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MUSLIM WELFARE ORGANIZATIONS IN GERMANY – BETWEEN PARTICIPATION, PROFESSIONALIZATION, AND EMPOWERMENT

Abstract

Since the growth of the Muslim population in Germany, the demands for a Muslim welfare organization are getting louder. For this reason, the German Islam Conference started some projects to develop Muslim interests in welfare organizations. The landscape of the German social welfare system is dominated by six umbrella organizations. Three of these are faith-based organizations. A Muslim organization is still missing, despite some empowerment projects. There are attempts of different Muslim communities to build social services which meet the needs of spiritual and cultural sensitiveness of Muslim people and allow them to participate in the existing system. The paper is analysing perspectives of experts on a possible concept for a Muslim welfare organization. The aim is to show a possible way of organizing and implementing a national organization. The issue is discussed in expert interviews and an additional group method of a world café. The major results can improve the ongoing efforts for a culturally sensitive welfare organization. One of the key topics is the professionalization of the existing social services in mosques and other community centers. They must meet the requirements of social work to get tax exemptions and to receive government funds. Another point is to separate religious and social services in the community centers. The heterogeneity in the Muslim population must be respected and integrated in a new form of welfare organizations, which can be different from the existing faith-based welfare organizations. Another point is to implement these tasks in borough, county, and national levels.

Keywords: Social welfare, participation, Muslim organizations, faith-based organizations, empowerment

Introduction

Muslims are a part of the German society. They are a target group of social welfare organizations and users of social work services. Some of the Muslim organizations, that provide religious services in the first hand, want to participate in the social

welfare system. Since the social welfare system is strictly regulated in Germany, the Muslim organizations face a lot of difficulties. They are experts on the field of religious services and know which cultural and religious sensitivities exist in the Muslim community. But they cannot provide social work in the professional way without social workers and professional organizations. Despite that, the mosques are important community centers for some Muslim people. So, in the recent years, it is discussed in the German Islam Conference, how the existing structures within the Muslim faith organizations can be improved and integrated into the highly regulated social welfare system. These discussions are taking part in a political sphere and are financed with project funds. The big player in the German welfare system are the six umbrella organizations. Only some of their local organizations are taking part in the projects. What is still missing is the answer of the social work researchers and practitioners to these changes. To close this gap, in this article it is discussed with experts on different fields on the question of how a concept for the Muslim social welfare can be evolved. The focus is on the professionalization of the existing voluntary structures in Muslim organizations.

In the following sections, the topic of Muslim social welfare is shown from different backgrounds. Afterwards, the methods of this research are shown. In the third section, an overview of the most important categories is given. At the end, the topic is closed with a conclusion.

The demand for Muslim social welfare organizations

According to a study from 2019, Muslims make up to 6,4 to 6,7 percent of the population in Germany (Pfundel et al., 2021: 37). These are 5,3 to 5,6 million people (Pfundel et al., 2021: 37). There are no exact numbers of Muslim people, because Islam is not an institutionalized religion in Germany, like the Catholic and Protestant Churches (Pfundel et al., 2021: 30-31). A lot of Muslims came to Germany in the era of the “guest workers” since the late 1960s. Most of them stayed in their new home. Now, their children and grandchildren live in Germany. Another big group of Muslims are refugees, that came from Muslim countries in the recent years. So, the range of the Muslims, that are potential service users of social welfare organizations is wide. All of them have different family and social backgrounds and needs. What they have in common is, that there can be a need for culture and religion sensitivity in the services they want or must use. At this point, it should be discussed in the academic discipline of social work, which role religiosity or spirituality can have in social work. Both can give people a sense of live in moments they need the help of social welfare services. To be part of a religious community can also be a big resource in the lives of people. If these are helpful in the professional helping system, social workers can adapt these resources. It is not always easy to find religious components in social work education in Germany. There is a lack of understanding

and knowledge about special needs of Muslim people. The research of social work needs to focus more on these topics. Muslim organizations, that are active in the field of social and religious services want to close this gap. This is one of the main reasons why they want to take part in the social welfare system.

