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# Social inclusion through associations and voluntary organizations

Experiences from refugees in Kristianstad and Helsingborg

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this study is to find out if participation in associational activities can facilitate social inclusion. The focus is on the experiences of the participants themselves, presenting their individual life situations and creating a framework against which the meaningfulness of associational activities is evaluated. The study is limited to adults with refugee backgrounds living in the areas of Kristianstad and Helsingborg, and who are following individual introduction programs set up by the local Employment Services. The study is also a participant evaluation of an EU-financed project “Network, Activities and Participation – NAD” which aims to build bridges between voluntary associations and newly arrived refugees. Semi-structured interview method is used to gather qualitative data from 29 newly arrived adult refugees. Data is analyzed using concepts of social inclusion and social integration, as well as a framework of volunteering impact assessment. The findings suggest that social inclusion can be facilitated by a common effort of authorities and civil society operators, and that such activities are generally experienced as highly meaningful by refugee participants. Participants are mainly experiencing human capital, social capital and cultural capital gains from the activities.

*Keywords: Refugees, voluntary organizations, associations, inclusion, integration, social capital, language*

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## 1. Introduction

Sweden is one of the leading European nations in receiving refugees. In 2013 Sweden granted permission for permanent residence to about 34000 refugees and their dependents, and according to a forecast published by the Swedish Migration Board in November 2013, 52.000-69.000 asylum seekers are expected to arrive this year. The share of refugees of all immigrants is significant, as refugees and their family members make up 80 percent of those granted a residence permit in Sweden in the last decades (Bevelander, 2009, p.78). Successful incorporation into Swedish society is essential for newcomers on a personal level, but also for the society as a whole.

Despite the efforts dedicated to social inclusion and labor market incorporation, the progress of integration is slow (SCB, 2013). During the first two years after receiving permanent residence permit, newcomers with refugee backgrounds are offered language and civic courses, as well as labor market preparatory activities arranged by the Public Employment Service and municipalities; still opportunities for genuine interaction with members of the majority population are limited. The situation is a paradox, as Sweden is a nation of vibrant civil society where more than 80 percent of the population participate and interact in associations, clubs, organizations, cooperatives and movements, and where organizations are typically open to everybody (Kings, 2013, p.18); still case workers and language teachers can often be the only Swedish speaking persons, newcomers have a regular contact with (about difficulties making contact with native Swedes, see for example Cederberg, 2012). Some voluntary organizations have set up multiethnic cafés and other frameworks for language training and social interaction, but initiatives are sporadic, and it can be complicated to find a way to such arenas (Kings, 2013, p.16).

In order to counteract this situation where refugees lack information about, and find it difficult to connect with local associations and voluntary organizations, facilitating measures have been introduced in two towns in the Southern Sweden; Kristianstad and Helsingborg. There refugees have been offered an opportunity to participate in associational activities as a part of their individual introduction plans. Match making between individuals and associations is taken care

of, by case workers of the Public Employment Service, and the activities including study circles, language cafés and activities in sport or leisure associations are organized by local civil society organizations.

In order to evaluate the usefulness of such activities, as well as to further develop activities suitable to newly arrived refugees, it is important to learn how refugee participants experience activities, if activities respond to their needs and conditions, and what potential benefits and limitations they identify in participation. This study focuses on adults with refugee backgrounds who have recently settled down in Sweden and who have been participating in such activities in Helsingborg and Kristianstad.

## 2. Aim and research questions

With migrants in focus, the aim of this study is to understand the role of associational activities for social inclusion and to provide a participant evaluation for a project “Network, Activities and Participation - NAD”. The study is limited to adults with refugee backgrounds living in the areas of Kristianstad and Helsingborg, and who are following individual introduction programs set up by the local Employment Services.

The research questions are:

1. How do the participants experience their situation in Sweden?
2. How do they experience associational activities?
3. How do they feel associational activities affect social inclusion?

In the following chapters, I shall first briefly present an introduction program newly arrived refugees are typically participating in, as well as the project NAD - an initiative aimed at introducing associational activities to newly arrived refugees. Thereafter, previous research is presented focusing primarily on refugee experiences of social inclusion in context of voluntary organizations. In the theoretical framework, concepts of social integration, social inclusion, social capital, human capital and cultural capital are introduced. The latter half of the document is dedicated to the method, empirical findings and analysis, and summarizing conclusions.

### **3. Introduction program for newly arrived refugees in Scania**

The Swedish refugee integration policy is based on, so called work line approach, which aims at fast labor market incorporation by focusing on incentives to work; the aim is, from an early stage, to become self-supporting and prevent socio-economic dependency on social allowances (Wikström, 2009, p.194). Integration policy relies on extensive state assisted integration measures (Valenta and Bunar, 2010, p.463); and a few years ago a legal and administrative reform which gave the Public Employment Service a central role in refugee integration efforts, was carried through. According to the new law, Law on introduction activities for certain newly arrived immigrants (SFS 2010:197), during the first two years after receiving permanent residence permit, newly arrived refugees are entitled to special assistance in order to facilitate their introduction into labor market and society. The law concerns newly arrived immigrants who have entered the country as refugees or for refugee-like reasons, and are between 20 and 64 years of age, and their adult family members; or youngsters of 18 and 19 years of age who do not have parents in Sweden.

Shortly after a person has been granted a residence permit, the Public Employment Service drafts an introduction plan which includes obligatory language studies (SFI-Swedish for immigrants), community orientation classes (basic knowledge of Swedish society) and job preparatory and labor market activities (internships, validation of educational and professional experiences, job search training and other activities); in addition, issues concerning housing, livelihood, health, educational and professional background, family status and economic compensations have been discussed and evaluated together with the newcomer. The contents of the introduction plan is meant to be individualized and to take into consideration participant's abilities and needs; the activities are structured and scheduled to resemble an eight hour long working day, five days a week (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2012, pp.69-71).

Presently there are about 2300 persons in Scania who are participating in introduction activities; the group is almost equally divided between men and women, and most people originate from Syria, Somalia, Iraq, Eritrea and Afghanistan. Participants are relatively young, as three fourths are less than 40 years old. There is a wide heterogeneity in educational backgrounds, as about 40

percent have long or relatively long formal education from homelands, while many have short or no formal education. In an evaluation of the implementation of the new law, which was done in 2012, one of the main findings was that 40 percent of the employment officers, who are responsible for setting up individual introduction plans, pointed out that there was a lack of meaningful and suitable activities which could be offered to individuals (Statskontoret, 2012, p.68). It is especially women with small children, analphabets, elderly and those with disabilities or health problems who are offered less introduction activities (Integrationsverket, 2007, p.27).

With an aim of expanding the participatory base and facilitating communication and cooperation between authorities and civil society organizations, The County Administrative Board has set up a platform, Partnership Scania, which brings together representatives from The Public Employment Service, municipalities, academia and the third sector, for intersectional cooperation focusing on immigrant integration issues. Enhanced cooperation is a general trend, and voluntary organizations are gaining an increasingly prominent role in public policy agendas through the Western societies (Rochester, Ellis Paine and Howlett, 2012). The majority of EU member states are involved in projects aiming at creating multicultural understanding and integration through sport associations (Walseth, 2006, p.447). In the UK, policymakers are promoting volunteering and intercultural activities, and have introduced them into a national integration programme; it is assumed that the emergence of social networks will invariably create a positive impact on integration (Home Office, 2005; 2009). In Norway, the government has extended funding to voluntary organization; as they are believed to be better equipped than public bodies in reaching out to the target group and build trusting and constructive relationships (Gele and Harsløf, 2012, p.167).

#### *Network, Activities and Participation – NAD*

One of the projects the platform in Scania has brought about is “Network, Activities and Participation - NAD”; an EU financed project which aims at building bridges between voluntary associations and newly arrived refugees (NSES, 2013). Rationale behind the project is that in an optimum case all parties involved could benefit from the cooperation: voluntary organizations could have access to potential members as they would take a more active role in integration efforts; integration authorities could provide better services as new activities would be offered to

individuals; and, refugees themselves could gain opportunities to improve language skills and meet people as they would be participating in meaningful activities (NSES, 2013, pp.3-4).

So far, NAD has been operational in Kristianstad and Helsingborg and some activities organized in context of NAD are individualized; in such activities participants have defined roles and responsibilities; examples include assistant trainer in a wrestling club, a chess club or football training for children; assistant leader in boy scouts, assistant group leader in social activities organized in a church or film making in a cultural project in local schools. Another type of activity could be named language and society introduction; activity is organized by Homeland society (in Swedish, Hembygdsförening) and participants visit institutions, private homes; they are introduced to Swedish culture and traditions and do activities together with local organizers. The third type of activities consist of language cafés organized by the Red Cross and different churches; they focus on language training, and groups are either women only or mixed gender groups. Sometimes groups do also other activities together including handwork, cooking or short trips. In cafés there are typically two to three native speaking organizers and three participants present. An activity which is connected to NAD but which has wider operative base is volunteer training for an information center for immigrants; the focus of the activity is on language training and society information so that the participants after the course can function as voluntary advisors. And finally, there are two study circles in function; one focusing on language training and the other one on culture and Swedish society. In both groups there are typically two organizers and eight to ten participants. Informants of this study have been participating in above mentioned activities.

