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How Do Social Service Providers View Recent Immigrants? Perspectives from Portland, Maine, and Olympia, Washington

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This article explores how social service providers in two small, geographically distinct cities—Portland, Maine, and Olympia, Washington—understand the importance of welcoming and incorporating new immigrants in their cities. We focus on how providers characterize their responsibilities, how they understand the importance of responding to new immigrants, and what they describe as the challenges and opportunities presented by recent immigration to their cities. Despite differences in Portland and Olympia, we find that providers in both cities combine a sense of moral responsibility to help immigrants, with an emphasis on the economic and cultural resources immigrants bring to cities. These insights expand recent immigration scholarship from a focus on immigrants alone to include the perspectives and logics of social service workers who are often their first points of contact in new places.

KEYWORDS *Immigration, social service providers, new destinations, framing, human rights*

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Since the 1990s, there has been dramatic growth in the numbers of immigrants living in a broad range of destinations across the United States. As immigrants move from traditional gateway cities like New York and Los Angeles to smaller cities, residents and newcomers of these smaller cities are negotiating and renegotiating the identities of the places where they live and the meanings of membership and belonging within those communities. City leaders, workers, and social service providers, in particular, are actively engaged in responding to the arrival of new immigrants and thinking about how and why it is important to include them in their communities. Scholars know very little, however, about how these social service providers—who are often on the front lines of immigrant reception—think about receiving or assisting immigrants and how their approaches vary by their city and regional contexts. Better understanding of how these providers view recent immigrants sheds light on the logics behind why and how they work with immigrants, which may inform the kinds of services they provide and the ways they attempt to integrate recent immigrants into their cities.

We focus in this article on the work of social service providers to add their perspectives to broader scholarly conversation about how cities help immigrants adapt to new places (Cadge & Ecklund, 2006; Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2000; Warner & Wittner, 1998). There is an extensive literature on the economic, political, and civic incorporation of immigrants, but the experiences of social service providers and the reasons they, as front line workers, think immigrants should be incorporated have been largely overlooked. Service providers are critical actors from which to garner citywide perspectives because they are often the first point of contact for new immigrants who arrive in new places and do not have friends or family already there. Situated at the intersection of state and civil society, we conceive of social service providers as “street-level bureaucrats” with a unique vantage point on the city and its constituents (Lipsky, 1980).

This article expands a growing body of literature on immigrant arrivals to new destinations by shifting attention from the immigrants themselves to the social service providers with whom they work. We compare how social service providers in two small, geographically distinct cities—Portland, Maine, and Olympia, Washington—frame their efforts to receive and welcome new immigrants. We focus specifically on how providers characterize their responsibilities, the importance of responding to new immigrants, and the challenges and opportunities presented by recent immigration to their communities. Examining the deployment of discursive frames by local institutional actors enables us to capture variation in how these actors experience and think about receiving immigrants in the cities where they work and in how the discursive frames they draw on are connected to the places where they live. These discursive frames also provide insight

into how small cities, via their social service providers, are renegotiating the meanings and responsibilities of community membership in the face of migration and offer a unique lens through which to examine how providers are working to address local economic, education, and cultural concerns. While we do not make arguments about how these discursive frames contribute to the services that providers and social service organizations actually offer, gaining a better understanding of the logics providers bring to their work will inform future research that attempts to make these connections.

We find that providers in both cities combine a sense of moral responsibility or “ethic of refuge” frame that focuses on providing hospitality to the stranger, refuge to the outcast, and respect for human rights regardless of immigration status (Nawyn, 2007), with an emphasis on the economic and cultural resources immigrants bring to cities. We explore similarities in these two central frames and outline local factors specific to each city, including demographics and city services for immigrants and refugees, which may help to explain the patterned variation and commonalities we identify. We then consider why certain discursive frames may be more effective than others in communicating the importance of immigrant incorporation at the city level, and we discuss the policy implications of each frame.

BACKGROUND

Migration scholarship is just catching up with “new destinations”—the smaller cities, suburbs, and rural communities that migrants have entered in significant numbers since 1990 (Gozdziak & Martin, 2005; Hernández-León & Zúñiga, 2005; Kandel & Parrado, 2005; Massey, 2008; Millard & Chapa, 2004). This literature offers insight into the ways communities respond to newcomers in places that have little previous experience with large increases of immigrants. Although a few recent studies compare local approaches to immigration within European cities (Caponia & Bokert, 2010; Koff, 2003; Vermeulen & Plaggenborg, 2009), research in the U.S. has focused primarily on singular localities rather than systematically exploring differences across two or more localities, and there exists little research that has examined how and why new destination communities vary in their “contexts of reception” (Menjívar, 1997; Portes & Rumbaut, 2006).

