, and the findings of this research demonstrate how the sense of belonging for refugee youth is negotiated within this dynamic.

The finding that the sense of belonging positively impacts the well-being of refugee youth, even within the transitional phase of liminality, underscores the importance of local social and urban structures in fostering the sense of belonging. For newcomers who have experienced significant disruptions in their social networks, longing for new connections is a natural response, which should always be considered by local societies. In the case of Weimar, the city and local initiatives have responded to this need and offered support, which allowed many refugees to build connections with the city and local social groups

relatively quickly. This, in turn, had a positive effect on their sense of safety and allowed them to stay engaged and form bonds with the locality.

One of the main outcomes of this research is the finding that the sense of belonging is an active process influenced by both an individual's capacity to engage and the level of external structures' inclusivity for refugee youth. The need for belonging among refugee youth has driven efforts to understand and engage with the local community. On the other hand, initiatives which managed to understand and respond to the needs of refugees have played a pivotal role in helping them gain a sense of safety and welcome, which is one of the core factors of belonging according to our findings.

Aspects that create obstacles to the sense of belonging in the case of refugee youth from Ukraine are mostly connected to weekly (right-wing) Monday demonstrations and hostility from locals. This reflects the fact that solidarity with Ukraine is one of the main factors that makes refugees from Ukraine feel safe and supported in Weimar, and witnessing political acts against this solidarity leads to strong feelings of hostility, fear, and alienation.

The paper contributes to the discourse on the sense of belonging among refugees, building upon the work of Kitchen et al. (2015), Huizinga and Van Hoven (2018), Mijić (2022), Haswell (2023), Dereli (2022), and Mahmud (2021). Additionally, it builds upon the use of psychogeography in forced migration studies and its relation to the context of liminality (Turner 1991; Alkhaled and Sasaki 2022).

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