The other reason is their wish for participation. The social welfare system is an important part of the German social politics and plays a big role in changing processes in the civil society. Since Muslims are a part of the society, there are aims to participate in this system. Another point is the representation of the Muslim part of the German society in the social welfare system. Despite the fact, that social work is universal service for all people and not connected to a religious group, the historical development of the social welfare system in Germany has brought faith-based organizations. It can be discussed, which role faith is playing in these organizations nowadays. Faith and religiosity can also be important for the social workers themselves, if their motivation to work as social workers is based on their faith for example. With the existing faith-based organizations in Germany, that are very important on the field of social work, the role of religion in social welfare services must be a topic in social work research.

The system and transformations of social welfare organizations in Germany

In this section I will focus on the system of the six umbrella organizations of social welfare in Germany. These organizations are existing since long years and are historically connected with different social groups (Backhaus-Maul, 2020: I). Two of them are organizations with Christian roots. One Protestant and one Catholic social welfare organization are two of the main social work provider and employer in Germany. These so called third sector organizations are facing a lot of challenges since the recent years due to the sociological and political changes. Due to these transformations, the social welfare sector is getting more diverse, despite the long history and strict legal regulations for the organizations.

One of the new players in the social sector are organizations established by Muslim communities. These new and the long existing traditional organizations are competing for limited subsidies from the government. In Germany, there are some principles in the cooperation between the social state and the social welfare organizations. Through the corporatist structure in the social welfare system in Germany, the third sector organizations are involved in political discourses in the welfare state (Backhaus-Maul, 2020: IV-VIII; Backhaus-Maul et al., 2015: 33). Another important rule in the welfare system is the principle of subsidiarity, which means that social problems should be solved by individuals or families themselves, before voluntary or governmental organizations intervene. When individuals or social structures cannot help themselves, the social welfare organizations have priority before gov-

ernmental organizations in providing social welfare services. This regulation has its roots in the Catholic and labour movement (Griep and von Kries, 2017: 4; Prölß et al., 2020: 300). Their aim was to prevent too much involvement of government organizations in the private life of people (Prölß et al., 2020: 300). Subsidiarity means nowadays, that organizations of the third sector are preferred when social welfare services need to be provided. These services are paid by the government. Social welfare organizations need to fulfil a lot of requirements to receive money from the government and get tax exemptions. From the position of social services users, they have the right to choose between service providers. In practice, this right is not realizable in every case. The realization depends on the variety of social welfare services that are provided in the social market. Since the users are not paying for these services, the government reacts to needs of people and take political decisions to create the legal basis for the services. Another point is the missing diversity in the provided services. This is an important point since the rise of globalization and the growth of migration. The existing system with different umbrella organizations is an example of the worth of variety in social services. They represent important social groups or movements. At the same time, they guarantee the right of users to choose between different services.

Beside these traditional values in the German social welfare system, important changes occur in the environment of the organizations. The social service organizations with deep roots in social history face different challenges today. Especially the faith-based organizations cope with rising secularism (Von Papen Robredo, 2017: 66; Lob-Hüdepohl, 2017: 176). The German welfare system is devaluing due to secularism and nationalization within the social welfare system (Von Papen Robredo, 2017: 66, Lob-Hüdepohl, 2017: 176). The legitimation of faith-based organizations is questioned with these trends (Lob-Hüdepohl, 2017: 168). Also, at the faith-based organizations, the staff is selected according to professionalism and not for their membership in one of the Churches (Boeßenecker, 2017: 32). While the old social structures are devaluing, new social milieus are rising and with them new tasks for the structural and personnel development of the organizations (Backhaus-Maul, 2020: XIV).