A comparative study on integration policies in Sweden and Norway reveals limitations in state assisted integration measures. With such initiatives there is a risk that when the aim is to facilitate relationships between groups and individuals who have very different needs, objectives and resources, and when simultaneously power is very unequally distributed, similarities between groups and individuals become overstated and differences overlooked; and some groups and individuals may remain totally ignored. Authors argue that as the differences between refugees and the majority population are large in all aspects of everyday life, no quick fixes are

possible; no individual measures such as housing assistance or training opportunities carried out in isolation could result in successful integration process (Valenta and Bunar, 2010, p.479).

In the next chapter some findings from previous studies shall be presented; it depicts some stepping stones and challenges in refugees' road to participation and social inclusion in host societies; and provides examples of experiences gained from associational activities.

#### **4. Previous studies on social inclusion through associational activities**

It has been claimed that participation in voluntary organizations can foster social belonging and community spirit; for example, there is some evidence that members of organizations exhibit stronger democratic attitudes and participate in elections more often than non-members (Hooghe and Stolle, 2003, p.10). In addition, it has been claimed that through participation in voluntary associations where individuals meet and interact on equal terms with each other, social capital is produced; and that the positive social experiences then ‘spill over’ to benefit also the surrounding society (Mohan and Mohan, 2002, p.194). Membership in cross-cultural organizations is positively associated with refugees’ economic integration (De Vroome and Van Tubergren, 2010, p.397). Similarly, studies of social capital and economic incorporation of refugees indicate that refugees with few contacts with majority population are at disadvantage compared to refugees with access to networks outside their own community (Nawyn, et al., p.259).

In many European countries, as well as in the European Union, it is a common policy goal to facilitate social inclusion of immigrants and minorities in associations and voluntary organizations. A study from the UK indicates that immigrants consider participation in sports, education, religious worship, community and political activities, as a sign of successful integration (Ager and Strang, 2008, p.179). However, such positive attitudes towards participation hardly correspond with levels of factual participation in host society associations. A survey from Norway shows that less than one fourth of population with non-European background participates in organizations where they can meet people of majority population, and that participation rates are particularly low among young women with non-European background (Walseth, 2006, p.449).

Studies carried out among refugee and immigrant populations confirm that participation in associational activities can develop language skills and provide orientation to the mainstream culture (Doherty and Taylor, 2007, p. 27). In addition, participation can provide a larger network of acquaintances (Walseth and Fasting, 2004, p.109), enhance feelings of trust and strengthen positive self-image and identity (Vermeulen and Verweel, 2009, p.1206). Social connections are also promoting health, as participation in social activities provides feelings of predictability, stability, purpose, belonging and security (Rostila, 2008, p.36). Health aspect is especially

important as a study from Sweden indicates that immigrants who lack social contacts with majority population have poorer health than other immigrants (Rostila, 2008, p.70).

It needs to be taken into consideration, however, that different meanings and motivations can be attached to civil society activities; for example, language skills gained through associational activities are often simply seen as a factor that improves opportunities in the labor market; however, a study carried out among Burmese refugees in the United States shows that host society language skills are valued firstly, because language provides access to information, and secondly, because it provides social power in the own community (Nawyn, et al., 2012 p.255). In the Nordic countries including Sweden, people already from an early age are socialized into a belief that cooperative behavior and social trust are right, positive and natural (Patulny and Svendsen, 2007, p. 35). However, newcomers with different upbringing and traditions are not necessarily socialized the same way; the whole concept of associational activities can be unfamiliar; it might be seen as a way to self-improvement or social togetherness, but it can also be a moral or religious duty; or it can appear altogether meaningless.

### ***Motivation and associability can condition positive outcomes in associations***

It has been documented that when natural opportunities for social interaction between different social groups are missing, interaction *can* be successfully facilitated. A study from the United States reveals that in a facilitated social interaction participants are experiencing a gradual change from an original stage of suspicion and distrust, to a stage of contact and further to a stage of meaningful interaction (Jarrett, Sullivan and Watkins, 2005). Still, not all interaction facilitated or not, leads to positive outcomes. A study from Canada indicates that participation in associational activities can enhance social exclusion if the language barrier is not overcome, if there is unfamiliarity with what the activity is about, or if participants experience prejudice during the activities (Doherty and Taylor, 2007, p.27). A study carried out among the Scouts in the United States indicates that, in addition to opportunity of participation, personal motivation and associability are necessary for positive outcomes and positive social contacts to materialize. Success is more likely if participation is supported by normative commitments, a shared interest, common identity or a wish to achieve common good. All these factors help to maintain the necessary level of motivation (Weisinger and Salipante, 2005, p.43). In addition to motivation,

associability influences social interaction and outcomes of associational activities. Associability, is primarily linked to individual's personal ability to relate well to others but it is also connected to a question of resources; if the participant has necessary time and money available to be able to sustain participation (Weisinger and Salipante, 2005, p.44). Finally, also different time perspective can influence people's motives and actions, and thus, undermine efforts dedicated to social interaction in associations; for example, the moment when a residence permit has been granted, can mean a starting point for intensified introduction efforts for a case worker, while for a newcomer it can symbolize a goal finally achieved, and which then justifies relaxation and gearing down the efforts (Integrationsverket 2007 p. 97).

### ***Organizational level factors influence social bridge building***

It is not only individual level factors which condition inter-ethnic bridge building in voluntary organizations; organizational characteristics, membership homogeneity and inwardness can challenge the efforts aimed at enhancing social inclusion (Coffe and Geys, 2007, p.121; Stolle and Rochon, 1998, p.47). It is harder to generate social connections if some socioeconomic groups are either very overrepresented or underrepresented within an association (Coffé and Geys, 2007, p.131). Another factor which can influence how the organization is welcoming newcomers is whether the organization promotes material, social or political interests of its own members or whether the organization promotes a common good. Consequently, it has been argued that outward-looking associations, including study circles, cultural groups, charitable foundations, human rights organizations, environmental groups, political parties, and neighborhood associations, would be a natural base to inter-ethnic cooperation (Zmerli, 2002, p.6). A study from Sweden indicates that individuals with non-Swedish backgrounds not only engage themselves less in civil society organizations, but they also mainly join certain type of associations, namely humanitarian; human rights; minority and religious associations. The organizations which least attract interest are organizations with large membership including pensioners' associations, sports associations, and consumer cooperatives (Kings, 2013, p.30). Simple categorizations are unwise however, as differences between organizations inside each category vary widely: for example, some sports associations may act as a successful integration arena, while some other sports arenas and events may promote xenophobic attitudes (Collins,

Holmes and Slater, 2008, p.7). A study concerning experiences of African immigrants in sport clubs shows that even though participation would generally contribute to building social bonds and bridges, negative social encounters including experiences of discrimination can reinforce group boundaries in the same arena (Spaaj, 2012, p.1519). In conclusion, associational characteristics seem to influence social contacts and outcomes generated in activities; it is not clear however, how characteristics influence outcomes.

### ***Barriers to participation***

What kind of barriers, then, can hinder participation in associational activities? A study carried out among African refugees in Norway suggests that particularly elderly immigrants find it difficult to access civil society associations, which then can deepen their feelings of social isolation. Barriers identified in the study include poor health, lack of information, language difficulties and mistrust towards organizations. In addition, the study reveals that majority of respondents had been active members in organizations in their home countries, but in Norway they feel that they are not welcome without proficiency in the language (Gele and Harsløf, 2012, p.170). Similarly, a study on Iranians living in Sweden indicates that many members of ethnic associations have previously been members of host society associations but after trying it out they decided not to continue, either because they did not feel at home in the activities or they felt that they would not be able to benefit from any potential career opportunities available in the associations. Consequently, it has been argued that discrimination in the associations might partially explain lower participation levels among people with non-Swedish backgrounds (Bengtsson, 2004, p.370).

In a Canadian survey immigrants justified their lack of participation with “not knowing where to go” and “not knowing what to do” because of cultural and language barriers (Handy and Greenspan, 2009, p.976). Other studies also reveal that particularly for refugee settlers, the information landscape can appear daunting: unfamiliar, complex and difficult to navigate (Kennan, Lloyd and Thompson, 2011, p.196). In addition to problems of literacy and language proficiency, if the information offered is too complex it can act as a barrier to social participation; people could feel that there are too many things to learn, creating a sense of

information overload. The problem is often connected to the sense of lack of time (Kennan, Lloyd and Thompson, 2011, p.206)

There are indications that personal experience and incorporation of strangers into one's own life circles reduces social distance (Hodgetts, et al., 2010). Study circles are an example of a venue where people with different backgrounds can meet. It has been argued that such activities can challenge old boundaries and provide greater understanding; however, they can also strengthen feelings of social distance. Consequently, it has been suggested that not only what individuals do in such study circles but also how groups are formed, and if and how people can influence the content of such activities, is relevant when analyzing impacts of participation (Fundberg, 2004, p.286). A study from the U.K. indicates that it is those who already have high levels of social, economic and cultural capital who typically participate in inter-ethnic study circles, which has been argued to mean, that on a society level, benefit gained is only relative, or at least not as large as if participants initially possessed low levels of social, economic and cultural capital (Kings, 2013, p.37). This argument could be turned around, however, and say that by facilitating access of newly arrived refugees who possess low levels of capitals, into study circles might be exceptionally beneficiary to the society. The question of different capital forms, and how they might be linked to voluntary organizations, is discussed in the next chapter which is dedicated to theoretical framework; but before presenting different capital forms, concepts of social integration and social inclusion are introduced.