The few studies that do consider varying contexts of reception in new U.S. destinations identify social and institutional mechanisms that distinguish local responses to growing immigrant presences (Caminero-Santangelo, 2009; Fraser & Jones-Correa, 2010; Lewis & Ramakrishnan, 2007; Marrow, 2009; Nawyn, 2007). Helen Marrow (2009), for instance, found that providers in public bureaucracies were overall more responsive to the interests of

immigrant newcomers than elected officials because of their internal service-oriented professional missions. While government policies encouraged or limited bureaucrats' ability to treat newcomers as deserving recipients of services, bureaucratic professionals invoked a moral framework for adjudicating between contradictory regulation and service-provision rules. Other research suggests that factors such as the nature of relationships between local governments and related community-based organizations shape how localities respond to immigrants. Fraser and Jones-Correa (2010) compared how two counties in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area responded to the presence and establishment of day-labor sites and attributed differing responses to the nature of interdependency between government agencies and nongovernment organizations, specifically community-based organizations (CBOs). They addressed how CBOs leveraged relationships and accessed resources using an assets-based frame that helped convince governments to accommodate day-labor sites through arguments about community safety, business needs for employees, redevelopment strategies, and the ways such efforts benefit entire communities. Studies by Marrow (2009), Fraser and Jones-Correa (2010), and others implicitly raise questions about how the presence of immigrants is understood and framed locally, how social service providers experience this aspect of their work, and how those frames may influence the ways particular localities respond and receive immigrants.

Research on contexts of reception outside U.S. borders further underscores the importance of studying immigrant integration from the "bottom up" (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006). With the recognition that European immigrants are settling in cities and small towns in rural areas, scholars are paying greater attention to how immigrants are incorporated at the local level (Caponio & Borkert, 2010) and to the differences between national and regional integrations strategies (Koff, 2003). Similar to Marrow (2009), Caponio and Borkert (2010) observe that street-level bureaucrats respond daily to the presence of immigrants in their cities and may act as policymakers in their attempts to accommodate policy objectives while also addressing immigrant needs and overcoming obstacles in delivering existing services. Their views often differ radically from the "official view" of municipalities regarding how to integrate immigrants (Alexander, 2003), and practitioners at local organizations may develop their own ways of thinking about immigrants (Vermeulen & Plaggenborg, 2009). As is evident in this research, it is difficult to understand the logics of action among street-level bureaucrats who receive immigrants on the ground without attention to their views of immigrants or the administrative cultures and professional ethos that shape their approaches (Caponio & Borkert, 2010).

In other studies that explore how immigrants are framed and understood in particular localities, scholars focus on controversial policy debates

and whether immigrants are cast as undeserving outsiders or “others” who are a threat to the public good (Fujiwara, 2005; Mehan, 1997). This research shows how particular localities and movements shape the framing of immigrants and the services they receive. It stops short, however, of systematically exploring differences in framing across two or more localities or focusing on how social services providers as front line workers themselves do that framing. Without such comparisons and perspectives, it is difficult to theorize more broadly about the importance of place and locality and the roles social service providers play, in comparison to others, in framing immigrant reception.

In one important exception, Stephanie Nawyn (2007) examined how local service providers who advocate for immigrants and help them integrate into new cities talked about the importance of their work. She compared 36 nongovernmental faith-based and secular organizations that resettle refugees in four cities to argue that, despite differences in religious traditions, staff members at faith-based organizations described their missions in similar ways. Blending religious rhetoric with secular human rights discourse, in what Nawyn (2007) calls an “ethic of refuge,” staff members focused on providing hospitality to the stranger, offering refuge to the outcast, and honoring the rights of human beings regardless of national boundaries. Staff at secular organizations, on the other hand, relied on the secular rhetoric of human rights, without reference to religious doctrine, and frequently talked about valuing human life regardless of the interests of government. Staff in both settings drew on similar frames, emphasizing the rights of refugees over state sovereignty and national boundaries.