Linked with the rising nationalization is the economization of social work in Germany. Social services are provided by the social welfare organization for its users. The financing system of these services is regulated by the social law system. That means, that the users are not paying for the received services. The social state is deciding, which services are paid. Only the organizations which meet the formal requirements for social organizations. The organizations calculate economically because the social state is demanding efficiency (Wohlfahrt, 2017: 217-218). This leads to more professionalism and comparability between the social welfare organizations, and the provided services get more equal (Von Papen Robredo, 2017:

66). The social welfare system is also part of a globalization process, which makes the society more complex. Users of social welfare services can have hybrid identities. Some reasons for migration processes lie within global challenges, like wars or natural disasters. The social welfare organizations are facing these changes and challenges and are trying to give answers to these new questions. With new organizations, for example those with Muslim origin, the transformations in the social system and in the society are getting clearer.

Research methodology

Due to the lack of research in the area of Muslim welfare organizations in Germany, in this article, qualitative research methodologies were used to answer the question, how a concept for a Muslim social welfare organization can be evolved. The qualitative paradigm enables the research of social behaviour of people, which can be defined as the basis for social work concepts. Also, the use of qualitative research methods highlights the process of the constitution of Muslim welfare structures in Germany, which is still evolving. These characteristics are part of the qualitative research methodology (Lamnek and Krell, 2016: 35). The development of a conception from research data bases on the methodology of the Grounded Theory (Mey and Mruck, 2011: 16). It was established by Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser (Mey and Mruck, 2011: 16). With the methodology of Grounded Theory, concepts or theories can be developed from qualitative research data. This process involves the coding of the data which then are translated into concepts. The Grounded Theory methodology is useful for new kind of topics, like it is in this article. It enables to create concepts for a relatively new research area.

The research problem is in interest of the practitioners of social work and the providing organizations. It is driven by the transformations in the German society that also affects the social welfare system. The importance of the research topic is also powered by the Muslim community, that wants to represent its interests. There is a demand for social work with culture and religion sensitiveness especially for Muslim people. Since the involvement of the German Islam Conference and some Muslim religious organizations in the topic, the social relevance of it is getting more attention. There is a need of transfer of knowledge between the social work organizations and the project owners, funded by the German Islam Conference. Also, the professionals and academics of social work are affected by the new actors on the field and the ongoing transformations.

The social work system in Germany is a strictly regulated area. With the projects of the German Islam Conference, some Muslim-rooted organizations want to enter this area. The question is, how this process can be implemented and what is needed for this aim. There is lack of information and literature about this topic. Therefore, this article has the aim to give first insights in conceptual considerations and chang-

es or organizational developments that are waiting for the Muslim communities. This article does not want to give a final version for a concept but is giving insights into expert opinions about the topic and wants to give impulses for the further development of Muslim organizations.

Expert interviews were chosen as data collection method in this research. With these, it is intended to get a wide broad of information about the new topic of Muslim social welfare organizations. The transfer of expert opinions into the social work practice is enabled with this method (Bogner et al., 2014: 13). In case of this article, it enables the transfer of the data into a concept for a social work organization. The chosen experts for the interviews represent a broad knowledge about the topic and of related fields. For this article, eight experts were interviewed. All of them were recorded and the transcripts are written anonymously. This guarantees the openness of the interview situation. The interviewed people have knowledge on the topic from their professional or voluntary work perspective in social welfare or related fields. In expert interviews, two types of knowledge can be found. One of them is the knowledge of processes, that they gain through their work or voluntary experiences (Bogner et al., 2014: 18). For this article, this kind of knowledge is important, because most projects and meetings about the topic are for a small group of people. The insights of the experts can show new aspects of the topic that are not discussed in the Muslim community yet. Another point about the generated data is the transformation of subjective opinions into generally accepted knowledge, when it is said by experts (Bogner et al., 2014: 19).