## **5. Theoretical framework**

Social inclusion can be seen both as an outcome and a process of improving the conditions for people to take part in society. It could be said that social inclusion aims at empowering people to take advantage of existing opportunities; to allow people to have a voice in decisions which affect their lives and to provide equal access to services and different social arenas. As a concept social inclusion is wider than social integration, which could be understood as a process of mutual adaptation between host society and migrant. Both concepts are multi-faceted and widely debated; in the following chapters the concepts are introduced in a brief manner focusing on the elements considered relevant for this study.

### **5.1.Social integration**

According to a conceptual framework defining core domains of integration, rights and citizenship form a foundation for refugee integration in the society; integration is then facilitated by language and cultural knowledge, and by safety and stability perceived in the society and experienced in personal life. Integration outcomes are manifested and can be evaluated through experienced progress in employment, housing, education and health (Ager and Strang, 2008). Language plays a central role in social integration, and there are studies confirming the positive outcomes experienced by immigrants who can speak the dominant language in the host society (Nawyn, et al., 2012, p.255; Yates, 2011, p.457). Conversely, there is also evidence how language difficulties form a barrier to civic engagement among immigrant population (Gele and Harsløf, 2012, p.166). Many receiving societies have tried to tackle this barrier by providing language courses to newcomers. However, based on experiences gained in the U.K., school like learning environments can provide only limited results; therefore, it has been argued that a shift towards more informal and social learning opportunities is necessary for integration to go forward (Morrice, 2007, p.155).

It is generally recognized that different types of social relationships are a precondition for integration to take place. In the model, social relationships are divided into social bonds, bridges and links; social bonds are understood to include connections within a community with a shared ethnic, national or religious identity; social bridges include members of other communities; and

social links concern connections with institutions including local and central government services (Ager and Strang, 2008). The conceptual framework defining core domains of integration is presented in figure 1.

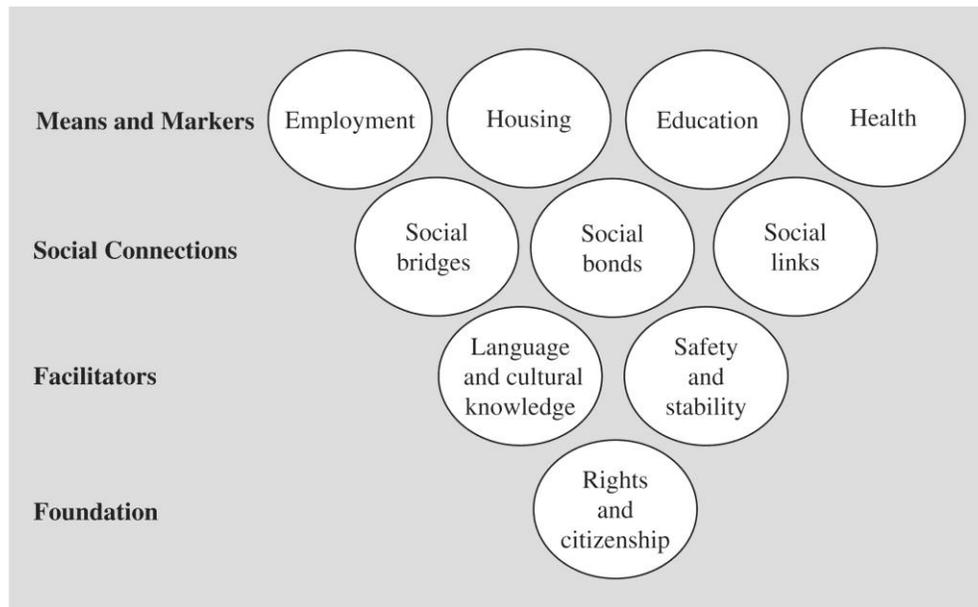


Figure 1: A conceptual framework defining core domains of integration (Ager and Strang, 2008, p.170).

The study indicates that family and co-ethnic ties are of primary value to immigrants and refugees, as such ties enable the newcomers to maintain familiar cultural practices and patterns of relationships (Ager and Strang, 2008, p.178); such practices generate feeling of security in a new environment. While family members, relatives and co-ethnic networks can help refugees to get settled, social contacts which cross inter-ethnic boundaries are most valuable for finding jobs and getting ahead in the society. Social bridges are believed to be beneficial for labor market outcomes; firstly, because they diversify social networks giving access to more opportunities; secondly, because they provide access to more resource-rich network; and thirdly, because such new interethnic contacts may alleviate and counteract prejudice and insecurity that could exist among prospective employers (Lancee, 2012, p.66).

However, it is not only success on labor market which is conditioned by wider social networks; more connections individuals are able to establish, the better off they are emotionally, socially,

physically and economically (Nichols, Tacon and Muir, 2012, pp.353-5). Still, ethnic minorities tend to have strong bonding networks with members of their cultural and ethnic groups but weak bridging networks (Alfred, 2010, p.219). A study on refugees living in Sweden indicates that it can be a challenge to get to know local people; cities are segregated to different neighborhoods and there is a lack of natural meeting places where people with different backgrounds can mingle and interact; newcomers perceive the Swedish society as closed and difficult to access both because how private lives are organized and how people spend their leisure time (Cederberg, 2012, p.66). Bridging social connections have sometimes been equated with weak ties, which can be understood as brief, fleeting relationships (Granovetter, 1973); however, weak ties can also be enduring but less personal relations such as professional or volunteer relations (Schneider, 2009, p.643).

Usefulness of distinction between bonding and bridging is contested. It has been argued, that “similar to us” “different to us” –dichotomy which lies at the heart of bonding/bridging - distinction, is of very little value as all individuals are multi-dimensional; different in some aspects, but similar in others (Nichols, Tacon and Muir, 2012, p.353); moreover, boundaries between bonding and bridging is difficult to establish. Bonding social relations are not exclusively reserved to co-ethnic relations as bonding can be developed also in inter-ethnic relations. In addition, relations change through time; weak ties can develop into strong ties, and vice versa (Rostila, 2008, p.23). It has been argued that “concepts of bonding and bridging appear to be complex up to the point where the difference between bonding and bridging may not be clear at all” (Vermeulen and Verweel, 2009, p.1214). Instead of focusing on a rigid bridging-bonding divide, it might be better to recognize simultaneous existence of both types of social connection as two qualities within the same social network (Patulny and Svendsen, 2007).

In this study the social integration framework is used as a guideline in data collection and analysis of the lives of the refugees in Sweden; how interviewed refugees perceive social integration and their personal situation.

## 5.2. Three levels of social inclusion

As the Swedish refugee integration policy focuses on labor market incorporation, and as the newcomers themselves are very conscious of the urgency of finding a job (Ehn, 2000, p.57), there is a risk of forgetting that social inclusion and well being require a wider lens of observation. When studying social inclusion of a migrant or refugee population, not only material aspects, such as housing and employment, but also physical and mental health, personal safety, and feeling of being valued by others, should be taken into consideration (Nawyn, et al., p.257). The complexity of social inclusion has been described in a three-layered model of Gidley, Hampson and Wheeler (2009). The model was developed in a context of lifelong learning; and it reveals the spectrum of ideologies underlying social inclusion theory and policy.

In the narrowest interpretation, social inclusion reflects neoliberal values, and it is understood as *access*. A broader interpretation includes aspects of social justice and reflects social inclusion as *participation or engagement*. And finally, the widest interpretation embraces the human potential of individuals and reflects social inclusion as *empowerment*. In the first level, the focus is on work, skills and economic aspects; social and human capital theories are used as analytic tools. In the second level, the focus is on engagement, capabilities and participation; the analytic focus moves on to social responsibility and critical theories. In the third level the concept is reflected through cultural diversity, social transformation and raising aspirations; and postcolonial theories

are applied (Gidley, Hampson and Wheeler, 2009, p.130). Their model is presented in figure 2.

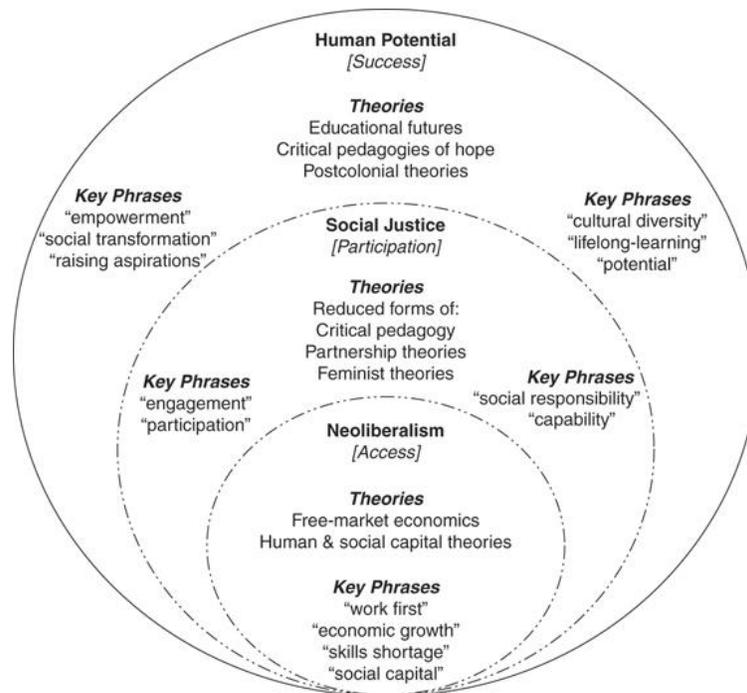


Figure 2: Social inclusion theory and policy (Gidley, Hampson and Wheeler, 2009, p.130)

In this study the social inclusion model is going to be used to analyze individual experiences gained in activities; to see what their experiences can reveal about of access, participation and empowerment. A study carried out among Afghan refugees in Sweden indicates that even very ordinary everyday actions can be seen as a valuable source of personal empowerment (Bergman, 2010, p.184). In addition, the concepts of "hard" and "soft" inclusion shall be used in this study. Hard inclusion can be understood as *factual participation* in activities; while soft inclusion captures the feelings of "*being a part of*" a social group or activity (Stigendal, 2008, p.51). In the light of previous studies it is especially the soft inclusion which is central for immigrant population. It is the friendliness of locals which helps newcomers to feel at home. Being recognized and greeted by locals is greatly valued, and small acts of friendship appear to have a large significance. Friendliness expressed by natives also helps refugees to feel more secure in the community (Ager and Strang, 2008, p.179).