We draw from Nawyn’s (2007) approach by focusing on social service providers to listen to how they talk about immigrants and incorporation into specific local contexts as is evident more broadly in the work of Marrow (2009), Fraser and Jones-Correa (2010), and others (Caminero-Santangelo, 2009; Caponio & Borkert 2010; Fujiwara, 2005; Koff 2003; Lewis & Ramakrishnan, 2007; Mehan, 1997; Vermeulen and Plaggenborg 2009). We outline similarities in how the providers spoke about immigrants in both cities—related to a sense of moral responsibility to help immigrants and an emphasis on the community assets new arrivals bring—before addressing how differences in their use of these frames reflect different city contexts at the time the interviews were conducted. While we recognize that these frames might be used in larger cities, we focus on smaller cities as a starting point, given their recent migration flows, and hope others will ask these questions in the context of larger cities, especially those that have been central gateways for post-1965 immigrants. While these frames do not point to the specific ways providers actually work with immigrants and the types of services they provide, they offer important context for better understanding the orientations providers bring to this work.

THE CASE STUDIES

We focus on the experiences of social service providers in New England and the Pacific Northwest, two regions not often studied in the context of recent immigration. Much of the emerging research on new immigrant destinations focuses on Mexican migrants (Hernández-León & Zúñiga, 2005) or on pan-ethnic groups such as Latinos (Gozdziak & Martin, 2005; Smith & Furseth, 2006) who tend to be concentrated in the Midwest working in meat-packing (Millard & Chapa, 2004; Valentine, 2005) or in the South working in agriculture (Smith & Furseth, 2006; Winders, 2006). Our study fills a geographic gap—as well as an analytic one—by comparing two cities located on opposite sides of the country that are populated with immigrants from multiple countries of origin and that have dealt with similar immigrant and refugee issues.

Both Portland (ME) and Olympia (WA) have complex histories of immigration and have received large numbers of immigrants in recent years. Immigrants to Portland were mostly refugees in the 1970s and 1980s from Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe, Cuba, and the former Soviet Union. Most did, and still do, arrive in Portland through well-funded federal refugee resettlement programs, which in recent years have grown to include individuals from Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan, and other African countries. In 2000, the U.S. Census reported that Portland was home to 4,895 foreign-born residents, just under 8% of the population, a 50% increase from 1990 (Allen, 2006; U.S. Census Bureau, 2000a). These include individuals arriving directly from their home countries as well as secondary migrants, especially from Somalia and the Sudan. Many recent arrivals find work in meat- or fish-packing plants, in other factories, or in service-based work or medical professions. In the mid-2000s, 53 different languages were spoken by the 1,172 students in the Portland public school system, which has the largest number of ESL (English as a second language) students in the state.

Like in Portland, the number of immigrants in Olympia increased significantly between 1990 and 2000, by almost 64%, to include 7% of the population, or close to 3,000 people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000b). Half of these immigrants are from Asia, including a large number of Vietnamese refugees and secondary economic migrants. Another large group is from Latin America, especially secondary migrants from Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras, working in the agriculture, forestry, and service industries around Olympia. While early immigrants were largely men who came for seasonal work, families have since been reunited and large numbers of young people of Mexican parentage are students in the public school system. Unlike Portland, where the vast majority of new arrivals are refugees, Olympia includes sizable numbers of both refugees and economic migrants.

Portland and Olympia have responded to new waves of immigration in different ways over time partly because of who the immigrants

were in each place. While the reception has generally been welcoming in Portland—perhaps because most newcomers have been refugees—residents of Olympia have welcomed and resisted newcomers at different points in the history of the city. Olympia enacted exclusionary policies during the World War II era, but then briefly became a sanctuary city offering protection for undocumented immigrants in the 1990s. Unlike Portland, where the government currently provides refugees with a range of services, few direct services for immigrants are provided by the city of Olympia—perhaps because most of the very recent arrivals are economic migrants. Immigrants there rely on a mix of faith-based, private nonprofit, and public social-sector service organizations for resources. Educational institutions including South Puget Sound Community College and Evergreen State College offer important additional resources for facilitating immigrant support networks. In contrast, Portland is a designated refugee resettlement site and the city has established a variety of service agencies, many of which have incorporated a multicultural or immigrant/refugee focus. Interestingly, diversity and multiculturalism have become important strategic tools in the city's efforts to promote revitalization. As in Olympia, the nonprofit and faith-based sectors also provide substantial services to immigrants (Jaworsky, Levitt, Cadge, Hejtmanek, & Curran, 2012).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study is part of a larger project that explores the context of reception for post-1965 immigrants in three small U.S. cities: Danbury, Connecticut; Olympia, Washington; and Portland, Maine. These cities have grown and diversified in the last decade through immigration and were selected for inclusion due to their geographic diversity, comparable size, and because each has welcomed immigrants from a range of sending countries. Our analysis in this article is based on interviews with 61 social service providers in Portland and Olympia, which both had older populations of refugees and economic or secondary migrants. Our focus on Portland and Olympia enables us to compare the eastern and western United States. Respondents comprised native-born persons and immigrants. All assist immigrants via organizations in each city that offer social services. These organizations include the city, social service organizations, and religious groups and were located inductively through existing contacts, listings in local directories, snowball sampling, and referrals from organizations we contacted. The small size of each city made a relatively comprehensive mapping possible.

