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Putting Career Construction Into Context:

Career Adaptability Among Refugees

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Abstract

This qualitative study, derived from 36 interviews with refugees in Germany, contributes to the literature on career construction theory by exploring career adaptation in the context of forced migration. We focus on the complexity of refugees' adaptive coping responses and study how refugees resort to and develop these adaptive responses in the host country. Our findings highlight the strong influence of context on refugees' ability to adapt their careers, suggesting that problems in career construction are also contextually conditioned.

Fundamental uncertainties, lacking personal resources, and having lost and losing time were overarching barriers. Restricted by the context's unfamiliarity and these barriers, refugees' coping was characterized by strong self-regulation. Many of them expressed concern and took control by disregarding uncertainties and set clear career goals and kept moving on regardless of the obstacles faced. They chose positive, appreciative mindsets to take control and strengthen their confidence, and shaped and explored their career dreams, thus exhibiting curiosity. Context not only impaired, but also facilitated refugees' ability to adapt their careers through social connections and the richness of local work opportunities. The present study offers new insights into research on career construction by highlighting how context can impede individuals' use of their adaptability resources and competences, and how despite difficulties, individuals can direct and actively shape their careers to re-build their work trajectories after the resettlement.

Keywords: careers, career adaptability, career construction, coping, refugees

1. Introduction

Today's ever-changing nature of work and careers have motivated scholars to re-think the patterns and processes that underlie individuals' career construction. Besides traditional careers made up of work experiences orchestrated more or less agentially (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Super, 1957), millions of people face far more uncertain careers. Among these are over 22.5 million refugees¹; people who have been forced to leave their countries because of persecution, war, or violence often connecting to questions of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or social membership (UNHCR, 2018a). As refugees lose their homes and safety, they also lose their jobs and face disrupted career paths (e.g., Ivlevs & Veliziotis, 2018). Yet, little is known about their career construction. Refugees experience language barriers, unrecognized credentials, stigmatization, and low local social capital (Wehrle, Klehe, Kira, & Zikic, 2018) and, consequently, their career opportunities often fall starkly short from their aspirations (Pierce & Gibbons, 2012). This impairs job-search and re-employment (Yakushko, Backhaus, Watson, Ngaruiya, & Gonzalez, 2008), and results in a poor adaptation to the host countries. Nevertheless, refugees must – and do – construct their careers in host countries, and the aim of our qualitative study is to explore how they do that. Using career construction theory (Savickas, 2005; 2013) as an organizing framework, we aim at unraveling refugees' attitudinal, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral adaptive coping responses after resettlement, and study how refugees resort to and develop their adapting behaviors when confronted with foreign and potentially restrictive contexts.

By doing so, our research contributes to career construction theory (Savickas, 2005; 2013) by applying it to the context of discontinuous and involuntary career transitions (e.g., Haynie & Shepherd, 2011). Even though Savickas (2013, p. 157) has drawn attention to “destandardized [career] trajectories consisting of more frequent and less predictable occupational transitions”, empirical research on the construction of such careers is scant.

¹ For simplicity reasons, we will consistently use the term ‘refugee’, including both asylum seekers and refugees.

Career construction theory builds on assumptions about volition and thus on individual differences in people's willingness and capabilities to adapt, yet also postulates people's career adaptation to be "conditioned by historical era, dependent on local situations, and variable across social roles" (Savickas, 2005, p. 51). It therefore is relevant to capture individuals' career adaptation context-specifically. By applying the theory to the extreme case of forced migration, we identify both conceptual areas of strength and contextual boundary conditions to this theory.

Also, we add to the literature on refugee integration by offering insights into refugees' career adaptation to the host country's labor market. We unveil how such adaptive coping is shaped by the legal and social contexts enabling or hindering refugees' career adaptive responding. While research has identified barriers to refugees' positive resettlement experiences (e.g., Baranik, Hurst, & Eby, 2018), we still know little about the effects of such contextual barriers on refugees' career-related adaptation. Thus, this study responds to calls for further research on the experiences of unemployed job seekers in general (Manroop, 2017) and of migrants seeking work in specific (e.g., Zikic & Richardson, 2016), offering helpful insights for the practice of refugee career counseling.

2. Theoretical Framework and Study Aims

Career construction theory (Savickas, 2005; 2013) illustrates the dynamic nature of individuals' vocational behaviors across their careers. It posits career adaptation as a logical sequence from peoples' adaptivity (i.e., their broad adaptive readiness and willingness), via adaptability resources and competences, to adaptive coping responses, and eventually career adaptation (i.e., career success). In the present paper, we focus on refugees' *career adaptability* and *adaptive coping responses*, that is, their competences, attitudes, beliefs, and actions in coping with vocational tasks, transitions, and traumas (i.e., unexpected and traumatic changes related to work due to uncontrollable external events; Savickas, 2013).

Career construction theory proposes four dimensions of career adaptability and related

adaptive responses, which are vital for a successful career construction, while their deficits evoke ‘career problems’ hindering career construction (Savickas, 2005; 2013). First, people need to feel *concerned* about their future careers to not endure the career problem of being indifferent to the future, but to be aware of the need to prepare for and plan a career. Second, people need to feel in *control* over their careers, that is, they should feel decisive and assertive in translating their intentions into corresponding career decisions, rather than suffer from the career problem of indecision. Third, they need to be *curious* and explore information about the career environment and the self to prevent the career problem of unrealism (Flum & Blustein, 2000). Fourth, a successful career adaptation requires *confidence*, which helps people to face the obstacles in their way and to actively engage in problem solving, rather than to suffer from the career problem of inhibition (Savickas, 2013).

In the present qualitative research, we explore the content, meaning, and enactment of these four adaptability dimensions to describe refugees’ adaptation to the host country’s labor market. Such focus, we believe, is promising both for the study of refugee integration into the local labor market (cf. Newman, Bimrose, Nielsen, & Zacher, 2018) and also, as an extreme case, a litmus test for the power of current conceptions of career-adaptive responses in the context of dramatic discontinuous career transitions (e.g., Haynie & Shepherd, 2011). Further, while past research has addressed career adaptation primarily from a person-centric standpoint (Savickas, 2005; 2013), we aim to study the role of context. Among refugees, this context can exert an extreme influence (e.g., Baranik et al., 2018). What we do not know, however, is how contextual factors relate to refugees’ attitudes, beliefs, and cognitions in their career adaptation in the new country (i.e., which factors may impair, which stimulate an adaptive response). Relatedly, we add to career construction theory’s dominant focus on intrapersonal processes by addressing the role of interpersonal relations when adapting to the novel context (cf. Savickas, 2013). We pay attention to how social contacts and resources may impede or facilitate refugees’ adaptation process. The context may thus, overall, both call for higher

levels of adaptive responses, but may equally impede such responses.

3. Methods

3.1. Study Context

This study takes place in Germany; a new home for about 1.27 million refugees (UNHCR, 2018b). Refugees in Germany receive basic social welfare as long as needed and a work permit ideally three months after registration, although that process usually takes longer (Informationsverbund Asyl & Migration, 2018). Asylum applications vary in length and may result in applicants being allowed to stay in Germany for good or receiving a one to three year subsidiary protection before cases will be re-decided. Other applicants are turned down and deported to their home country or a 'safe' country passed during their flight, although many of these negative decisions are followed by prolonged legal actions, and possibly, revisions.

On the labor market, Germany is characterized by high academization (Baethge & Wolter, 2015) and vocational specificity (Hillmert, 2006). Built on a dual system of vocational education and training, the German labor market sets out specific educational pathways to ensure a highly skilled workforce. The system relies on apt qualifications and credentials for its workers, thus potentially disadvantaging people who enter from the outside or shift in their careers, reducing these people's re-employment chances and career success.

3.2. Sample and Research Design

In winter 2017/2018, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 36 refugees who held a work permit and who sought to gain or had secured employment. We knew 21 from an earlier study (Wehrle et al., 2018). To secure theoretical saturation (cf. Strauss & Corbin, 1990), we further recruited 15 additional participants via snowballing or via social service organizations working with refugees. Two reasons made us re-interview former study participants: First, to build trust and to secure open answers, we relied on longer-term contacts and already established relations. Second, the present study was inspired by the interview data collected for the earlier study (Wehrle et al., 2018), which provided some insights into how

refugees adapt their careers in the host country, even though that had not been the focus of the interviews. We thus decided to explore this topic with partly the same participants.