Question of barriers is seamlessly linked to the question of social inclusion; and one option how the topic has been previously approached is to divide the barriers in target group barriers, resource barriers and behavior barriers. When target group barriers exist, those who do not belong to predefined group or do not fulfill predefined criteria concerning, for example, background, age or health, are chosen away; they are deliberately excluded. Resource barriers are linked to issues “one must have” in order to be able to participate, including money, skills, contacts or education. And, finally, behavior barriers are linked to requirements of how “one must behave” in order to be allowed to participate (Stigendal, 2008, p.64). The barriers can be obvious, but they can also exist and operate unintentionally and unconsciously. In this study it is observed if and how barriers appear in the experiences of the participants.

### **5.3. Impact assessment of associational activities**

Rochester, Ellis Paine and Howlett (2012, pp.160-76) have developed a framework for the impact assessment of volunteering in the United Kingdom; they discuss *who and what is impacted upon* by volunteering and *what those impacts are*. In order to go beyond general claims that “volunteering is a good thing” the authors have been collecting evidence on how the assessment of the impact of volunteering can be conceptualized and undertaken. They use the word “impact” to include outputs (things produced through action), outcomes (things that happen as a result of the activity) and impacts (longer-term changes; positive or negative; intended or unintended). Being inspired by an assessment toolkit which has been published by the Institute for Volunteering Research in the United Kingdom, the authors identify four stakeholder groups, upon who almost all volunteering is likely to have an impact namely: volunteers, organizations, service users and community. They suggest that potential impacts can be categorized into five capital forms: physical, human, economic, social and cultural.

In the model *physical capital* refers to identifiable products and services produced by voluntary activity; *human capital* relates to personal development and skills acquired in the activity; *economic capital* is related to expenditures and financial gains; however, economic capital is a controversial way of measuring the impacts of volunteering as many volunteers feel

uncomfortable seeing the impact of their efforts to be turned in to a mere money calculation (Rochester, Ellis Paine and Howlett, 2012, p.169). *Social capital* can be defined as social contacts and resources which become accessible to individuals through social relations and networks (Lin, Cook and Burt, 2001, p.7). According to Lin, mobilization of resources existing in the network can lead to two types of returns; firstly, instrumental returns, which refer to economic, political or social gains; and secondly, expressive returns which are more personal and are connected to physical and mental health and life satisfaction (2001, p.19). In the framework *cultural capital* is referring to shared sense of cultural identity, knowledge and understanding of culturally specific meanings. The authors acknowledge that cultural capital is hard to identify and measure, and that is why it is also the least documented area of the five capitals (Rochester, Ellis Paine and Howlett, 2012, p.173). The framework shows what kind of impacts, in terms of the five capitals, different stakeholders can expect to encounter. The framework is presented in figure 3.

	Physical capital	Human capital	Economic capital	Social capital	Cultural capital
Organizers; volunteers	Tangible individual benefits (social events or courses attended, certificates gained)	Personal development, skills, team work, public speaking, employability	Individual net gains (benefits minus expenses)	Increased trust and civic participation	Strengthened cultural identity; understanding and appreciation of other cultures
Organizations	Identifiable outputs; number of participants	Impact of volunteers on staff; diversity of members	Net gains (Value of activity minus cost of activity)	Increased status and reputation, membership recruitment	Services more reflective of cultural diversity
Participants; service users	Enhanced quantity and quality of services available	Personal development, skills enhanced	Access to activities which otherwise have to be paid for	Increased networks, enhanced trust and participation	Appreciation and understanding of other people's cultures
Community	Enhanced quantity and quality of services provided	Well functioning communities, better-skilled inhabitants	Enhanced value for money in public services (increased health, lower crime)	Increased networks, enhanced trust and participation	Appreciation and understanding of other people's cultures

Figure 3. Framework for evaluating the impacts of volunteering (Rochester, Ellis Paine and Howlett, 2012, p. 167)

There is evidence that volunteering provides satisfaction, joy, personal achievement and social contacts to those who volunteer; (surveys from the UK show 86-97 % positive results) (Rochester, Ellis Paine and Howlett, 2012, p.162); in addition, there appears to be a connection between volunteering and employability, but only when volunteering is used as a part of direct strategy aimed at employment (Hirst, 2000). Evidence concerning the impact of volunteering on the organizations is sketchy and mainly focuses on economic benefits achieved through unpaid labor; in addition, it is recognized that volunteers provide the organization with a larger and more diverse workforce which enables the organization to provide more and better services (Rochester, Ellis Paine and Howlett, 2012, p.163). Service users have been recording increased social contact, mental and physical well-being and health benefits. And, finally, surrounding communities are recorded to benefit from social cohesion, reduced crime rate, service provision and enhanced well-being (Rochester, Ellis Paine and Howlett, 2012, p.164).

The framework concentrates on positive impacts of volunteering; however, negative outcomes such as negative social capital (Portes, 1998, p.15) and decrease of human capital may also occur. Surveys carried out in the UK show generalized positive human capital outcomes (75 % positive results); however, volunteering may lead to a decrease of human capital, for example, when a bad volunteering experience undermines participant's self-confidence, and leaves the person feeling de-skilled (Rochester, Ellis Paine and Howlett, 2012, p.171). In addition, impacts, even when predominantly positive may be very unequally distributed across gender, age, ethnic and socio-economic groups (Spaaij, 2012, p.1519).

Keeping in mind that the framework for evaluating the impacts of volunteering has not been developed for the study of vulnerable groups and thus can provide only limited support to the task at hand, in this study the model is going to be used to explore how the five capital forms, in their positive or negative forms, appear in the experiences of the interviewed refugees.

## **6. Method**

### **6.1. Qualitative method**

Qualitative research method is chosen for this study as it is a well suited method for collecting data on personal experiences and perceptions; this study aims at gaining understanding about participants' personal experiences in associational activities. Qualitative method allows the researcher to enter into the world of participants, to see the world from their perspective and to make discoveries that will contribute to the development of empirical knowledge (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p. 16). When studying social connections, qualitative method has been predominantly applied to bonding social capital, whilst bridging connections have been analyzed typically through quantitative method. It has been argued that for deeper understanding, more qualitative research is needed on bridging social capital (Patulny and Svendsen, 2007, p.44). In addition, it has been suggested that more inductive qualitative research is needed to unravel the complex and nuanced barriers which might hinder development of social capital in clubs and associations (Nichols, Tacon and Muir, 2012, p.350).

The data is collected through semi-structured interviews which allow an interviewer to seek further elaborations and clarifications to answers given. In addition, this type of interviews allow informants to answer to questions more on their own terms than what is the case with standardized interviews, but it still provides better comparability of the findings than what is the case with unstructured interviews (May, 2011, p.135). It has been argued that as any singular interview, no matter how revealing, can provide only limited insight into a social reality, the true understanding of the significance of an interview can only be achieved by comparing series of interviews; and thus each interview will add to the final story (May, 2011, p.136). The study departs from an ontological presumption of multiple realities, and the approach is inductive, which means that previous studies represent only a general guideline to the study, while the focus is in the emerging stories of the participants. The aim is to understand and describe experiences; not to explain incidents or processes taking place in associational activities. Such an interpretive approach gives priority to revealing patterns and connections, and is not applying linear reasoning (Charmaz, 2013, p.126). The interview guide used in this study is presented in appendix 1.

## **6.2. Selection of interviewees, locations and languages**

As the aim of the study is not theory development, but rather to understand and report subjective experiences, a complete collection as a sampling method can be used (Flick, 2009, p.117). In a complete collection, sampling is limited in advance by certain criteria, and individuals who do not meet the criteria are excluded. Criteria used in this study include adulthood; refugee background; location; and participation in project NAD; consequently, the informants of this study are adults with refugee backgrounds, or their adult family members, living in Kristianstad or Helsingborg; and who have been participating in associational activities as a part of project NAD. By the time of planned fieldwork, in March 2014, there were 30 persons who fulfilled these criteria; they were all invited to interview; 29 were interviewed; one could not attend for health reasons. Of the informants, 20 are women and nine are men; 14 are young adults (18-29 years of age), 11 are middle aged adults (30-59 years) and four are elderly adults (over 60 years). Of the informants 12 originate from Syria, four from Palestine, three from Afghanistan, two from Iraq, two from Sudan, two from Caucasus, one from Ethiopia, one from Yemen and one from Somalia. Interviews took place in the premises of the Public Employment Service in Kristianstad and Helsingborg; each lasted 45-60 minutes, except one which had to be interrupted after 25 minutes. Eleven interviews were done without interpreters: six in English and five in Swedish. Eighteen interviews were done with interpreters: fifteen in Arabic, one in Russian, one in Dari and one in Farsi. Interviewee profiles are in appendix 2. In the text interviewees are referred to using letters from A to Ö.