In Portland, interviews were conducted with 26 individuals in 2006 and 2007. They were employed at educational, social service, city, legal,

religious, and health organizations that work with immigrants. Given the small size of the city, less than one-fifth of these organizations were focused exclusively on immigrants. Most had services or programs for immigrants as one of several sets of services they offer to a range of people in the city. Interviews were conducted in Olympia in 2007 and 2008 with 35 individuals representing state, labor, health, educational, social service, and religious organizations. As in Portland, few were focused exclusively on immigrants though three did focus exclusively on Latinos/Hispanics and several of the churches had mostly Latino/Hispanic members, both immigrant and native-born. As per our agreements with respondents, we identify organizations, but not individuals, by name.

Interviews followed the same broad semi-structured interview guide in Portland and Olympia, which included questions about the purpose, history, and mission of the organization, where the respondent worked as well as the services offered, client populations, and experiences with and observations about immigrants in the city. In this paper, we focus on how providers talked about why they think it is important to provide services to immigrants. They often addressed this issue in response to questions such as, “Why do you think it is important to provide immigrants with these services (i.e., social, political, economic, religious)?” and “Why do you (personally) think it is important to provide immigrants with these services (i.e., social, political, economic, religious)? Why do you do what you do?” Interviews lasted between 50 minutes and 2 hours and were digitally recorded and transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. The information was supplemented with published materials about each organization, and through limited participant observation in one related organization in each city—Portland’s Office of Multicultural and Multilingual Programs and Olympia’s Hispanic Youth Commission.

We analyzed the data inductively following the principles of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Researchers worked collaboratively using Atlas-TI software to develop and refine a set of codes and then worked with intra- and intercity cross checks to ensure that the analytic categories were applied consistently across interviews as well as cities. We initially intended, following Nawyn’s work, to compare how providers working for religious and secular organizations spoke about the importance of providing service for immigrants. We did not identify clear differences in our analyses, however, and realized in the process that city context rather than the type of organization for which respondents worked seemed to play a bigger role in shaping their responses. We considered differences among providers in terms of the type of organization they worked for, in other words, and were surprised to discover inductively that frames were more common across sites, making the central comparison in this paper between the cities themselves.

TWO COMMON FRAMES

Providers in both Portland and Olympia drew from two distinct, but overlapping, discursive frames when speaking about the importance of working with immigrants in their cities. Many used what Stephanie Nawyn (2007) calls an “ethic of refuge” frame, stating that community members have the responsibility to welcome newcomers and offer them basic services, hospitality, compassion, and a safe haven. Providers also drew on a community assets frame, arguing that immigrants are potential economic and cultural assets to the cities in which they settle and should be incorporated as full members so that the wider community will benefit from their skills and expertise. While these frames were at times combined in individual narratives, providers emphasized different aspects of reception and community membership based on their experiences working with immigrants in different local contexts. We outline similarities in how each frame was utilized in each city before describing differences and the contextual and demographic features that may begin to explain this variation.

An Ethic of Refuge Frame

Social service providers in both cities used an ethic of refuge frame as they focused on the moral responsibility community members have to reach out to one another and ensure that the needs of the city’s newest members are met. In the words of a representative from Portland Refugee Services, “Are we not all responsible for other people having (success) or for other people failing?” Providers characterized these responsibilities as meeting basic needs, welcoming immigrants by making them feel comfortable and secure in their new environment, showing compassion, and providing a safe haven.