Characteristic for a refugee workforce (World Education News & Reviews, 2017), the sample was mostly male (30 men), young (mean age = 32 years), and single (23; see Table 1). The refugees originated from seven countries, mostly Syria (19), had entered Germany between 2005 and 2016, and resided in Germany on average for three years and seven months, holding work permits on average for three years. Their residence statuses varied from tolerated stays (i.e., temporary suspension of deportation) to German citizenships. One refugee had an elementary level education, four a high school diploma, three had finished a vocational training in the home country, ten had not yet fully completed their university studies at home, and 18 held a university degree, roughly reflecting the general educational level of refugees in Germany at the time of the study (e.g., Stoewe, 2017).

[Please insert Table 1 approximately here]

This study's research design followed the inductive qualitative methodology of Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton (2013). The interviews were conducted in German or English, depending on the participant's preference, and lasted on average for 63 minutes. We highlighted the anonymous and voluntary nature of the interviews to the participants, received their informed consent, and, for each interview, compensated the participants with 10€/h. The interview questions were focused on refugees' work-related experiences, thus not requesting information relating to traumatic war and flight experiences. The interview protocol was designed on the basis of career construction theory, targeting the refugees' career-related adaptation in the host country, and was consistently applied in every interview. The protocol and its semi-structured nature allowed us to adapt each interview to the participant and to flexibly enable each refugee's unique story to surface. Further, it aided us to recognize the impacts of specific contextual events on the refugees' adaptive coping behaviors and to identify how they adapted their careers in the host country. The protocol included a core set of

questions on the following topics²: (1) The participant's demographics; (2) their past and current vocational experiences; (3) their career adaptability and their adaptive coping responses during the transition into the German labor market; (4) contextual barriers and enablers; and (5) their future career perspectives. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Illustrative quotes in German were translated into English.

3.3. Data Analysis

We coded the data with NVIVO11 according to the research methodology of Gioia et al. (2013) and the thematic analysis approach of Braun and Clarke (2006), capturing the data structure (see Figure 1) via in-depth analyses of the interviews. Adhering closely to participants' language, we did open coding, resulting in first order codes (e.g., 'taking responsibility'), which were then combined into second order categories (e.g., 'continuously moving on') that constituted concrete phenomena of the refugees' coping responses on a theory-centric level. Lastly, we clustered second order categories to the four dimensions of career construction theory (Savickas, 2005; 2013) to form the abstract and conceptual level of the aggregated theoretical dimensions (e.g., 'taking control and making decisions'). Throughout the analysis, we were sensitive to new and context-specific insights that we recognized in the data. When such themes emerged in one interview and seemed to relate to the overall refugee population, we backtracked to prior participants and re-analyzed their interviews to check for these themes. To ensure internal validity in the data, the interviews were first coded by the first author before the other authors independently went over the quotes and codes. The resulting analyses were compared to further develop and unify the codes, form the second order categories, and the aggregated dimensions. Minor disagreements were resolved through discussion after examining the codes collectively.

[Please insert Figure 1 approximately here]

4. Results

² The full interview protocol can be obtained from the first author upon request.

In this section, we focus on the refugees' efforts to take control over their careers, their concern and attempts to re-plan their careers in the new context, their curiosity in exploring future job opportunities, and their confidence to solve problems during career construction.

4.1. Control in Involuntary Career Transitions

While career construction theory proposes being concerned about one's career as the foundation of career adaptability (Savickas, 2013), our findings point to the critical role of refugees' (lost) sense of control after resettlement. All participants reported a loss of control over their lives and careers, a loss that strongly impaired the other adaptability dimensions.

Nabil voiced:

My work [in Libya] was really good. [...] I could've become a manager. [...] I had to re-start here [in Germany] from minus. [...] Not from zero, but from minus. [...] The system [...] is very different. Even with [...] work experience, it takes its time. It's not easy, [...] although my CV is very good. [...] You're new [...] and that plays a role. (Nabil).

4.1.1. Contextual factors for losing and taking control. The refugees *lost* control by facing uncertainties, lacking necessary skills and credentials, and by losing time and waiting.

Fundamental uncertainties were constant companions for the refugees, not only in home countries devastated by war and civil unrest, but also in Germany. Critical life and career decisions were often beyond their control, as Zahra noted: "We can't decide [...] by ourselves, we can only react", even though most refugees longed to have control over their lives. Zarif reflected: "Most of the times, I want to have full control over my life, but that won't work. [...] Not at all. That's not possible." This uncertainty, in turn, had devastating consequences, as portrayed by Sami: "[When my residence decision] was negative, [...] I went crazy. [...] I was in so much stress. I cannot go back to Afghanistan. [...] It is so bad."

Missing language and/or credentials bereft all participants of control. Sharif outlined the double bind situation of missing language skills and not having a job: "Work helps [...] to

learn German. [... Yet,] without German, you cannot work here, [...] you aren't allowed to."

Many refugees also lacked job and education credentials, which impaired their ability to actively build their careers. Tahir said:

I'm searching for a full-time job, but it's difficult in Germany [...] because you don't have credentials. I told them to let me do an internship, see whether I'm good or not. [...] They declined. [...] I worked five years in Syria. [Still,] they said: 'Alright, but let me see your credentials'. [...] I send out my applications, [...] but no answers. [...] They [employers] say they need my credentials from Syria, but how am I supposed to get those? [...] Inside [the job center], they talk to me, sit with me, look at me, and tell me that I need the papers. Alright, I don't have the papers. My problem. (Tahir).

Many refugees lost time without being able to re-build their lives and careers. As stated by Zafer: "I already lost seven years now [...] or more. [...] I've done nothing, nothing at all in those seven years. [...] I wanted more than this". Sometimes, this confined them to an inactive 'waiting position', as in the case of Sharif:

The war came and I didn't have an option [but to flee]. [...Now,] I don't have another option, so I must wait. [...] We live in Germany for two years. [...] Officially, we're in Germany for six months now. [...] Before that, we didn't have an official residence permit. [...] I didn't have any possibilities [language course or work], so I had to wait. (Sharif).

The feeling of having to wait also led to new barriers. Nabil stated how refugees could miss job opportunities while waiting for their residence and work permits: "Employers search for people [...] who work. If it takes too long [to be legally allowed to work], it's over!"

In the face of such difficulties, context also countered above challenges. The refugees felt *enabled* to take control once they experienced a sense of security and social connections.

A sense of security often came from comparing one's present life with the instabilities faced before. Salim recounted: "In Iraq, [...] there are no rights, there's no strong, stable

government. [...] What surprised me here were, honestly, the laws. [...] I work and I have my rights.”

Relatedly, a sense of control also arose from securing German professional credentials that would be recognized and respected both in Germany and internationally. Nasir reflected:

In Syria, I didn't have a stable occupation. [...] I'm thrilled to have [...] an education and training [in Germany]. [...] This] means for me, first, stability, and second, to have one foot firm in the job market. [...] To build a real career [...] in my line of work. (Nasir).

Choosing to redo all his studies from scratch to re-enter his profession, Dakhil noted:

I want a certificate so that if I go to another country, it's not like [...] when I left Syria. [...] Maybe I lost time [by studying anew], but the best thing is to have a German certificate and then, when I go someplace else, there will be no disputes. (Dakhil).

Social connections bolstered refugees' sense of control. Sami noted how people's advice and encouragement re-enforced his optimism in his unresolved residence status:

10 to 15 people told me that when [I] have the next interview at the court [for the residence status], they will come with me. [...] Everybody told me: 'You're such a strong man' that I [feel as though I] can control the situation. (Sami).

4.1.2. Taking control and making decisions. Most refugees wanted to overcome the uncertainties and re-establish normality into their lives. Zafer said: “The life I live at the moment, I'm not used to it. I want more and I try to go back to normal. Almost normal. Yes and I [still] have much to work towards that.” He sought to take control by, for instance, learning the local language and making experiences in how to navigate the society:

I don't want to rely on the job center any longer. [...] My life, this is not how it is. [...] In the past, I couldn't speak German. [...] I wasn't allowed to do many things. I couldn't do many things. I didn't have any experience. [...]. Now, I understand almost everything. Now, I can continue. In the past, I needed help. Now, I don't. (Zafer).