The interviews were held in an explorative style. That means, the interviews were held in a relatively open way. For the new research area, this way of interviews was seen as useful to get the data, that is the most relevant. Also, the discussions and results of a world café method were analysed for this article. The method was used in a conference, that was about the topic of Muslim social welfare and was attended by volunteers in Muslim communities. All the data was analysed with the method of categorization. The categories are concepts, that are excerpted from the data.

Results of the research

This section is an overview of the categories of the expert interviews. These categories build the base for further considerations about a concept for one or more Muslim social welfare organizations. Due to the limit in the length of this article, I focus on the topics that are analysed as relevant in the data. The main categories of the interviews are about participation, professionalization, and empowerment.

Participation

On the question of how a Muslim welfare organization should be structured, it must first be clarified which persons the interviewed experts see as relevant actors

in the welfare system. There are different views on this among the respondents. The religious organizations are recognized as important actors. Here, the aspect appears as to whether the religious associations or those founded specifically for social purposes should be counted among the actors in Muslim welfare organizations. In Interview F is given a position on this, with the indication that the new foundation would cause administrative overhead. While religious organizations are recognized as actors, the affiliation of association-independent organizations are questioned. In Interview B, an extension of the welfare concept around newly founded associations that have exclusively social functions is demanded. The background to this consideration is the expansion of the political will generated by the mass of Muslim actors. Also in Interview C, better networking between the Muslim organizations and are demanded. In contrast to this, in interview D, reference is only made on the services of religious organizations. The interviewee E raises that while choosing the right organizations, the support should be given from the Muslim community. So, there are different types of expert views on the question of which actors are relevant in structure development. It is therefore the responsibility of the Muslim organizations to decide whether they want to be part of the development of a welfare structure or not. One of the main questions here would be whether a common Muslim charity should exist or not. The diversity in Muslim structures is emphasized in the interviews. So how can the structure of a welfare system look that does justice to the diversity of the Muslim landscape? In summary, the tendency in the interviews is that an organization can arise on several levels, consisting of diverse Muslim actors. A mission statement about the work of Muslim welfare could be a helping tool at this stage. This must also be discussed and worked out in networks. The emergence of a structure is therefore related to the willingness to talk and the commitment of the Muslim organizations. This process can be accompanied by welfare organizations, coming from the Muslim landscape or from external structures and the networking of the actors and the development of a new self-image.

Professionalization

In some interviews, the tenor is that the establishment of a Muslim welfare structure separated in religious and social offerings is needed. The strengthening of cohesion and focus on social services, are in the foreground in this category. However, ambivalences are also visible on this topic. The interviewee A calls for the separation from social and religious offers, at the same time she distances herself by religious groups attributed to the Muslim spectrum. A contradiction is evident here, given the separation of social and religious offerings cannot go hand in hand with the exclusion of different groups. The aim is to let theological debates fade into the background. This is achieved by distinguishing between religious and social offers. In the interview B, this fact is even considered necessary for the recogni-

tion of the considered Muslim welfare structure. A differentiated discussion of the topic is dealt with in Interview F. Also, this interviewee sees a need for separation. However, she draws attention on the sensitive dealing with communities. A separation would come with confinement of the Muslim communities from some of their social offerings. However, the communities have been providing social services on a voluntary basis for several years. Separating them from their duties could cause an attitude of rejection. Therefore, the expert warns to be sensitive on this topic. At the same time, the separation in the structures of the religious organizations is already completed in some areas. As an example of this, the expert cites the formation of youth groups and associations. So that the welfare structures can be professionalized, the independent development of social services is needed. Also, for the future fundings a clear assignment of responsibilities is important. A recognition of the social offers made by the Muslim religious organizations so far is nevertheless important. These are mainly carried out in voluntary structures. Voluntary work is an important pillar of welfare structures. That means, that even after the transformation to professional structures, voluntary work will exist. For this reason, in professionalization processes, maintaining the volunteer base is important. To ensure that, one expert suggests the involving of the religious communities in the transformation process. They should also be able to decide whether they want to be a part of the change or not.