In both Olympia and Portland, religious and secular human rights provided the underlying logic for the ethic of refuge frame. A representative from United Way in Olympia explained, “It’s a very small world we live in, and we’re all connected. It’s a global world and we have so much to learn from each other. We’re all human beings, and people have a right to basic services.” Providers frequently told stories about the rights, inherent worth, and dignity of all people, underscoring the belief that every person has basic human rights that should be respected, regardless of citizenship or nationality. They agreed that everyone should have access to the services that their organizations provide, but pointed out that immigrants need additional help negotiating unfamiliar bureaucracies, education, social service, and legal systems. As a leader from Portland Refugee Services pointed out,

There needs to be a safety net for refugees. They come to the country, they don’t speak the language, some of them are illiterate in their

own countries. They don't know how to maneuver the school system. They don't know how to maneuver the hospitals. And it's not for ignorance—they're not from here, and so their country does things totally differently than what we do here. In order for them to succeed and survive, they need support.

In addition to providing economic and informational resources, respondents emphasized the importance of developing strong interpersonal relationships with newcomers when framing their work in terms of an ethic of refuge. Providers expressed these sentiments through ideas of “welcoming the stranger,” “providing a ‘family atmosphere’ at their organizations,” “helping them [immigrants] adjust, be comfortable,” and “being open-armed to everybody.” This focus on cultivating stronger social ties between new and already established community members was exemplified by a representative of the Olympia Library who spoke of the library as,

A place where the community that's already established learns about immigrants and learns about different cultures and the cultures coming in . . . It's not just this one way stream . . . If your community is always changing, you want to be a place that is welcoming to these new populations and a place where more established populations can interact with immigrants, and where people can just meet each other and begin to understand each other and figure out each other's cultures . . . a little better.

A Community Assets Frame

In addition to framing their work in terms of an ethic of refuge, providers in Portland and Olympia drew on a community assets frame as they emphasized the potential economic and cultural assets immigrants bring to their cities. In both cities, the language used by providers who articulated the community assets frame reflected an asset-based community development (ABCD) approach to providing social services (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). Respondents argued that immigrants have skills, capacities, and resources that can be tapped at the local level if they have access to basic tools that will enable them to contribute to the community. Instead of viewing the immigrants they serve simply as clients with different needs and problems, providers viewed them as fellow community members and potential citizens who should be incorporated as full and active members of the city (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). Focusing on the collective benefits and positive outcomes of their work, providers made explicit the high level of respect and admiration they have for immigrants and described the skills and motivations they witness among their immigrant clients.

Providers anticipated a number of positive individual and community outcomes in their work with immigrants, for example, which they framed in terms of assets. At the most basic level, providers thought it was important to help immigrants so that they could support themselves, their families, and become full-fledged, stable members of the communities in which they live. However, beyond the basic goals of helping immigrants achieve individual outcomes such as personal success, self-sufficiency, and economic stability, providers in Olympia and Portland spoke about how in so doing they enable immigrants to become community assets and give back to the cities and broader communities of which they are a part. At the Office of Minority and Women's Business Enterprises in Olympia, a leader pointed out the relationship between immigrants' individual successes and regional economic gains,

The immigrant community comes here with many, many skills, knowledge, and abilities that were valid in their countries and are valid here . . . They create little mom and pop grocery stores, little mom and pop tax businesses, little mom and pop accounting businesses, little mom and pop computer businesses. I see this all across the state of Washington . . . There's enough funding generated by these mom and pop businesses for them to live comfortably and send their kids to college. I know many first generation peoples from different ethnic communities. Mom and pop cannot speak English that well, but the kids are extremely conversant in the language and they finish college. And so, it is important that we provide opportunities for these folks. Because, in doing so, they become self-sufficient, productive people in their communities and they pay taxes and they're consumers and we expand our tax base. It's what I call a win-win-win situation.

Given the opportunity, this provider argued, members of the immigrant community put their knowledge and abilities to use, starting family businesses, putting their children through college, and strengthening the local economy, each in turn.

CITY DIFFERENCES IN THE USE OF FRAMES

While providers in both cities drew on ethic of refuge and community assets frames in speaking about why it is important to work with and receive new immigrants in their cities, their particular city contexts likely led them to emphasize different aspects of these frames. It was not the case that respondents in one city drew from one frame more than respondents in the other city, but that in addition to their common understandings of these frames there were also differences evident in how they articulated them.