Continuously moving on served as an antidote against being overwhelmed by the various barriers and it helped the refugees to regain a sense of control. First, the refugees' aspiration to take responsibility for their lives and decide for themselves was a driving force to move on. Especially not feeling victimized constituted a critical part, as stressed by Zarif:

[When I'm feeling down, what helps me is] just the feeling to keep on going. [...] Yes, I don't like the feeling of being a victim. [...] Not at all. I always try to be active [...] and be an [agent]. [...] I always try to see it this way, [...] even if it's difficult. (Zarif). Also, Issam took responsibility for his actions within his field of control:

My parents didn't know I would be leaving the next day. [...] I decided on that, on what I'd do, that I'd do it by myself. [...] You've wanted it like this and now you're here. [...] You have to accept it. [...] It's a motivator, [...] it calms you. [...] You ask yourself: 'What can you do?' and whether it went right or wrong, you did it yourself. (Issam).

Second, many refugees decidedly disregarded uncertainties to keep on actively shaping their careers, such as Nasir:

I was stopped by the police in Hungary and [...] had to give my fingerprints. [...] Because of this, at first, I was declined as an asylum applicant, [..., but] right now, it's being decided for how long I'll be allowed to stay in Germany. [...] Actually, I'm doing very much at the moment, even though I don't have a residence permit. [...] I've integrated myself pretty well and I'm doing many things. [...] I distract myself from it [my unresolved case by] educating myself as a dental technician. (Nasir).

Thus, despite factors that could not be influenced in their lives after resettlement, they held on to what they were confident to be in control of: Their own abilities and actions. Nasir said: "I don't really have control except over my abilities". As many others, Nadim strove to become self-employed to make his own decisions: "Becoming self-employed, [...] means you're free. You're independent. You don't need anyone. You're not dependent on anyone."

Consciously prioritizing helpful emotions and thoughts was another method used to regain control. As Zarif said: “I try to not worry too much about everything. That restricts one’s ability to think.” Refugees achieved this by distracting themselves (see Nasir’s quote in ‘continuously moving on’) or by consciously controlling their emotions, as outlined by Issam:

It has a lot to do with one’s emotions. [...] I’m all alone in Germany, without my parents or my siblings. [...] Sometimes, you think much about it, about the family, [...] and when this emotion comes up [...] you neglect another part [of life], such as your studies, work, or so. So, I always try to control my emotions [...] to not influence my work, or my studies. [...] It bears me down, but not too often, as I try to not think about it too much. [...] To solve the issue, I think one has to think differently. (Issam).

Some participants also consciously accepted their lack of control over their situation, trying to keep it from overshadowing their personal lives. As Burhan stated: “I always say that I have to accept it here. [...] Just accept it. [...] I don’t think too much about things.”

Further, many refugees maintained their control by appreciating their life experiences associated with overcoming challenges prior to and after resettling. Rakia observed: “[Now,] I value more what I have [in life]. [...] I’ve experienced many things that I’d never imagined to ever experience. [...] And everything you experience in life gives you new knowledge.”

Also, some refugees voiced their gratitude for basic things which enabled a new sense of what control meant to them. Salim said: “I have to say, we [I and my family] are content. We really thank [the Germans ...] for accepting us, the Yazidis, and for giving us [back] our rights.”

Finally, some refugees explicitly framed their resettlement to Germany as a chance to start over. Zafer appreciated the new opportunities and described how they aided him to be in charge: “It’s a new life. I don’t have to think about what I did before. New life, new start. [...] I feel at ease knowing that I got another chance [...] to do something.”

Contributing to local society was another means to regain control. When working, some refugees not only wanted to do good work, but also to have their work recognized,

giving them purpose and motivation. Zarif said: “I always want to do good work [...] and [...] achieve good results. [...] It’s not only the higher position, [...] but also] the recognition of one’s work.” He also explained how this recognition related to contributing to something significant. Having knowledge in his own work enabled him to feel valuable and assertive:

It was always [important] to me that I have good work or relevant work. [...] Relevant doesn’t imply that I have good knowledge on all science matters, but [...] on what I do, the field I work in. [...] That now, I’m able to do something [...] that counts. [...] That what I’ve done was important, [...] has changed something; [...] I was important. (Zarif).

In addition, several refugees noted that it was important for them to give something back to the people who helped them surpass difficulties and integrate. Nasir said:

What really motivates me [to voluntarily work in a clothing store] is, first, to be able to give something back [...] and second, to help the people the same way that I’ve received support [...] by just being able to share my experiences. (Nasir).

4.2. Concern in Involuntary Career Transitions

A deep concern for their futures, including their future careers, was prevalent in many of the refugees’ minds – and yet, uncertainties undermined their active career planning. Nasir noted: “You can’t really anticipate [...] anything about your future in Germany”.

4.2.1. Contextual factors for career planning. When *restricted* by uncertainties about their residences and thus also their work statuses along with disrupted career paths, many refugees’ felt unable to pursue original plans or to make new plans in the host country.

An uncertain residence status and thus uncertain future not only eroded refugees’ control, but also disrupted their ability to plan ahead, as they did not know where their futures would lie: In Germany, at home, or in a third country passed along the way. Dakhil stressed:

One doesn’t know [what will happen]. We’re just refugees. When the war in Syria ends [...], maybe we’ll go back. [...] I have three years [permit to stay in Germany] as

a refugee. But I don't know what I should do after that. Either I receive my unlimited [German residence permit] or I'll be deported back [to Syria]. [...] If I stay here, then I want to finish my education and studies. Without that, you can't do anything in Germany. [...] But I don't know, [...] what do they want to do with me? (Dakhil).

Disrupted career paths made it difficult for many refugees to plan. Salim had to find a job in Germany and could not take the time to re-enter and continue his prior education:

[My prospects in Iraq] went into a totally different direction than now in Germany. [...] I had very good grades [and] my teachers were very pleased with me. [...] I had very different ideas on [...] work fields than now. [...] But it all got destroyed. (Salim).

Many occupations also required different skills and knowledge in the home country than in Germany. These differences rendered one's occupational competence invalid and complicated planning one's future in that occupation. Dakhil said: "I didn't think about other [work prospects] yet. In Syria, I was a chemist and worked much in the rescue service. Here, everything works with technology. [...] I have to find another idea here, one that works."

Yet, other contextual factors *enabled* career planning. Once refugees learned that they could stay for some time or even for good (e.g., receipt of residence permit), they felt more able to plan their futures. Liana compared her own ability to plan to that of her sister:

Many doors have opened since she [her sister] received the [residence permit]. [...] Much has changed. Suddenly, she has work prospects. If I find a job, I have to ask the immigration authorities whether I'm allowed to work there or not. [...] My sister doesn't have to ask anyone. [...] When she finds work, she can apply, and work. (Liana).

4.2.2. Making and adjusting career plans. Even before receiving residence, many participants set future goals and prepared accordingly. Some explicitly monitored the progress of their plans. Burhan said: "Right now I have a plan from the beginning [of my stay in

Germany] and [up until now] it worked out well. [...] I hope it'll stay like this until the end".

Revealing the relevance of *setting goals*, Rakia noted: "I think that every person should have a goal to be able to keep on going in life". The types of goals, however, differed. In response to their earlier experiences or current uncertainties, several refugees only set present or proximal goals. Djamila was accustomed to unanticipated life and career developments: "I only think what I'll do tomorrow [and] the day after. [...] Maybe something will happen [...] that I haven't planned." Sami, who had just filed a case of legal action against a negative asylum decision, noted how his uncertain future shortened his planning horizon: "Everything is [at a] stop. [...] Now,] I go step by step." Setting only proximal goals also occurred when refugees needed to find a job quickly, thus giving up their original plans. Sharif said:

[Now,] I don't plan for an education and training. [...] I just want to find work and think about translation services [...] in two or three years. [...] It would take long, so now, I search for normal work. [...] Maybe in a hotel [...] or a café, just simply work. (Sharif).