Empowerment, self-consciousness, and self-determination

The aspect of self-determination of the Muslim organizations can be found in nearly every interview. The experts demand more self-consciousness from them. Different dimensions of self-determination can be found in the interviews. Interview partner A recommends a further cooperation and networking of different Muslim organizations. In interview B, the link between self-consciousness and implementing of structures is emphasized. Also, the acknowledgment of interests and rights of the Muslim organizations, is part of self-determination processes in interview B. In this way, Muslim organizations can confidently assert their right to participate in welfare structures. Muslim organizations should not only be users of social services but also providers. To do this, they should first become aware of their own resources and strengths. This also corresponds to the idea in interview A about the networking of Muslim organizations. The fact that Muslims themselves need to change and expand their understanding of the functions of the Muslim communities is addressed in interview D. The interviewee not only demands the practice of religion in the communities, but the strengthening of their social character. Also for the political work of the Muslim welfare structure is this category important. In interview D, just like in interviews A and B, there is a close alliance demanded by the Muslim organizations to represent a political weight, which is perceived by politicians as

worthy of funding. Through the missing legal status of Muslim religious communities is recognition at the political level part of the structural problem. The self-determination of the Muslim landscape could put these debates in a different light, in which the social importance through the cooperation of all Muslim organizations, is highlighted. The merger of different Muslim organizations to establish welfare structures, also makes it easier for them to access funding and a uniform representation on the political level. Self-determination has further effects in structure construction. Despite the demand for cooperation with existing welfare structures, the self-determined approach of the Muslim organizations is demanded in the interviews. This means that they decide themselves who sits on the committees, who represents them externally and how the internal and external cooperation should look like. The authenticity of the representatives from the Muslim communities was emphasized by interviewee E, so the users accept their offers. Here, there must be a balance between the technical and structural support from established welfare organizations, that is not rejected and the self-determination of the Muslim organizations. In this sense, interviewee E also emphasizes that cooperation projects should only be carried out when the Muslim organizations have already been able to set up their own structures and offers. In interview F, the Muslim actors are asked to activate and pool resources. This is also part of the self-determined approach. What is striking about this category is that it precedes the structural design development task of the Muslim structures. Besides that, is the basic idea of self-determined and self-confident action in Muslim organizations present in almost all interviews. The interview partners only emphasize different aspects of this basic attitude. This shows the importance of an intensive examination of one's own resources, similarities and objectives of the Muslim organizations that want to make their way to a welfare structure.

Conclusion

The question of the possibilities for a concept for the establishment of a Muslim welfare structure cannot be answered conclusively in this work. However, there were important impulses for the establishment of structures, which concern above all the current development phase and need to be worked out within this phase. These concerns the attitude of the Muslim organizations that are becoming self-confident about their own possibilities, resources, and rights in order to be able to act independently. However, this is less than one to complete process, but rather as a recurring self-reflection. Furthermore, it is about the professionalization of the existing structures in the mosque communities and other Muslim organizations. On these, the development of Muslim welfare structures can be built, by further professionalizing and developing them. A separation of the social and religious services of Muslim organizations is expected to concretize the objective of the work and to

facilitate the promotion of social services. The research results indicate a further need for research in this area. A social reversal within the Muslim population can be seen and is recognized on different levels. So social work must continue take a stand on this and develop suitable concepts, as well as to build cooperation's with the new players. The Muslim welfare structure in Germany is in a process of self-discovery and development, which will certainly continue. The challenges, that concern today's welfare organizations also arise the new Muslim players on the field. To meet these challenges a relevant cooperation and networking of the new and the established organizations is needed. Thus, a new way can be found together that offers a contemporary answer to the new social questions. The development of Muslim welfare is already in full swing and will shape the welfare structures in the coming years.

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