While it is impossible to say conclusively, given our small sample size, the evidence we gathered suggests that variation in how these two frames were articulated is related to differences in the historical and social context of Portland and Olympia and reflects the ways in which the presence of undocumented immigrants, refugees, and the regional economies of a place shape the experiences of social service providers and the discursive frames they use.

City Differences in Use of Ethic of Refuge Frame

When speaking about an ethic of refuge, providers in Olympia were more likely to emphasize human rights and the importance of extending safety and comfort to immigrants in a climate of fear. “Every person, regardless of where they are born or where they are living should have basic human rights,” a representative from the Thurston County Extension at Washington State University emphasized. Unlike refugees in Portland, who are largely in the country legally by virtue of their refugee status, some of the immigrants in Olympia lack documentation and live in fear of deportation, especially given growing numbers of immigration raids. Providers in Olympia likely responded to this climate by emphasizing in interviews how important it is for immigrants to realize their rights, which they framed in terms of both legal rights and universal human rights. A representative of the Human Rights Commission in Olympia, for example, explained the importance of immigrants understanding their rights as employees to prevent exploitation, “I think when they [immigrants] have the information . . . I think that gives them their own personal power then to use that information maybe in the workplace to protect themselves.”

In addition to making sure that immigrants know their rights and are taking steps to create environments in which they can fully exercise them, providers in Olympia also spoke more frequently of the importance of providing a safe haven as part of an ethic of refuge. In light of several large-scale immigration raids, reports of human rights abuses at detention centers, and other post 9/11 events in Olympia, many cited fear as the dominant characteristic of their local contexts, seeing it as an important obstacle to effectively offering services and providing places where immigrants are not afraid to access them. Responding to these anti-immigrant sentiments following 9/11, these providers believed that their organizations were providing a safe place for immigrants to receive services, a place where their needs could be met without the fear of deportation. An interviewee at the Thurston County Food Bank underscored the organization’s role in overcoming fear,

I think the Food Bank in its role as being non-threatening, [is] a first step into the safety net . . . I mean [for] a lot of people that are new to the community, a lot of people that are immigrants, a lot of people that

are fearful of government or don't know where to go, the Food Bank is probably the easiest first step. Still not easy, but easiest first step.

In a context in which policies and governmental and community responses were restricting services offered to immigrants and posing potential threats to their livelihoods and lives, service providers placed a stronger emphasis on an ethic of refuge to justify their work with immigrants.

Reflecting the fact that refugees comprise most of the immigrants in Portland, providers in Portland also spoke of an ethic of refuge, but focused less on providing for basic human rights in climates of fear. They were more likely to address the uniqueness of refugees and their needs, frequently focusing on and expressing compassion for the particular situations of refugees in their community. In the words of a leader at the Community Counseling Center,

I think [about] just what people have been through to get here. I don't know how they do it. It's amazing, the resiliency. And to be able to provide services in their own language, with people who understand the cultural aspects of mental health and what they've been through. I just think it's so important, and to make people feel comfortable and know that they're welcomed here and that there are services to help them through the process.

This empathy for the suffering of the people they serve and their experiences before arriving in the United States was characteristic of how providers articulated an ethic of refuge in Portland. A representative of Coastal Enterprise Incorporated in Portland, for example, explained that providing entrepreneurial assistance to new immigrants with few good employment prospects is "a way of just giving someone their dignity back after being persecuted and living in a hell hole for however many years." It is important to provide this assistance, in other words, not only because immigrants have a right to it, but also because it is part of recognizing the value of every human being and the distinct and individual struggles they have endured as refugees.

City Differences in Use of Community Assets Frame

Differences in emphasis were also evident in how representatives from each city articulated the assets-based frame. Olympia providers focused on providing immigrants with opportunities to acquire specific "tools" or skills such as literacy, education, and navigating transportation. They also talked about helping immigrants gain access to important information and developing leadership skills, confidence, and independence. These activities were described as a way to empower immigrants to be active contributors to society at large and to give back to their own communities. Expressing several of

these collective sentiments, a representative from the Office of Diversity Affairs at Evergreen College in Olympia argued,

Immigrants are a part of our community, and we want our entire community to be whole, to be active, and to contribute to the health and well-being of the larger community. If we don't provide them tools to contribute, then we can't expect them to succeed. We can't expect them to contribute, and . . . that kind of marginalization of them only leads to a divided community and a troubled community . . . We should learn to provide skills that they need to bring their perspectives into the discussion about the directions our community should go . . . We need to make them as strong a contributor as anybody else in the community so we all benefit. That's the purpose of a community.