Even though setting proximal goals was often due to having to trade long-term career dreams to immediate job opportunities, several refugees noted how it enabled them to move forward. Zarif experienced his former plans being shattered and had to re-manuever in life:

Maybe it has to do with my asylum, with my experiences of the situation in Syria and that now I'm here, that I fled to Germany. [...] I had, for instance, plans in Syria, but they were [then gone]. That sapped my energies. [...] I make myself plans, of course, but not long-termed. For instance, I believe that I can study my masters soon, but right now, that's not on my plan list. [...] I always have thoughts in my mind about my future, but that's different than planning it, I think. (Zarif).

Other refugees set major goals. Issam established his goals hierarchically to have small goals pave the way to plan the future and to motivate him to reach for his major goal of

becoming a self-employed civil engineer:

One has to have a major goal to succeed in achieving the small goals. [...] The major goals are what actually motivate me. [...] Small goals are rather a way of planning, for example, which exams will I write this semester? [...] But my major goal is that, well, where do I see myself in ten years? (Issam).

Yet, sometimes concern also showed in refugees *preparing for their futures* in Germany as if they could stay. While Nasir's uncertain residence status reduced his control over his situation, he still was concerned about his future in Germany and made plans: "I prepare myself as though I'm staying here. [...] I don't know] for how long I can work. [...] I haven't received the final decision yet and I'm waiting on whether I'll be accepted or not."

For Said, disregarding uncertainties meant to follow his planned path and prepare for his career, although he was told that he would be unlikely to return to his former profession:

At the beginning, I met a person [employee] at the job center. He tried to disappoint me. [...] He told me that he knows I'm an engineer and I've studied, but that the labor market [in Germany] is different and I should know that I'll probably work in a warehouse or so [...]. The work standards are different. [...] Those were very difficult moments, really. I was new and didn't know anything about the labor market. Would my vocational future be destroyed? [...] I worried a lot. Then, I thought worries won't help me. My path is clear. I have to learn the language as well as possible. If I don't make it, I did [all I could]. But for now, I can't change it [the situation]. The first step is the language, [...] no question. I was sure that after my [...] language class I could use the time to get to know the land and the labor market better. And then assess whether it was true what the man had told me. (Said).

Also, some refugees proactively anticipated formal requirements for specific jobs and invested time, effort, and money to meet them. They secured skill credentials that would help them re-enter work. Salim reported how this helped him obtain his job as a school bus driver:

I applied for some jobs, also in patient transport. [...] One firm [...] invited me. [...] Before that, I, of course, had already prepared myself. I already did the passenger transport certificate. [...] Without it, you can't work as a driver. [...] I had to do tests [and ...] it cost me 200€. [...] I prepared myself [...] for the time when someone would say: 'Do you have it already?' [...] And that was how it happened. (Salim).

Also, anticipating the high competence and credential requirements in Germany, many refugees prepared themselves for potential jobs by continuing their education and securing their credibility. Especially gaining local work experience was seen as relevant. Issam noted:

After having finished my education, I plan to work two or three years in Germany to gain some experience. The German experience [...] is recognized] everywhere you work around the world; when they [employers] see that you've worked in Germany. (Issam).

Many participants reported the value of internships not only as a filler task, but also as a valuable addition for understanding the labor market and employers' standards. Aman said:

I think it's better to do an internship before working [...] and then be ready for the job, and [...] work well. [...] The work [one does] is better than as [...] when one starts directly. [...] When one receives a bit of help or explanations on [...] what to do. (Aman).

That said, not all participants showed such planfulness. A few did not feel able to plan and prepare. As Sharif stated: "I don't have another option, so I must wait".

4.3. Curiosity in Involuntary Career Transitions

Being new to the country and customs, a certain curiosity and willingness to explore were of pivotal importance for refugees' successful integration into the German labor market.

4.3.1. Contextual factors for exploring. All refugees were curious about the local labor market and its opportunities, yet often *lacked* necessary knowledge. Particularly cultural and institutional norms differed greatly between the refugees' homes and Germany. Many

found it difficult to understand the German norms, expectations, and customs, as Dakhil said:

In our country, it's easier, more flexible than here. If you want to work here, you first need your CV, then all the other documents. What did I do from first grade to my studies, my work permit, many papers, and I don't know why employers need them.

[...] Why is it so complicated? It's a mini-job for 400 €/month. [...] If I want to start a career and I have the competences and skills, but no credentials, I can't work.

(Dakhil).

Despite having heard about the German educational system, some refugees did not master its basic features. Rakia said: "There are so many possibilities I don't understand. [...] Someday, I should understand what happens in the German labor market, but not yet." It also prevented many from realizing the educational and work opportunities available, resulting in missed chances. Stressing the helplessness of refugees in the alien setting, Nasir suggested:

It'd be amazing if the people [refugees] would have more insights into the labor market. [...] It's, first, difficult for us to enter the labor market and then, to proceed in it. [...] To just get in is the issue. [...] The strict laws and everything, I think people just have to be more informed. [...] Many want to do something, [...] they're [...] interested, [...] but] the language, [...] all the paper work. [...] People need much help.

(Nasir).

Some contextual factors could also *facilitate* exploration. These were rich educational and work opportunities and being offered a chance.

The rich educational and work opportunities of the German labor market were often valued when refugees tried to identify careers to explore. Zarif illustrated: "I think that [...] I have greater and more open prospects. [...] I see more opportunities in Germany than in Syria", and he used these new opportunities in Germany to shape his career (see also Zarif's quote in 'knowing what to explore'): "I'm really happy to have changed my fields of study."

Often, a successful exploration of career options depended on the supportive attitudes

of employers. As many refugees struggled with the language or their credibility as workers (see, for instance, Aman in ‘finding and establishing ways to explore’), being offered a chance aided finding work. Said noted:

What really helped me were the people with whom I worked. They were helpful and had the courage to give me a chance, and were open-minded about me. [...] I also met people who [...] preferred not to take risks [...] as [...] language [issues] might [harm] the work climate. But what helped me was that [...] the firm’s management had the courage to [...] try something new. [...] I absolutely needed this chance. (Said).

4.3.2. Exploring the self and the environment. Re-establishing their careers after resettlement required all refugees to consider what they wanted to do with their futures. This implied having ideas on what they wanted to explore and on how to go about exploring.

Knowing what to explore was the first step for refugees towards new career possibilities. First, many participants held on to their former careers, feeling that they should use their job-specific knowledge and past education and not disregard it. Gulalai said: “The main thing is that I get to work in my [...] field of specialty. [...] If you work in a different field, you have to do it all over. [...] I wouldn’t be successful [...] in other fields.”

Issam described how the new setting allowed him to explore his childhood dream:

When you see engineers and architects at constructions sites as a small boy, [...] you think how cool they are. [...] Working way up high in a building [...], looking all the way down. It’s fun. [...] Then you [...] came to Germany and had no prospects. [...] But somehow it all happened and now, [I’m] almost a civil engineer [myself]. (Issam).

Others formulated new career dreams. Zarif changed his field of study: “I have an [education and training] contract in [...] mechatronic automation. [...] It’s very interesting. [...] There were no studies in this field in Syria. [...] The work field wasn’t as developed.” Several refugees were willing to experiment and take risks. As Zafer said: “If my education and training works, then everything will be great! If not, I have to try something else.”

Lastly, a few refugees even identified an advantage in the hardship of being displaced: Having the chance for a fresh start. Said decided to revive his old career dream:

I looked for work in network technology, but that was unsuccessful. I didn't get a good job offer. Then, when searching, I got the idea to change my work field and start with automation technology. I always dreamed of working in that field. And I thought if I have to start new anyways, why not change to my favorite field? (Said).

Finding and establishing ways to explore was the second step after knowing what to explore. Especially connecting by building social contacts was vital to gaining insights into the German regulations and cultural practices. As Sami noted: "You need to meet the people if you want to understand the culture. If [...] I meet here with you, [I] will understand something. [I] will find some advice here. [...] I have learned so many things from [people]."

Sometimes, initial social encounters developed into friendships that offered not only support to the refugees in life and career matters, but also access to resources and knowledge. Zarif noted how locals and relations to his employers aided his perspectives:

I know [a German family] as they helped us [refugees] at [a social institution]. [...] Their daughter also helped me with my enrolment [education and training]. [...] It was a bit difficult for me [...] so we did it together [...] and that made me feel more comfortable. [...] Further,] we [former employer and himself] became friends. [...] She was also the first person to tell me about the education and training [in Germany]. [...] She said that I did so much in Syria and want to quickly get back into work life, and have a job, so [this form of work] would really suit me. (Zarif).