### **6.3. Ethical considerations**

When the informants were invited to interviews they were informed about the purpose of the study, that the participation was voluntary and that the collected data would be confidential. In addition, their case workers and job coaches were informed about the aim and content of the interviews, in case there would be need to discuss it with the interviewees. In the beginning of each interview it was checked that the purpose was correctly understood and that they were participating voluntarily. It was also stressed that the interview could be interrupted at any time and that any particular question could be ignored if so wished. It was also explained what confidentiality meant, how the collected data would be analyzed and published, and how their anonymity would be protected. As the interviews took place in the premises of the Public Employment Service it was also stressed that I was not employed by the Service and that I was working on an independent academic study. Consent was asked for recording interviews; one person rejected and the decision was respected. Finished interview sound files were stored under fictitious names in a separate memory stick. For the sake of confidentiality, descriptions are general and individuals are not connected to particular activities.

It is recommended that any qualitative study should produce positive identifiable benefits to interviewees (Flick, 2009, p.37). In this study interviewees were not directly rewarded, neither was it in my powers to influence their introduction plans even though several interviewees expressed such wishes; I could only advice that they would take up the questions with their caseworkers. However, many interviewees expressed satisfaction after the interviews and expressed a hope that their experiences would somehow, even indirectly, contribute to improving introduction activities.

### **6.4. Trustworthiness**

It has been argued that qualitative studies should be evaluated or judged according to different criteria from those used in quantitative research, and that the most suitable criteria would be

trustworthiness made up of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Seale, 1999, p.45). Correctness or credibility of the conclusions does not imply any objective truth but directs our attention to possible alternative explanations or rival hypothesis (Maxwell, 2005, p.106). The establishment of credibility entails that research is carried out according to the good practice and that the investigator has correctly understood the social world under investigation (Bryman, 2008, p.377). Transferability of the findings require that readers are given sufficiently detailed information so that they can evaluate the applicability of the findings in another setting (Seale, 1999, p.45). Dependability of the study is strengthened by careful recording of all phases of the research process; and finally, confirmability is concerned with ensuring that, while recognizing that objectivity is impossible in social sciences, the investigator can be shown to have acted in good faith (Bryman, 2008, p.379).

During the research process I aimed at improving the credibility of the study in different ways. Before data collection I familiarized myself with the activities informants were participating in, through publications, internet homepages and interviews with some of the organizers. Literature reflecting refugee experiences made me more aware about my own position as a researcher; how my Nordic upbringing which includes seeing civil society, in all its forms, as a natural and positive forum of social interaction, could limit my understanding and analysis, and that it could be a source of potential bias. In addition, the fact that activities were incorporated in participants' personal introduction plans and were suggested and recommended by the Employment Office could condition both the expectations and experiences gained through the activities. Therefore, interview questions were formulated in a neutral and open way, which permitted the interviewees themselves to define the meaning of such activities.

What informants say is always influenced by the interviewer and interview situation (Maxwell, 2005, p.109). Informants may not trust the interviewer, they may not understand the questions, or they may purposely please or mislead the interviewer in their responses (Silverman, 2011, p.134). As the interviews took place in the premises of the Employment Service, there was a risk that I would be confused to represent the institution. And even though my role as a Master student was explained, it cannot be excluded that I was seen to represent "an authority" and that it could influence the answers. I prepared interview rooms so that I was physically sitting lower than the interviewee; and when possible, I moved the seats so that the desk was not between us. I

also booked interviews with long intervals so that there was time for free conversation in the beginning, and the relaxed pace could be maintained through the whole interview. In most interviews trustful atmosphere was reached during the opening phase; in one case it was not until the closing moment, when the informant started to talk more freely giving detailed accounts and retuning back to previous questions. In one interview the answers were so short that I could only presume that the necessary trust was missing.

If I had a reason to believe that the question had been misunderstood, I rephrased the question. Occasionally, I summarized the answers, to check that I had understood it right and to make sure that I kept my own ideas separate from the ones of the interviewee; at the end of the interview I checked that I had captured right the overarching themes and messages. All, except one informant appeared cooperative and helpful. After each interview I shared my observations with the interpreter and checked how he or she had experienced the interview situation.

Some information is unavoidably lost in translation; however, as interpretation was mainly done by professionals the loss was minimized. I tried to minimize the risk of misinterpretation by briefing the interpreters in advance about the study and concepts I was going to use. In two cases when interpreter was not available, family members carried out the interpretation which somewhat influenced the answers: in one case the interpreter shortened the given answers; in the other case interpreter added his own opinions to the answers. In addition, one interviewee was visibly influenced by the presence of the interpreter searching affirmation from the interpreter and talking to him instead to me. Such observations were taken into consideration when analyzing the answers.

In addition to translation, also memory loss can negatively influence the quality of the data collected (Rochester, Ellis Paine and Howlett, 2012, p.173). Most interviewees were participating in the activities when interviews took place or they had very recently finished the activities; there were a few interviewees however, who had finished activities almost three months earlier, so the memory loss factor cannot be totally excluded.

I aimed at improving the dependability of the study by careful documentation. All except one interview were recorded and transcribed. After each interview, notes were taken concerning the

role of the interpreter, interviewee-interviewer interaction and highlights of the interview; possible comments of interpreters were also noted down.

When analyzing the results I looked at the evidence from different angles and tried to subject it to “every possible test” (Silverman, 2005, p.213). I began the analysis when one third of the interviews were done, transcribing and producing an initial set of categories and making some adjustments to the interview guide. After two thirds of interviews were finished, I transcribed the new interviews, and went back and forth in the data identifying themes and different meanings attached to them; again some adjustment were made in the interview guide. Then I finished the rest of the interviews, transcribed them, added the material to previous data and continued comparing and analyzing.

Good dependability, the careful recording and documentation of the study, is also linked to good transferability of the findings. In this study all data was incorporated in the analysis, and during the data collection and the analysis, special attention was dedicated to deviant cases. With the aim of improving transferability of the study, the findings include both common trends and deviant cases. First the findings are presented according to the themes that dominate the interviewees’ experiences, and then the findings are further analyzed highlighting some common patterns appearing from the interviews.

## **7. Social inclusion through associational activities**

### **7.1. Refugees' experiences from living in Sweden**

Informants of the study are refugees who have been living in Sweden for a relatively short time. Many are influenced by their experiences during the migration, and despite the fact that they have been granted permanent residence in Sweden, many do not feel truly settled in Sweden yet. Most of them have transnational lifestyles; families are scattered in many countries; and it requires time and resources to keep in touch and to try to take care of the loved ones who have been left behind or who remain in different countries. Some are waiting for their husbands or wives to be reunited with them in Sweden. Many say that they have two homes: one here in Sweden and another one in homeland. A middle aged man who has dependents in Afghanistan describes his migration and his mental stage the following way:

"I have it quite bad, actually. In my country, everything was stressful. We moved to Iran. They wanted to send us back, but we just continued to Turkey. At that time we did not have any thought about Europe; but then there was a chance and we continued to Greece, and from there to Sweden. My mom came as well. But there are problems. I cannot be truly happy. I am worried, my father died and my brother is gone. I saw my friend dying next to me. Over time, it will be better, I know, but there are no things that make me really happy. When I laugh, it does not come from my heart. "

For many informants, especially for women with children, family forms a center of life which gives meaning in life, brings joy and satisfaction, but family is also a source of concern and longing. From early morning to late evening, the days of mothers who have many children are structured around children and family chores, transporting children to different schools and daycares, cleaning and cooking, and helping with homework. Family duties dominate women's daily routines as they have a principal responsibility of the practical functioning of the family; in exceptional situations some husbands help, but it is mainly eldest children who help their mothers. For many women family is the meaning of life, and as long as family is doing well they themselves are doing well. It is difficult to separate own needs and dreams from family objectives, and women do not make a difference between work and leisure either. These women

express that the most satisfying moments are connected to family and that their wishes for the future are conditioned by the family. After describing their daily routines some women, especially younger ones with formal education call it “a bit boring” or “repetitive”; while most middle aged women with larger families and without formal education describe their own situation as “happy”, “safe” and “pleased”. A middle aged woman from Syria, who got separated from her two children during the migration but who has got her family together again here in Sweden describes her feelings the following way:

"I have six daughters and two sons. Our life is very good; every day repeats the same structure, there is a lot going on all the time but the older children help me. We always have the supper at the same time together, and after the dinner we gather in the living room and talk about the day. The very best that has happened to me ever, was the moment I got to see my children again. I was immensely grateful and happy. The feeling of joy that my children had made it (she is drying tears of joy). But I am very concerned for my family in Gaza, the situation is not easy there; economically, politically, socially. Life is very difficult there. "(G)

A large survey on refugees' networks and the value of such social capital carried out in Canada reveals that most adult refugees keep in touch with at least some family networks and almost half of all refugees remain connected to extended family networks and plan to sponsor other family members. With time, extra-familial networks involving neighbors, other community members, service providers, co-workers and employers are constructed; the study confirms that social networks are providing much-needed support and assistance when refugees are facing financial, employment, personal or health problems (Lamba and Krahn, 2003, p.335).