In Olympia, providers articulated specific processes through which immigrants become assets to their local communities. First, they argued, immigrants must be included in the community as full and active members in order to contribute to it. "If you can make everybody feel that they're part of the community and they have something to offer . . . no matter how small, they can give. As long as they're giving something, we're going to always be better," commented a representative from La Mesa Redonda in Olympia. Second, immigrants must have access to services, as well as opportunities to gain specific skills, such as education, health care, and housing. "We believe that once they're served and their basic needs are met, they will be able to exercise leadership and create their own services and be an asset to the community at large," explained a leader of Cielo in Olympia. Finally, if immigrants are included as members in the community and have access to tools that will enable them to contribute, everyone in the wider community, including immigrants themselves, will benefit. This was clearly articulated by a representative from the Department of Health and Human Services in Olympia who explained, "We're helping the [immigrant] communities by helping them become self-successful. They can help communities out; they can become leaders in their communities—their kids can become leaders in their communities. They can help move forward, you know, move us all forward."

While providers in Olympia emphasized small businesses and the steps through which immigrants might influence communities at multiple levels, providers in Portland speaking within the community assets frame were more explicit about how immigrants might influence the local workforce and economy in Maine, especially in light of population declines across the state. Many spoke at length about Portland needing immigrants and the contributions they make to the workforce and local economy. A leader of the Training Resource Center focused on the immigrants as the "next work force" of the state,

For Maine, that is our next work force. We've got a declining population. We've got a large youth out-migration. So people who grew up here tend to go to school in Boston, Hartford, New York, and then they get down there and then as they graduate . . . [they do] not necessarily come back here . . . So a lot of our youth don't stay. Maine is one of the oldest states by age . . . the median age is like 42 years old. So we don't have a labor force for businesses to expand. So what we do have that's coming in and that's skilled and willing to work is the immigrants and the secondary migrants . . . Employers can't expand if they can't hire. Businesses can't grow if all that they can ever have is ten employees.

In addition to speaking in economic terms, providers in Portland spoke of assets in cultural terms, expressing an appreciation for the ethnic and intellectual diversity immigrants bring to the city. In the words of a leader at PROP, the People's Regional Opportunity Program, "They're exposing us to a richness and diversity of thinking, seeing, dressing, speaking that we would never be exposed to . . . I think that's good stuff. I think it expands and helps us all grow and develop to be the best we can be." At Portland West, a leader similarly argued, "A state like Maine is just so white it's just essential that we figure out how to become more diverse and more welcoming. I mean it's just going to strengthen our state and make our economy stronger and make our social fabric stronger and make our intellectual capacity stronger, and we have to figure out how to do more to diversify the state and welcome people. It's good for us."

CONCLUSIONS

Social service providers in Portland, Maine, and Olympia, Washington, spoke in terms of an ethic of refuge and in terms of community assets when they described how and why it is important to welcome immigrants to their cities. Despite differences in the cities, providers articulated a common understanding of these two frames, in terms of caring for people because it is the ethical or right thing to do and because of the economic and cultural resources immigrants bring to cities. This is the first study we know of that focuses on social service providers that work with immigrants to identify commonalities in how they articulate the importance of welcoming immigrants in two different cities.

The emergence of common frames in Portland and Olympia suggests that factors like the professional training of social service providers, their professional networks, and the media may shape the rhetorical construction and diffusion of immigration frames across cities. The diffusion of the ethic of refuge frame across cities may be tied to the prominence of human rights discourses among advocacy groups at the national level, and to the

powerful presence of faith-based organizations that blend religious and secular human rights language in their work on immigrant and refugee issues. However, much of the national discourse on immigrants in the last decade has focused on their legality and fiscal impacts as a result of the economic downturns. The diffusion of the community assets frame can be partly explained by these developments, and the increasing visibility and adoption of assets-based community development (ABCD) approaches, which were rapidly institutionalized by educational institutions and professional networks following the 1993 publication of *Building Communities from the Inside Out*.