Social connections also facilitated finding new job openings. Repeatedly when searching for work, the refugees faced rejections. Yet, social connections could unlock (unexpected) opportunities, especially when locals used their networks to help the refugees find jobs. Aman noted how locals aided to gain credibility in the eyes of German employers:

I can't find work alone. [...] We have good contacts [to Germans]. [...] My friend

helped me find work. [...] He's German [...] and the company [believed in me]. When I search [...] for work myself, [...] maybe they don't believe me. (Aman).

Yet, sometimes it was difficult to approach locals due to language barriers or cultural differences. So, the participants also relied on people with similar past experiences from their home countries or who share the same ethnicity to gain local insights. Tahir described:

I always also ask other Arabs, as sometimes, it's different for Germans. I can't always understand it all. [...] Many questions, I can't ask them in German or I have no idea how it works. I ask Arabs who've already been here for some time and they help me. (Tahir).

In addition to relying on social connections, many participants used present opportunities to broaden their views on potential future career paths. Thinking ahead, Nasir knew that he might one day specialize in a certain area of dental technology. Thus, he used the practical training of his dual education program to explore his alternatives in the field:

Right now, I do way too much at the laboratory. [...] I mean as much as I can possibly do. [...] In dental technology, you first learn about everything and then you get specialized. [...] There are three or four paths you could take. [...] So, I look into all fields [...] to have all possible knowledge that I can get. [...] It's not being asked of me, but I [...] gather as much experience as I can [...] in all fields. (Nasir).

Besides relying on resources such as the internet, cell phones, books, local classes, and organizations, some refugees actively visited job fairs and other such events that showcased possible work prospects. Meticulously informing himself, Zarif found a job this way:

The main reason [for staying in a city] is that many firms [...] for my line of work are located in this region. [...] I've really informed myself. [...] I asked people and I went to many [...] job fairs [...] to get to know the firms. [...] In the newspaper, I saw an advertisement for an information event [...] about education and training. [...] I went there twice and [...] there were lists of all the firms that offered education and

training. I looked them up, [...] chose [...] four [firms], and wrote four applications.

[...] And it worked. (Zarif).

Many participants also used the opportunities in their workplaces to prepare and initiate future career aspirations. Chakib, who worked as a bar keeper and waiter, used his job to acquire knowledge that would, later on, help him to realize his goal of opening a restaurant:

I don't just see it as work, it's rather like an education and training, or a new way of gaining experience. [...] I always try to find ways in my current job to learn something for my future. My goal is to open my own restaurant. [...] I always try to learn more. (Chakib).

4.4. Confidence in Involuntary Career Transitions

Successful career construction requires confident actions, but the refugees often felt their confidence wavering. Rakia stated:

Every evening [...] I think about what will happen and whether I'll really succeed at the university. [...] Or whether I'll be able to finish my studies. [...] I'm afraid of everything. [...] Fear is a feeling that constantly follows me. (Rakia).

As a consequence, many refugees re-adjusted their aspirations to something that appeared more realistic to them in the new setting. Nabil described:

What was 15 years ago is something I can't bring back. [...] It will take its time, but I don't think it'll be what I had hoped for. [...] When I achieve 65 percent of what I had hoped for in the past, that's good! [...] Because the atmosphere is different, the environment is new. [...] And it's different and you can't change everything from today to tomorrow. [...] But you have to live with it. (Nabil).

4.4.1. Contextual factors for losing and bolstering confidence. Many refugees' confidence was *undermined* by feelings of wasted time and lost opportunities when they compared where they could have been at home and where they found themselves now. Tahir (see also 'missing language and/or credentials') felt that he was not achieving anything:

I don't need money from the job center. I can work myself [...]. It's better than to sit at home. [...] Now, I work as a janitor, but it's a mini-job, 11 hours per week. [...] I have more than 100 other hours a week. What do I do with these 100 hours? Only sit around. I wanted to do something, not just to support my family, but also for myself. [...] Time flies by so fast. Then, when I'm 40, I'll look back and [...] what did I do until then? Nothing. [...] When I'll have children and they'll ask me what I've done, I can only say: 'Nothing.' [...] That's not how I want it! I want to tell my children I was in Germany, I worked, I did something, [...] their father was strong. (Tahir).

Also, most refugees fell behind the usual timeline of their career trajectories. Drawing the contrast between where in her career trajectory she would have been in Syria by now versus her present status in Germany, Rakia, who sought to re-enter university, said:

When I [...] think about my friends in Syria being in their last years at the university and I haven't even begun with my studies [in Germany], it makes me sad. [...] What am I doing here now in Germany? I mean, where [in life] am I? (Rakia).

A lack of belonging in the sense of feeling lonely and sensing negative attitudes from others eroded many refugees' confidence. Kain noted:

We're all alone here. [...] I'm afraid as [...] at times, just one information [ethnicity or nationality] changes if people want to give you work. [...] When somebody says we're alone here and can't change that, [...] it ruins my day [...] and] my motivation. (Kain).

Also Dakhil was afraid of locals not understanding or valuing him as a person:

When people would look at me and [perceive me as] worthless, you know? [...] I don't want to force others to respect me, to accept me. [...] I want to show others that I'm a normal human being. I always try to command the language. [...] I can't do it in a short time. I'm not a magician or something like that. [It takes] time. (Dakhil).

The refugees were also worried of how to approach and engage with locals at work.

Due to different cultural customs, Zarif felt unsure of starting his new work: "How should I

deal with my colleagues? [...] How does it work in Germany in a firm? How do the people behave?" This lack of confidence also stemmed from fearing unequal treatment. Zarif added:

I'm afraid and don't want to receive smaller, less, or easier tasks, [...] because I'm Syrian [...] or because of the language. [...] I just want to be treated on the same level as Germans. [...] To be valued] the same, treated the same. (Zarif).

Yet, context was also able to *bolster* the refugees' confidence. Often, they grew confident by gaining insights into the advantages of the labor market and feeling to belong.

An awareness of the advantages of the local labor market strengthened the refugees' confidence. Sami reported how the emphasis on qualifications in Germany made him confident about his future possibilities: "In Germany, if you do something [work], it must be [an education] for three years [before starting to work]. After that, I think it will be easy [to find a] job." Many refugees also highlighted how the local demand for workers in certain fields ensured future careers. Said stated: "I think that I have a good future in this work field [automation technology]. [...] There's a great [labor] demand and that's important. The work perspectives are good for the future, especially in Germany, where the industry is strong."

Social belonging bolstered confidence. Noting social relations as vital, Issam voiced:

A human needs other humans. [...] To have someone by your side, that's very important. [...] To know that someone stands behind me motivates me a lot and then I don't think too much about everything, because I know that someone supports me and no matter what happens, that person is by my side. (Issam).

4.4.2. Protecting and bolstering confidence. To protect and strengthen their confidence, the refugees reflected positively on their accomplishments and kept persisting.

Reflecting on their accomplishments both to themselves and to others helped many refugees bolster their confidence. Nasir gave meaning to his past actions, directing his career:

Somehow, we [refugees] have this [...] ability to survive. [...] That comforts us. [...]

In Syria, I thought that I could move forward, but now that I'm here, I noticed that I've

moved even further than I thought at first. (Nasir).

Also, Zarif noted: “When I wrote my [...] application, I thought more about what I’ve done. [...] What I’ve achieved in Germany. [...] I hadn’t recognized many things.” Some refugees even recognized having achieved more than they ever thought possible. Zafer said: “I didn’t know that I could make it here [in Germany]. [...] I didn’t know that and I’m very proud of myself. [...] And I want more.”

Sometimes this awareness also translated into conveying their accomplishments to others. By capitalizing on past adversities, Zarif proved his value to German employers:

[They hired me, as] I introduced myself as someone who has already had experience abroad. [...] I come from Syria [...] and I’ve already lived in Germany for two years now and yes, I’ve made use of my situation. [...] I’ve learned the [German] language and succeeded in it. [...] I’ve lived with two other people in the same room. [...] I’ve used [my possibilities] and I make every effort that I can, [...] despite the high strains. [...] And the company looked for someone with the experience that I have. [...] I studied four years [...] at the university [in Syria in a related line of work]. (Zarif).