For most informants learning the language is the most urgent need and central objective in life but reasons for learning the language vary widely. Some connect the language skills directly to opportunities to find a work, while others have more practical motives: to get a driving license or to be able to help children with schoolwork. Some also mention that they want to be able to move around independently and to be able to communicate with people without the need of an interpreter. Even though all informants recognize the need to learn the language, some find it more necessary than others. Some find it possible to communicate in Arabic everywhere, at schools and shops alike, as there are always people around who speak Arabic. A middle aged

woman who used to work in a hair salon in Syria and who feels hindered by her lacking Swedish language skills, describes her present day objectives the following way:

"I live here and I want to be an adult who can do everything without help, so I want to learn the language. I still have a goal to open my own beauty salon here, but I cannot do it without the language, therefore I want to learn Swedish quickly. "(G)

A study from Australia confirms the ambivalence often attached to language learning: on the one hand, immigrants are very aware of the urgency of learning the new language, but on the other hand, there is the temptation to remain safe within native language network. Language learning appears to be important not only for practical integration, but also for emotional and cultural integration (Yates, 2011, p.458)

All interviewees dedicate lots of time for language learning in SFI and other institutions, also because language courses are included in their individual introduction plans; and some interviewees have achieved good results in relatively short time. They are typically young adults who have some education from their homelands and who speak also other languages. Most informants, however, have only few opportunities to speak Swedish with anyone; only one interviewee tells that she has friends with whom she can speak Swedish. These findings are very similar to the ones made by Yates (2011): the lack of local friends, feelings of social isolation and very few opportunities to use what has been learned at school; in addition, similarly to the previous study, the tendency is the same in all levels of language proficiency and in all ethnic groups (Yates, 2011, p.461)

Most informants have learned the language in classrooms; or with the help of TV programs. A young man from Syria who has no family in Sweden and who lives in an asylum center describes his relation to Swedish language the following way:

"I can only speak Swedish at school. All my friends are in the same situation. We try to speak Swedish together but we are all equally bad in Swedish, so it does not help much. I would love to learn the language; it feels that the language is the biggest barrier between me and the society. "(P)

However, there is much more at stake than mere language competence. Findings from Australia confirm, that the way a refugee is able to engage in the community has a crucial impact on the sense of self. Positive social contacts and recognition by the community, not only the right to be part of the community, but also to be visible and valued, is essential to feelings of social inclusion and well-being. Thus, successful communication and interaction during the early settlement has proved to be crucial for future language competence and inclusion (Yates, 2011, p.457-8).

SFI is valued by many informants as it starts from the beginning, advances in an organized manner, and provides solid base of grammar and writing skills; however, many argue that they do not learn to speak in SFI because the groups are too large, or because some students are behaving in an intimidating manner. An elderly analphabet woman from Afghanistan is struggling to learn the language in a large class room setting; she is also disturbed by the disrespectful behavior of some students and is considering dropping out of the school. She tells the following:

"At school I learn nothing. The teacher hands out papers to us all, the same text, but I do not understand it. It feels strange to go to school, because I have never been to school before. They give a lot of information. We have to learn slowly, slowly, and I have to learn from the alphabets. There are many Arabs there, young men of 23-25 years of age, but why are they there? They should be working. Young people say they are studying but they are not. They just scream, and do not respect the teachers. It is not good there. A neighbor took his wife out of school. I am thinking about doing the same."(Q)

This finding has elements of both information overload and risk of falling into information poverty. Refugees who have different understanding of society because their previous world has been very different than the world they are now living in, may experience information poverty. Over time it may affect everything from ability to create social contacts, to get a job, maintain health, improve life quality, and finally lead to marginalization. Those without access to information become increasingly excluded from information sources and can fail to fully settle in the society (Kennan, et al., 2011, p.193). Such challenges need to be addressed in appropriate ways which acknowledge individual needs and cultural differences.

Several interviewees are struggling with learning the language. Some identify institutional or structural barriers for learning while some others mention personal barriers: Some elderly interviewees believe that it is the advanced age (over 60 years) or bad eye sight which makes learning difficult. A young mother explains that she cannot follow the classes efficiently because her sick child requires attention; and a young man finds living in an asylum center so disturbing that he is not able to concentrate on doing the homework. Some informants believe that school is not the right place for them at all; instead, traineeship or working together with a native speaker would be the best way to learn the language. A young Palestinian woman questions the meaningfulness of formal education. She has only a few years education from her homeland and would like to quickly find a practical job. She tells the following:

"It is often spoken Arabic in SFI, and everywhere. It's not just my problem. It is boring, for me, and for many others too. I know many who have passed level D but cannot speak Swedish. I have asked others how they have learned the language and they say they have had a job, traineeship, or they know some Swedish neighbors. At school, you learn how to write but you do not learn to speak. "(E)

Almost a similar account is told by another young Palestinian woman:

"It's hard to go to school, sit and listen to someone for four hours, and go to the next school, and again just listen. Most important is to find a traineeship, otherwise it will be too boring, I almost fall asleep. If I'm always thinking about the grammar, I'll never talk. I forget what I want to say. "(H)

Many refugee receiving societies offer free language courses to newcomers, similar to SFI; however, formal classroom education cannot provide the newcomer with all the necessary information and practice that is needed in order to develop full communicative skills. Therefore, it has been argued that social interaction with majority population using the new language is crucial for overall proficiency (Yates, 2011, p. 459). Some informants of this study argue that no good results can be achieved at language schools because student groups are so heterogeneous. A young Sudanese man with academic education from his homeland suggests the following:

"There is also a problem of the system. Somehow it is wrong. There are many people here who do not know anything about studying. They have got used to working with

something practical. Here they get an opportunity to study but it is actually a bad for them; they don't know how to study. They don't *want* to study. There is no motivation. When you put these guys in a school, of course they make trouble because they are not focused in getting education. My opinion is that people should be separated; those who want to study and those who want to do other things. Those who cannot study should not be expected to do it." (W)

This finding has similarities with a study from the UK; the study confirms that in policy initiatives aimed at social inclusion, refugees tend to be treated as a homogeneous group and learning opportunities offered to them are typically narrow and one-dimensional. Such approach focuses on target-learning and does little to address other issues associated with migration, such as loss of social status, change of professional identity and problems of self-esteem. It is recommended that specific strategies would be developed which would bridge refugee and non-refugee communities, and which would provide learning opportunities which recognize refugees' existing skills, knowledge and professional identity; as potential frameworks; discussion groups, group activities and visits are mentioned (Morrice, 2007, pp.168-9). These recommendations are actually very close to the rationale which can be identified behind the project under evaluation.

Most interviewees of this study are focusing on learning the language. Getting a job is not a central issue yet for those who have been in the country for a very short time. For them the situation appears confusing: they cannot communicate in Swedish and there is no idea what they could or would like do in the future; and many mothers feel themselves fully occupied taking care of the family. Meanwhile, those who have been in the country for years or who have gained education or professional career before coming to Sweden, are very focused on job search. Many are stressed for not having found a job, and say straight that they do not want to become depending on financial support. Some are also concerned because the introduction period is coming to an end, even though their future is still uncertain.

Some of the highly skilled interviewees express frustration for not being able to use the education and knowledge they have accumulated in their homelands and are aware that the value of their knowledge is diminishing as the time is passing. The highly skilled are applying different methods for going forward; some are concentrating on language learning while waiting for

formal validation of qualifications; some are relying on English language skills and networking actively; some are considering volunteering in different organizations; and some are accepting the idea of just starting from the beginning. A young Sudanese man with academic background has come to Sweden with big expectations but realized that education and knowledge gained in his homeland is not matching the requirements in the local labor market. He tells the following:

“When you come to one of the best countries in the world, you think all opportunities are available, but when you try to find a work you realize that it is very difficult. In my own country I am highly educated; here we are all the same. I want to keep on doing what I was doing in my own country. But even though it is the same field, the content and tools are different.” (W)

Labor market mismatch is a problem also for those with practical skills. A young Syrian man is describing his powerlessness because his skills are not needed in Sweden. He tells the following:

"In Syria, I was self employed, I had a small workshop but I cannot have the same kind of business here in Sweden; market is different. You do not buy that stuff here; everything is imported. What I can do, is not needed here. "(P)

Such experiences are concrete examples of general trend documented for example by Bevelander (2009, p.69); the study on resettled refugees in Sweden shows that the employment levels for refugees is significantly lower than the level for natives in all educational categories, and that only less than a third of refugee males obtained employment during the first five years in Sweden (Bevelander, 2009, p.73). In addition, newcomers are often surprised for high requirements of formal evidence of competence, and that contacts and references are required even for low-skilled jobs (Wikström, 2009, p.218).

How interviewees perceive their potential in the labor market appears to depend also on age: in this study some elderly interviewees are satisfied with a harmonious life and do not really expect to find a job, while some young interviewees express great optimism and energy when describing their future plans. Similar, age related trend has been revealed by the study on resettled refugees in Sweden (Wikström, 2009, p.220). A young Palestinian woman who is living

with her parents wants to study in the University and is looking optimistically at the future; she tells the following:

“I hope to start in the University soon. My life is great, open, and it is just getting better. I am happy and I have many plans ahead. Hope to achieve some of them. In the future I would like to do designing and combine it with business studies in the university. Yes, I am a Palestinian girl with a scarf, so maybe there is some extra work before I can reach my aims, but you need to show strength. It is not about the society actually but more of your own willpower. But I am quite content how things are going right now.” (O)

Interviewees’ daily lives are structured around language learning, family chores and job search. In addition, some interviewees participate in social activities. One interviewee teaches Arabic and Islam to children at weekends in a mosque, one interviewee goes to a church and has been able to find some acquaintances there. Some men and a younger woman go to gym regularly. Physical exercise makes them feel better, even though they have not made any friends or gained any contacts there; one of the men who regularly attend the gym says that he does not have any friends at all. A study from Canada confirms the well-being enhancing effect: participation in sport and recreation can ease stress associated with settlement (Frisby, 2011, p.135).