Beyond the similarities in incorporation frames, it is likely that the historical and social contexts of Portland and Olympia influence how social service providers used the frames and what aspects of them they emphasized. The fact that Portland has long welcomed immigrants and in recent years mostly responded to refugees who are in the country legally, for example, has made providers less likely to emphasize a climate of fear or the importance of making immigrants aware of their basic human rights when speaking about an ethic of refuge. When speaking about assets, Maine's declining population has encouraged providers to focus on immigrants' economic contributions and the ways immigrants might instrumentally assist with a shrinking economy and need for an expanded workforce to help local businesses grow (Benson & Sherwood, 2004). Both the city's self representation and ethos stress the benefits of welcoming newcomers, which has, in turn, become an integral part of its strategy to reposition itself economically. For these reasons, and because of the funding that has helped the city and state to provide refugees with needed services, service providers in Portland are more inclined than those in Olympia to see the future of their city as bound up with the successes and failures of its immigrants.

Providers in Olympia serve more economic migrants than refugees, including people with and without documentation. The challenges those without documents face have led providers to be more attuned to immigrants' fears when speaking of an ethic of refuge, just as the fact that the city does not provide many services has likely led social service and faith-based organizations to expand the scope of services they offer. Olympia's conflicted history of welcoming newcomers influences its more ambivalent current approach and the emphasis providers place on the steps through which immigrants might best become full and contributing members in the city by developing their assets. Taking into account the vulnerable position of immigrants within the community, providers more concretely outline the efforts both providers and immigrants must take via the assets-based frame in order for immigrants to be fully integrated in the city.

While individual providers combine aspects of the ethic of refuge and community assets frames, it is important to recognize that each points to different underlying logics and arguments for welcoming immigrants, which

connect to broader national policy debates. Placing the reception of immigrants in a moral framework that emphasizes the common humanity of newcomers and reminds community members of their responsibilities to one another is often a crucial first step in the incorporation of immigrants. This discursive turn is especially critical to providers in cities with healthy economies and a higher number of economic migrants because immigrants may be viewed as economic liabilities rather than assets regardless of their legal status or contributions to the local economy. As evident in the case of Portland, immigrants' contributions as workers and consumers are more visible against the backdrop of a declining economy or population.

While more empirical research is needed, the ethic of refuge may be a less effective rhetorical strategy for supporting the full incorporation of immigrants in the cities where they settle than the community assets frame. As evident in Olympia, where immigration raids and hate crimes have shaped the development of an ethic of refuge frame, this response ignores some of the complexities of migration and immigrant incorporation by portraying newcomers as strangers whose immediate needs must be met. Research suggests that universalistic appeals to human rights may fail to convince skeptical publics that all immigrants deserve support or services (Fujiwara, 2005; Mehan, 1997). By identifying the breadth of expertise immigrants bring to the local community and concretely outlining the efforts both providers and immigrants must take in order for immigrants to be fully integrated into the city, the community assets frame has the potential to address genuine challenges posed by immigration to small new destination cities. When local actors represent immigrants as potential partners and collaborators rather than people who simply deserve services, they may be able to help support and create greater opportunities for immigrants to, in the words of one Olympia provider, "participate in the process of developing the community."

While we cannot generalize beyond Portland and Olympia, we encourage other scholars to explore the extent to which social service providers use these frames in other contexts. Beyond these two cities, the ways social service providers talk about their work with immigrants points to the likely role local contexts play in shaping immigrants' and providers' experiences. Although discursive frames do not explain the specific types of work providers do with immigrants, these frames do reflect how providers view their work and may influence both the types of services they develop for immigrants and the efforts they make to integrate them into the community. Our findings add to Stephanie Nawyn's (2007) insights on framing by showing how providers extend an ethic of refuge in different settings and combine this frame with a community assets frame depending on local social and economic factors. These findings also suggest that providers may act as creative reframers whose experiences at the city level influence how they negotiate the open-endedness of normative human rights discourses

and the anxieties of broader publics concerned with how immigration will affect labor markets, tax burdens, and local culture.

Our study points to the importance of research on immigration at the city level that includes the voices of service providers and others to more comprehensively show how immigration is reshaping some localities and how social service providers experience these changes. Although we analyze how providers speak about the importance of welcoming immigrants, more work needs to be done to understand how providers' views shape the work they do with immigrants on the ground, the kinds of services they provide, the local policies they implement, and the ways they attempt to integrate them into their cities. Such studies are likely best conducted using research designs that allow for analytic comparison across cities in order to make visible the taken-for-granted framings and underlying assumptions that shape the role social service providers play in how immigrants and refugees are received.

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