Simply persisting also when facing setbacks helped many refugees to maintain their confidence. Nasir clarified: “I’ll keep on continuing, [...] no matter what happens”. Also, Salim actively targeted obstacles, remaining confident to find new work and not give up:

There were problems and surprises, [...] rejections when [I] was new, didn’t have experience. [...] But when you always continue to try and knock on every door, one of those doors will open, and that’s what happened. I knocked on all doors and one opened, invited me in. [...] Other people said they were really afraid [to] be rejected [for jobs]. [...] I didn’t have any experience, [...] I just came to Germany. I was like blindfolded. [...] I always told myself to stay calm, even when the next [employer] rejects me and the one after that, [I’d] continue forward. [...] It worked. (Salim).

Also, some participants built confidence by keeping on learning. As Said put it: “To

do something ordinary isn't my thing. I enjoy continuously learning new skills and facing new challenges. Work then is fun." Re-building one's career entailed finding innovative ways to overcome obstacles, such as the language barriers, as also reported by, for instance, Said:

I wanted to learn German as fast as possible, but [...] it wasn't easy, as I had no contact to Germans. I tried to learn it in [...] German classes [...] and with the help of the radio or the television. [...] I also trained my speaking abilities, [but] I didn't have many options. I [...] invented situations and just talked to myself in the mirror. (Said).

Burhan focused similarly on learning the language, but also on staying active and reminding himself of how much he was able to do:

Currently after work, I visit the C1 German class [effective operational proficiency] [...] three times a week for two hours. [...] Weekends, [...] I play soccer [...] and work as a] gardener, [...] as Saturdays I don't have anything else to do. [...] I wanted to try how it works. If I can do [it all], I'll continue, if not, [...] I can still quit [gardening]. (Burhan).

5. Discussion

Career construction theory posits career adaptation to happen along four dimensions grounded in individual differences in adaptability resources and competences (Savickas, 2013). Even though the resources and competences naturally vary among people, our findings show that a study of the adaptation process is incomplete without considering contextual factors. Being a refugee implies an abrupt break in one's career, followed by many contextual barriers to shaping one's career after the resettlement. Of particular relevance were three overarching barriers for a successful career adaptation in Germany (i.e., barriers intersecting various adaptability dimensions; see also Figure 1). First, the participants faced fundamental *uncertainties* in regards to their residence decisions, both leaving them without control and with difficulties to make or adjust their career plans. Second, *lacking personal resources* (i.e., language skills and work credentials and knowledge of cultural and institutional norms)

inhibited their control and restricted their exploration, resulting in missed opportunities.

Third, the refugees felt that they had wasted much *time* when they could not build on their earlier training and work experiences (and these effectively became useless). The time needed for learning the language and sorting out legal matters in order to begin looking for work, and also the hurdles in finding work, impaired both their sense of control and confidence. The way these barriers strongly impeded the refugees' career adaptive responding also showed in the barriers' resolution: For instance, receiving a positive residence decision assisted all refugees in overcoming their fundamental uncertainties and solved many context-related problems, allowing participants to take control and make future plans in Germany.

Apart from barrier resolution over time, other events also facilitated adaptation. The findings highlight two overarching enablers cutting across at least two adaptability dimensions. First, *social connections* enriched the refugees' control and bolstered their confidence by aiding them to feel understood, supported, and to belong. Second, the *richness of opportunities* of the local educational and vocational system and being given a chance by employers assisted to exhibit their curiosity and gain confidence.

Our study also illustrates how the refugees managed to cope and actively construct their careers. In line with career construction theory (Savickas, 2013), their coping was characterized by self-regulation, that is, goal-directed cognitions, emotions, and behaviors that help individuals follow a line of action across various contexts and over time (Karoly, 1993). As Figure 1 indicates, many refugees regulated their emotions and actively framed their thoughts in a positive manner to take control, make decisions, and to build their confidence. Behaviorally, they kept 'moving on' and consciously disregarded objective realities and uncertainties in their career construction, rather holding on to their intents and dreams. The self-regulative nature of their coping also showed in goal-setting (cf. Heckhausen, Wrosch, & Schulz, 2010) and in both self- and environmental exploration (cf. Stumpf, Colarelli, & Hartman, 1983). They used their time and innate resources, relied on institutional and social

resources to explore career prospects, and constantly worked towards creating a new career.

In line with quantitative findings (Hirschi, Herrmann, & Keller, 2015), our data also indicate interrelations between the career adaptability dimensions. First, refugees disregarded uncertainties both to be in control and to turn their career concern into actual plans. Second, they actively regulated thoughts and emotions and reflected positively on their achievements. This helped them to take control and make decisions, and it bolstered their confidence. Third, refugees continuously moved on, enabling them to attain control, demonstrate concern, and gain confidence. To be in control, they took responsibility for their actions and, to exhibit career concern, actively planned and prepared for future jobs. They sustained their confidence by being persistent. Lastly, refugees built their potential (e.g., by keeping on learning) and resources (e.g., by securing credentials) to prepare for their careers and to be confident.

Further, we recognized two mindsets that strengthened refugees' career adaptability: A 'can do'-attitude and positive, appreciative mindsets. First, and in line with previous research on qualified migrants (Zikic, Bonache, & Cerdin, 2010), many refugees had a distinctive 'can do'-attitude. They were goal oriented in adjusting to the new setting, stayed cognitively and emotionally positive, and disregarded uncertainties and barriers. Thus, possibly, discontinuous career transitions and related adverse experiences of, for example, the loss of control, spark individuals to become more independent career constructors. When noticing that they would not be able to realize their former expectations after resettlement, some refugees took control and showed concern for their futures by considering self-employment or thinking beyond both Germany and their home country. Such boundaryless mindsets (cf. Arthur & Rousseau, 1996) surfaced in both refugees with temporary residence statuses and thus insecure futures and refugees with German citizenships. Second, many refugees nurtured optimistic, appreciative mindsets that fostered their successful career adaptation, possibly even enriching their career adaptability (cf. Rudolph, Lavigne, & Zacher, 2017). By framing their situations in a hopeful and positive way, these refugees took control by appreciating their experiences and

opportunities in the host country. Their confidence was bolstered when they recognized and shared their past achievements. Also, turning objectively 'negative' factors (e.g., refugee background) into something positive (e.g., international work experience) protected some refugees' confidence.

Repeatedly, participants highlighted social connections as relevant (cf. Gericke, Burmeister, Löwe, Deller, & Pundt, 2018). Facing career disruptions, the refugees relied on connecting to other people to take control and make decisions, to explore, and be confident. Connections to both the home and the host community made them feel safer and increased positive transition experiences. The value of social connections differed among the adaptive response: When taking control and making decisions, connections directed refugees' careers and gave meaning to their actions. Social connections were also instrumental for career exploration; they mobilized resources to follow up on one's curiosity. Finally, connections strengthened refugees' confidence by increasing their sense of social belongingness (cf. Baumeister & Leary, 1995) and counteracting a loss of confidence in the face of obstacles.

Finally, career construction theory proposes that the process of career construction shapes both self and career, and in a successful case, weaves both together into a personally meaningful career path (Savickas, 2013). As the findings show, refugees directed their behaviors not only to adapt their careers, but also to build meaningful careers. They did this by adapting to the altered circumstances of the new context and by re-entering work. For example, they continuously moved on and thought positively, strove to be of value, acted on the new work environment's inherent chances, and reminded themselves of their past achievements, re-infusing meaning and purpose into their newly adapted careers.