A middle aged woman who has an academic education and a professional career before emigrating, has been struggling to establish a new life in Sweden. For years she has tried to find a job; her introduction program is approaching an end, and she is anxious. Despite good Swedish language skills, her self-confidence is failing. She describes her situation the following way:

"I cannot use my skills, so I get sad and feel useless. I talked to a woman who said that it might take eight to ten years before I can find a job. I cannot imagine it; what I could do for ten years? In my country, it is important to have a career, to make money; if you don't, you cannot live well. Here the situation is different; suddenly the family has become most important. I spend a lot of time with the computer, keep in touch with friends and family via Skype, search for a job. I go to some meeting places in town and try to talk to people, but I cannot talk like they do, I cannot. With Swedes it is difficult; they keep on asking me "what did you say, what did you say" I get nervous and feel shy. They do not understand me. Maybe I'm speaking only wrong. "

Interviewee's statement of the grim future prognosis is not totally unfounded; a study on refugees' labor market incorporation reveals that from the very beginning refugee women are in a highly disadvantaged position as only less than 20 % of refugee women find a job in the first five years, and that it can take 15 to 20 years before refugee women catch up in employment with other admission categories (Bevelander, 2009, p.76). A study on resettled refugees in Sweden shows similar findings: refugees with a strong motivation to find work and support themselves risk at losing their motivation and confidence when they confront barriers which they cannot overcome (Wikström, 2009, p.217).

Social distance experienced between the newcomers and native Swedes is described also by other informants, and several interviewees tell that they do not know any Swedes at all; either they are living in neighborhoods where there are no native Swedes, or there are no natural opportunities to create contact. Several men talk about the distance or barrier between the locals and themselves: how they would like to get to know some Swedish speaking people but that they feel themselves uncertain and stupid as there is no common topic to initiate conversation about or because there is no natural framework for conversation. Some women tell about concrete situations when they have felt rejected by some local people. A Syrian woman with an academic education was first living in northern Sweden and found it much easier to make friends there. She is especially fond of an elderly couple who helped her and her family through the difficult times in the beginning. They still keep in touch and she considers them as her best friends in Sweden; however, it has been much more difficult to make friends in the new home town. She tells the following:

"In Kristianstad, it is not easy to find friends. I say "hello" to my neighbors, but they do not say hello. They do not respond. I think there are many immigrants here, and maybe there is a problem, sometimes every person is judged for one person. It's not right but it happens. Here one must be careful with people. For example, I invite you to my house. In the north it was easy, just come come ... but here in Kristianstad it is as another Sweden. I do not know, maybe it's just my neighbors. They do not like foreigners." (Å)

A study from Italy reveals similar kind of situations where interaction between refugees and local people can be reduced to simple banalities like saluting in the morning. The authors believe that reasons for weak bridging connections include widespread negative image of refugees in the

media and general discrimination (Iosifides, et al., 2007, p.1354). A young Iraqi woman tells about an unpleasant encounter in the street. She still does not understand what actually happened and why. She tells the following:

"The hardest thing is when someone speaks to me, but I cannot answer. Once I went across the street and met a person and he shouted at me. I did not know what he said; it feels terrible that one could neither understand nor answer.... I think it was because I had a veil. "(M)

A parallel situation is described by a Syrian middle aged woman:

“One time I was really sad. I went between the sidewalk and bike path, a wrong location. A woman stopped and screamed. She said something like "You're not Swedish." I said nothing. I cried a lot and told my husband that I want to go home; he just said "it happens"”. (A)

A young Syrian woman who has been living in many countries and has an international education sees the social distance as a personal challenge she wants to do something about. She tells the following:

“In a grocery store an older woman said to me: “What are you doing here? You should not be here, go back to your country”. She did not even give me a second to reply. At that moment it did not feel good, but I let it go. No problem. At the gym I get some looks, but they are not bad looks, more like curious ones; they haven't got used to seeing a woman with a headscarf on a treadmill. I understand that it is an opportunity for them to see something new. There are so many misconceptions and stereotypes of Islam. I know many Muslims who are scared to talk about it, but I think it is our responsibility to understand it well and take it from the source and explain it to people.” (O)

Stolle and Harell (2013, p.44) have been studying ethno-racial diversity in Canada, and what kind of consequences diversity has to social cohesion and community. Their study shows that direct social interaction can help to establish positive inter-group feelings; but it only leads to accumulation of social capital and generalized trust if the diversity in the society is normalized. Therefore results are more promising among the youth: direct diverse contact causes social

boundaries to shift and gradually new shared identities are developed. The precondition for such positive outcome is that the social interaction is based on a co-operative experience between equals. The study reveals that it is more difficult for the elderly to be part of such a normalized interaction, to overcome negative feelings of mistrust and to reach positive outcomes.

## 7.2. Refugees experiences from associational activities

When informants of this study joined the associational activities, most of them did not know what to expect from it. They trust the evaluation of the case worker who has recommended the activity and join the activities because it has been included in their personal introduction plans. However, content of the activity and who is the organizer behind the activity becomes more relevant if the activity is highly individualized. A Palestinian man who used to work as a film director, actor and media professional in his homeland was expecting to improve his Swedish language skills in the association, as he is practically always speaking English; he was also hoping to get to know some local people through the activity. In the activity he was making a film project in local schools filming and editing stories told by local school children. He tells the following:

“I heard from the Employment Office that there was a new place where they wanted to make some cultural activities, and they thought about me because I have this cultural background. You know, actually I have been looking for a work, but I was thinking, why not, maybe I’ll find a job there, gain experience and get to know new people. I am working very hard – day and night. I shall present a documentary film in Malmö film festival, and I am working on a short drama. I am networking all the time trying to meet people who work in cultural projects or media. For me the activity was an amazing experience. It was easy to speak Swedish with the children because I could understand them; they speak slowly and pronounce the words so that you can hear them. Adults speak so fast that I cannot get it. So definitely, it was a good experience for me, I learned a lot. And now things are getting even better. I have just got a job in Stockholm so it is going very well. I do not want to leave, but when you get a job, it is best to go.” (L)

Most interviewees are positively surprised by the activities; they are very pleased for the experience and many say that it had been much too short time and that they would like to continue with the same activity. Several informants are also interested in joining other associational activities.

Informants’ experiences are in clear contrast with a study from Norway where multiple hindrances were identified which made it difficult for African refugees to participate in associational activities. The barriers informants experienced in Norway included lack of information of relevant organizations, health and language problems and mistrust towards

organizations (Gele and Harsløf, 2012, p.166). One reason why the results of the present study are much more positive might be the mechanism how the participants are matched with organizations: not only are the case workers making an individual matching but they are also transmitting information to participants and organizers. As the participation is organized through the authority, possible mistrust towards organizations is alleviated. Even the language barrier does not appear as significant as in the other study; this could be explained by the proactive role of the organizers. In this study voluntary organizations and associations have been inviting the participants, and have made necessary preparations for their accommodation to the association.

### *Language learning*

The majority of interviewees are very pleased with associational activities as a place for training the language. Interviewees describe how they improve their skills, learn new words and train pronunciation. Positive and encouraging atmosphere is praised by many participants, as they describe how they gain self confidence and overcome shyness to speak. Some have been doing activities with a company of small children and find it helpful, as the language children use is simpler and clearer than the one spoken by adults. A middle aged woman from Sudan who has professional education and working experience from her homeland was participating in culture and language introduction course in Homeland society (Hembygdsförening) visiting institutions and private homes but also doing everyday chores together; she describes her experience the following way:

"I was very happy every time; I waited for Wednesdays so that I could go there. I met four women and they were very kind. They came to pick us up from the railroad station and then they told us what we were going to do that day. There was no one who spoke Arabic there, so we just spoke Swedish - every time four hours (laughing)! They said all the time - try, try, try – and we tried - they were very kind. I think such activities can help integration hundred percent, and it has increased my confidence to speak Swedish.”(A)

Encouraging atmosphere in different activities is stressed and appreciated by many informants. A young woman from Palestine was participating in a language café; she has been living in Sweden for almost four years but she is struggling to learn the language in a school environment. She appreciates the women-only group and positive atmosphere there; she is telling the following:

"I went to women's café. There we chose some theme and discussed it and concentrated in speaking and pronouncing correctly. We were 3 or 4 people; 2 Swedes, another foreigner and me. I love the café because there we have an opportunity to talk even if we talk or pronounce wrong. They (the organizers) encourage us to say whatever we can."(H)

Also most of those who have very little knowledge of Swedish language find associational activities a good environment for learning the language. The middle aged Syrian woman who would like to open her own beauty salon in the future, participated in a handwork café for women; she describes the activity the following way:

"It is a group of Swedish women who are doing handwork. I listen to them speaking; they show me things and teach me new words. I am learning to talk without thinking about grammar and spelling. I am learning like a child, by showing and repeating. (smiling) They are very nice people; and I am impressed because they are elderly women but they enjoy life. They want to show what they have been doing, beautiful things. Some of the women have some health problems, but they do not let it prevent them in any way. I am so impressed about this. I just want to say that I have learned from them that I shall never let the age stop me.---- Everyone should have a chance to go to such groups; it should be compulsory like SFI. And the best is a small group without too many Arabs together. In my group there is only one other Arabic speaking woman whom I can ask if I do not understand something. It is best when the group is completely Swedish or with only two Arabic speakers together. If we are more, we are just fooling ourselves that we are learning."(G)

There is previous study with similar findings. Even though strong network of people who speak the same native language can be an important source of support for a newcomer, such network can also be a disincentive and constraint on developing proficiency in the new language. This is especially the case if the language minority group is large and all basic economic and social needs can be met through the group (Yates, 2011, p. 458).