5.1. Theoretical Implications

The findings highlight several implications for career construction theory (Savickas, 2013). First, deficits in persons' career adaptation showed not only as career problems (i.e., attitudinal career adaptability deficiencies) where a deficit in control is about indecisiveness, a

deficit in concern about indifference, one in curiosity about unrealism, and lacking confidence about inhibition. Rather, we postulate career problems also to originate from contextual barriers impeding individuals' agency. Most refugees had to sacrifice their previous lives and careers to ensure their basic physical safety and survival and, in doing so, had to let go off their earlier career paths. Basic life uncertainties (e.g., where to reside in the future) robbed them of control. Rather than being indecisive, they were fundamentally uncertain. Also, despite being concerned about their careers, planning was difficult. Although many refugees sensed what was required of them, the unfamiliarity of their environment hindered making plans and actively preparing for their futures. Consequently, they worried about their future careers, yet were helpless to shape them. Further, even though refugees were curious and open to explore, being unrealistic and thus missing to follow up on one's curiosity stemmed from lacking basic insights into existing local possibilities. Also, losing confidence often resulted from refugees knowing that they could not live up to their aspirations. Thus, the refugees faced context-specific issues that, rather than their attitudes, hindered career construction, indicating career problems to not only originate from deficits in career adaptability.

Second, career construction theory postulates individuals who show career problems to not exert the behaviors of the corresponding career adaptability dimensions (cf. Savickas, 2013). Our findings, however, show otherwise. A few participants surrendered to the inhibiting context undermining their adaptive responding (e.g., waiting until resolved legal issues would solve context-specific problems), yet most refugees actively managed their situation by moving ahead despite the difficulties. Thus, they exerted adaptive behaviors regardless of the context interfering with their career adaptive resources. Such behaviors were not, however, equally possible for each career adaptability dimension. Contextual factors had a stifling impact on control (leaving the refugees to feel helpless) and confidence (leaving them to doubt themselves and their ability to overcome obstacles), and on adaptive behaviors as a result. In terms of their concern and curiosity, the context only restricted their behaviors

(i.e., inhibiting them in making plans or exploring their selves and surroundings), but not necessarily their innate adaptability. Thus, although being concerned and curious, they could not display behaviors that translated their adaptability into reality.

Our data also suggest an alternative view to the dimension of concern (cf. Savickas, 2013). While career construction theory suggests that setting only present and proximal goals speaks of a lack of concern, our findings suggest that when facing uncertainties and feeling pressured to quickly find a job, many refugees oriented their planning to the short-term, just to get their feet on the ground. Actual planning was often difficult, yet they still showed intense concern about their futures. Thus, we point to career concern not only revolving around optimistic planning, but to also include being troubled about the future and making choices driven by one's needs and the context's immediate opportunities.

Our findings also emphasize the positive influence of contacts on refugees' resettlement (cf. Gericke et al., 2018; Wehrle et al., 2018). Career construction, in the light of these results, is not a process done alone. As interpersonal relations are vital, they introduce the question 'with whom do I build my future?' as a crucial aspect of career adaptability (cf. Savickas, 2005). Lastly, we propose career construction theory to incorporate emotional adaptive responses into career adaptation (cf. Savickas, 2013), given that several refugees regulated their emotions to adapt successfully.

5.2. Practical Implications

Our study has shown how a strongly bounded context challenges refugees' career adaptation, highlighting the need for host countries' organizations to support refugees' self-regulation, foster their adaptive coping, and thus empower them to successfully transition (cf. Pajic, Ulceluse, Kismihók, Mol, & den Hartog, 2018). Enabling them (e.g., in terms of language courses) and granting them admission to the local labor market and thus simply giving them access and (local) work experience, enhanced refugees' self-regulation. Local organizations and job-search agencies may supply work opportunities to increase refugees'

local credibility via, for example, internships and mentoring programs. While a lack of cultural or institutional knowledge restricted refugees' exploration and thus decreased their re-employment chances (especially as those short on some adaptability resources are likely to be short on others as well; Hirschi & Valero, 2015), being offered a chance often resulted in job opportunities. The mandatory integration classes should also more clearly outline local educational and work requirements, and opportunities to enable refugees to navigate local work and society more successfully (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, 2018).

In addition, the findings speak for the role of social connections in refugees' career adaptation. Holding the potential to spark refugees' agency and thus direct their careers, we believe it crucial to institutionalize quality relations in job-search and re-employment processes (cf. Stephens, Heaphy, & Dutton, 2011). Further, the findings indicate the importance of low-threshold opportunities for refugees to connect with locals; a concept worth including into career counseling practices. While research recognizes (social) context for career counseling (e.g., Lent, 2005), the current career construction practice may stronger acknowledge such influences (cf. Savickas, 2013).

5.3. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study specified few exclusion criteria to generate a rich picture of how refugees adapt their careers in Germany. Yet, the sample may be biased in two ways: In terms of, first, the dominance of male participants (which, however, resembles a characteristic gender distribution of a refugee labor force; cf. World Education News & Reviews, 2017) and, second, the over-inclusion of persons more self-regulated, motivated, and open to share their insights than the general refugee population. By re-engaging participants of a former study (see 'sample and research design'), and given their sincerity to also report negative experiences, we do not believe this potential bias to be worrisome. Also, the 21 participants from the former study who agreed to a second interview did not differ perceptively from those who did not on age, gender, or on any conceivable indicator of integration success such as

residence status or current work situation. We therefore see no reason to believe our sample to suffer from a form of survival bias. Further, the residences of our participants ranged from one year to twelve years and three months (see Table 1), thus providing comprehensive insights into the refugees' experiences directly after resettlement and emerging over time.

In addition, this study's interview data were cross-sectional. Therefore, they do not allow precise inferences of causality. Future research may follow up both temporally and quantitatively to unravel possible causal links between, for instance, individual differences in adaptive responses. Also, it may identify the nature of the interrelations within career adaptability dimensions and coping responses. In line with prior research (e.g., Hirschi et al., 2015), we found several indications of both being intertwined.

6. Conclusion

This study addressed refugees' career-related adaptation in their host country. By unraveling the constraining and enabling influences of the context on refugees' career adaptability and adaptive coping after resettlement, we also provide insights into contextual effects on refugees' agency. Our findings validate the power of current conceptions of career-adaptive responses in discontinuous career transitions (e.g., Haynie & Shepherd, 2011) and generalize career construction theory (Savickas, 2013) to the refugee context. We also extend the current career construction theory: Career problems in career construction are also contextually conditioned and not only attitudinal by nature. By presenting the complexity of refugees' adaptive coping when transitioning involuntarily, we show how they manage to shape their careers despite the vast constraints. Their coping is characterized by strong self- and emotion regulation (cf. Savickas, 2013). Further, we note positive mindsets to help persons to adapt (cf. Rudolph et al., 2017) and social connections as vital for refugees' career adaptability.

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Table 1*Demographics of study participants according to order of interview dates (N = 36).*

#	Participant ⁺	Age	Country of origin	Gender	Time spent in Germany ^a	Time since work permit receipt in Germany ^a	Residence status ^a	Earlier line of work	Line of work in Germany ^a
1	Issam ^b	24	Afghanistan	Male	8Y4M	7Y4M	German citizenship	Various jobs	Civil engineer ^h
2	Sami ^b	23	Afghanistan	Male	2Y4M	1Y3M	Tolerated stay	N/A ^f	Gastronomist, baker
3	Zarif ^b	27	Syria	Male	2Y2M	1Y0M	Residence permit	Electronics and telecommunication engineer ^h	Mechatronic automation engineer ⁱ
4	Yaver ^b	34	Syria	Male	2Y3M	N/A ^f	Residence permit	Personnel officer	Warehouse ^j
5	Rakia ^b	22	Syria	Female	2Y3M	1Y10M	Residence permit	Computer scientist ^h	C1 language class
6	Kain	32	Iran	Male	2Y 10M	2Y9M	Residence permit	Chemical engineer ^h	IT specialist ⁱ
7	Said ^b	37	Syria	Male	3Y0M	2Y9M	Residence permit	Network technician	Automation technician
8	Zahra ^{b,c}	34	Syria	Female	2Y5M	2Y4M	Residence permit	Office assistant	Homemaker
9	Dakhil ^b	26	Syria	Male	2Y10M ^d	1Y5M	Residence permit	Biochemist ^h , male nurse	Medical technician ^h
10	Burhan ^b	26	Syria	Male	2Y2M	1Y10M	Residence permit	Electrical engineer ^h	Electrical and building technician ⁱ , gardener ^k
11	Nasir ^b	26	Syria	Male	2Y2M	1Y10M	Tolerated stay	Dental technician ^h	Dental technician ⁱ
12	Salim ^b	30	Iraq	Male	12Y3M	10Y1M	Unlimited	School student	School bus driver
13	Jannah ^b	28	Iraq	Female	8Y3M	7Y10M	Unlimited	School student	Homemaker
14	Tahir ^b	24	Syria	Male	2Y3M	1Y6M	Residence permit	Carpenter	Janitor ^j , job seeker
15	Zafer ^b	25	Syria	Male	2Y2M	2Y0M	Residence permit	Computer administrator ^h	Sports trainer ^j , job seeker
16	Sharif ^b	31	Syria	Male	2Y1M	1Y1M	Residence permit	Teacher, literature translator	Job seeker
17	Djamila ^b	29	Syria	Female	2Y2M	1Y1M	Residence permit	Quality controller	Job seeker
18	Gulalai ^b	28	Syria	Female	1Y10M	1Y9M	Residence permit	Civil engineer ^h	Civil engineer ^h
19	Baqer ^b	31	Syria	Male	1Y10M	1Y1M	Residence permit	Pediatrician	Pediatrician
20	Bahram	48	Iran	Male	3Y 0M	2Y5M	Temporary residence permit	Electrical engineer ^h	Electronic technician
21	Nabil ^b	39	Libya	Male	2Y10M	N/A ^f	Residence permit	Statistician ^h	Specialist for flight administration
22	Ramin	27	Syria	Male	2Y 3M ^d	1Y10M	Residence permit	Computer scientist ^h	Computer scientist ^{h,k}
23	Liana	41	Georgia	Female	2Y 3M	1Y10M	Temporary residence permit	University lecturer in literature and arts	Assistant of language teacher ^l
24	Chakib	26	Iran	Male	3Y 0M	2Y9M	Residence permit	Industrial engineer ^h	Bar keeper, waiter
25	Xhamil ^b	20	Kosovo	Male	2Y11M	N/A ^f	Residence permit	Various jobs	Baker ⁱ
26	Aman ^b	41	Afghanistan	Male	5Y3M	3Y11M ^e	Unlimited	IT engineer	Job seeker
27	Resmi	28	Iraq	Male	1Y 0M	N/A ^f	Temporary residence permit	Food engineer ^h	Job seeker
28	Kadir	35	Iran	Male	8Y 3M	6Y4M	German citizenship	Music composer ^h	Music therapist, music lecturer
29	Nias	32	Iran	Male	6Y 0M ^c	5Y1M	German citizenship	N/A ^f	Music therapist in psychosocial service ^m
30	Awin	33	Iran	Male	8Y 0M	5Y4M	German citizenship	Architect ^h	Architect
31	Taryll	48	Iran	Male	6Y 0M ^d	5Y4M	Unlimited	Monumental sculptor ^h	Temporary work in arts, job seeker
32	Hasim	42	Syria	Male	2Y 8M	2Y6M	Residence permit	IT engineer ^h	Job seeker
33	Kamil	35	Syria	Male	3Y 0M	2Y5M	Residence permit	Aircraft engineer ^h	Job seeker
34	Nadim	42	Syria	Male	2Y 9M	2Y4M	Residence permit	Arabic language ^h	Job seeker
35	Ruhi	52	Syria	Male	2Y 7M ^d	N/A ^f	Residence permit	Pharmacist ^h	Pharmacist ^k
36	Harun	27	Iraq	Male	2Y 1M	1Y0M	Temporary residence permit	Civil engineer ^h	Job seeker

Note. ⁺ Actual names have been replaced by pseudonyms to protect the participants' anonymity. ^a At time of interview. ^b Participants of former study (Wehrle et al., 2018). ^c Parts of interview were translated by other participant. ^d Estimated maximum time spent in Germany. ^e Minimum time spent in Germany. ^f No data available. ^g Estimated maximum time since work permit receipt. ^h University student. ⁱ Education and training student. ^j Mini-job. ^k Part-time job. ^l Intern. ^m Voluntary worker.

Figure 1

Data structure of the refugees' career adaptability dimensions in involuntary career transitions

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Highlights

- Uncertainty, lacking personal resources, and lost time hinder career adaptation
- Social connections and rich local work opportunities assist career adaptation
- ‘Career problems’ may be contextually conditioned rather than only attitudinal
- Refugees’ adaptive coping is characterized by strong self-regulation
- A ‘can do’-attitude and an optimistic mindset strengthen career adaptability

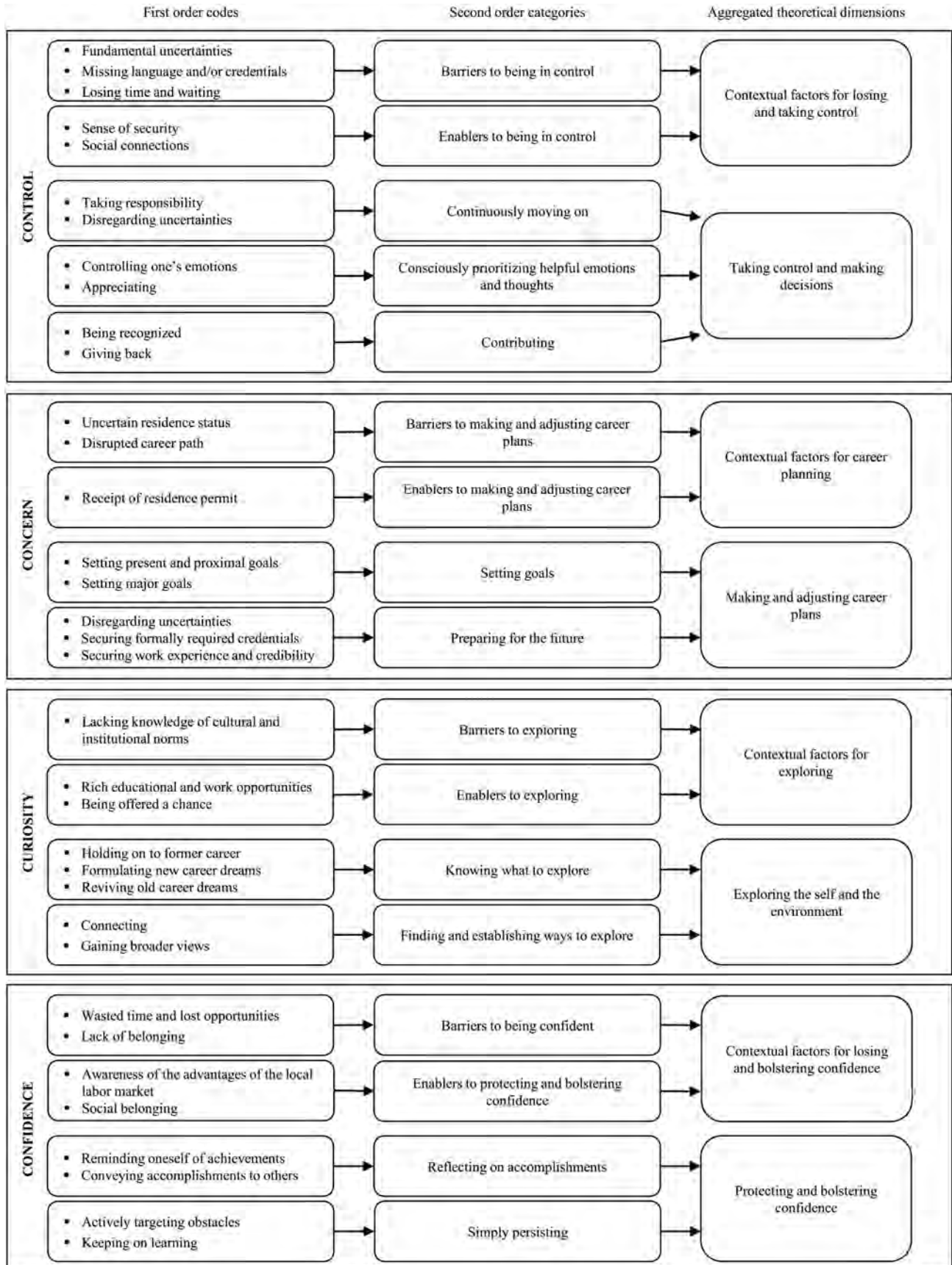


Figure 1