However, not everybody shares the positive experiences; a young Iraqi woman who has not gone to school before arriving to Sweden and who has been struggling in SFI does not find associational activities meaningful. She believes that the best way forward for her would be a practical traineeship where she could learn the language alongside working. She was

participating in a study circle where some other participants were more advanced Swedish speakers, and they knew each other from SFI and other courses. She describes her experience the following way:

"It was a bad activity because we were about to fall asleep. Those who were there they showed us TV, and we drank coffee, and she (the organizer) talked to them who are at level C or D in SFI. We (beginners) did not kind of exist. I did not understand anything and I did not learn anything. I think it is only those who are at level C or D in SFI that should go to such activities but not us from level A or B."(I)

However, not everybody agrees that study circles function well only for those who already have language competence. Negative experiences described above might be linked to social interaction and communication rather than be a question of language skills. This conclusion is supported by findings of a study on how social relations inform learning and acculturation among immigrants in the United States; the study suggests that for learners to develop social capital, they must be able and willing to interact in new ways, in new contexts and with new people (Alfred, 2010, p.233). In other words, associability, or limits of the same, could at least partially explain experiences of the interviewee. This conclusion gains weight when we observe how other participants in the same activity describe their experiences. A middle aged Palestinian woman who also has a limited knowledge of Swedish language (level B in SFI) and who went to the same activity tells the following:

"The activity was great, I liked it. It was great for me, because one could ask questions if you did not understand, so others would help. We learned a technique how to draw, talked and had coffee together. They invited us to do many things; some said yes and others did not want to participate. We watched TV, and went once to see the school theater, but I cannot remember what it was about. There was no problem that there were different levels, we were buddies. "(J)

A young Syrian woman, one of the most advanced Swedish speakers in the same group takes up the question how study circles are organized; that even though a study circle is loosely structured and opportunities are given to participants to influence the content of the activity, people are not prepared to take the opportunity. She describes the situation the following way:

“The leaders of the group asked if we would like to suggest something we could do together, but nobody really came up with any suggestions, so we sat and talked a little bit. Some talked but some others did not say anything. It would be better if there was a plan what we should talk about; to be more structured.” (F)

Similar conclusion is made by the author of the study on how social relations inform learning and acculturation among immigrants in the United States; she argues that individual’s knowledge and skills, in this case language skills are not enough for developing social capital, but instead it is the norms of the group which play a crucial role (Alfred, 2010, p.233).

Many interviewees see associational activities as a valuable supplement to SFI. Some suggest that some other courses would be replaced with associational activities and many tell that the time spend in the activities should be much longer. It is suggested that the activity would be offered to everyone, similarly to SFI, that the activity would take place at least twice a week, and that it would last minimum three months. What the interviewees consider crucial for language learning is the small group size, heterogeneous group (different native languages) and direct contact with native Swedish speakers.

### ***Social connections***

Interviewees describe their relations with organizers, other participants and other people they come across in the activities, generally with positive or very positive terms. Most interviewees express appreciation for the relaxed and welcoming atmosphere and good social relation in the activities. Many participants compare the relations to friendships or family relations. One participant resembles the relationship to a caring mother-child relationship. In situations where participants do not feel that any special connection is created between the organizers and themselves, they still describe relations as fair, professional and respectful. A young Palestinian woman who was participating in culture and language introduction course in Homeland society (Hembygdsförening) and who was particularly happy for the kind and welcoming attitude they were received with, describes the relations the following way:

"Sometimes we went to their homes; we cooked together; we also met their family members. Very nice, we were like friends. We used to take a bus back home and it takes

20 minutes; so we were talking that we did not want to come home. We would rather stay there (laughing). It feels so good to be there. They (organizers) are like my own family. I asked if I could keep in touch with them when we are finished and they said, of course. They would also like to meet my husband; once I took my daughter with me to the activity and she liked to be there too. I've actually planned to invite them to my home."(E)

Interviewee quoted above describes how she feels better in the activity than at home; activity becomes a kind of “place of refuge”. A study carried out among Muslim women in Norway confirms that participating in associational activities can provide private time which is free from regular duties and family responsibilities, and such experience of “place of refuge” strengthens the value of the activity (Walseth, 2006, p.447).

Similarly, many women who have been participating in a women’s cafés value the safe atmosphere in the activity. The first quote is from a middle aged Somali woman who has a large family here in Sweden and who does not have any formal education from her homeland. The second quote is from a middle aged Iraqi woman who likewise has a large family and no formal education. Both interviewees find the women’s café an exceptionally positive experience.

"We are five students and three leaders in the café, and we come from different countries, all of us. We are like one big family. They ask us what we have been doing during the weekend. We talk about our lives and experiences, how we bring up our children; and we do different things together. We learn many things we cannot learn at school. We cook and show things from our homelands. And once, even the priest came to salute us (smiling). It feels comfortable; that you talk with someone you know, that you do not need to feel ashamed, that you talk freely. They (the leaders) encourage us to learn the language even if we are a little bit older, and even if one feels shy."(Z)

"It's three older women who are with us in women’s café. They try to help us with all means, and they speak simple Swedish. The time goes so fast there that we do not notice it at all, and we do not want to have breaks or anything. They are so nice, just like a mother with her children; positive, and they make us smile. "(A)

Many interviewees stress the important role of the organizer. Similar findings are shown by a study on Muslim immigrant women in Norway; women underlined how the instructor of the sports activity they were participating in, made them feel special, and how such feelings created sense of social support and belonging (Walseth, 2006, p.457). In this study it is not only women

who are satisfied with social relations in the activities; also men appreciate and value positive and dedicated attitude of the organizers. A Palestinian man who participated in the cultural study circle considers the organizers as his new friends:

”I have now close friends in the organization, actually both who are working there. They help everybody and just try to make things easier. They are open-minded and respect everyone. They love their work. It is hard to find people who love what they are doing, even if they don’t get paid for it. And they do, I can see it.” (L)

In this study social relations among the participants are described as relaxed and positive by almost all interviewees. In study circles some participants know each other from SFI and some are friends or neighbors. It is especially appreciated that everyone has a chance to participate in discussions on equal terms whether it is in study circles or for instance in volunteer training. Some women find it important to have only women in the group; and in some cases it is even a precondition for participation. They explain that in a woman only group they can express themselves more freely, have more space to talk, and do not need to fear that any man would be laughing at their opinions. None of the interviewed men preferred separate groups. Men found the discussions more interesting in mixed groups, and one saw it as a benefit to have mixed group because it provides an opportunity to learn what is important to women.

In individualized activities where participants help the organizers as assistant trainers or assistant leaders to children, or where they help to organize events and activity groups, participants are exposed to different kind of situations and social contacts. Some feel that they can provide valuable help in the association and that their presence and input is truly appreciated by the organizers; while some others describe more complex situations. A middle aged Afghan man who is assisting in an activity group for children, is very pleased with his relations with organizers, but finds it difficult to connect with the parents of the children. In addition, he would like to be able to be more productive in the activity, but feels his poor language skills hinder him. He tells about the social relations in the following way:

"The leaders are friendly and kind, and they are very helpful with everything. No problem at all. It goes well also with children. I do not have much experience with children so it is new to me. I am learning how to work with children, it is good. But with

parents it is not so good. I do not want to sound like I am complaining but there is a problem. Parents are worried; they think that maybe their child is in danger. They have heard a lot about Afghanistan. It is normal. I accept it; the children are important. Parents do not say anything, but when I approach them I feel it. I say "hello" but they do not smile. There is no warmth."(V)

Also another man, the young man from Sudan who is assisting in children's sports training, has similar experiences. He tells the following:

"I have a good relationship with the coaches; we are not close but we treat each other with respect. But there is no contact with the parents. Once I saw a mother of a kid I was training with, to talk to the coach. I believe she asked about me. But, no, they do not talk to me directly." (W)

As social interaction is crucial for social inclusion, it has been argued that it is not only responsibility of the newcomers to adjust to mainstream, but also members of the mainstream need to become more inclusive in their behavior; the unwillingness of the mainstream to interact with newcomers is a problem which requires attention. Newcomers need to be equipped with necessary language and cultural skills, but also representatives of majority population need to be equipped with awareness, attitudes and skills so that engagement and communication with newcomers can be successful (Yates, 2011, p.470).

Even though interviewees show general satisfaction and joy for social relations in the activities, some; especially those who have been in group activities, tell that they would like to have more direct contact with native Swedes. In addition, interviewees tell how the fact that the activity is scheduled to take place only a certain amount of times is influencing the relationship; that there is not enough time to develop relationships to full potential.

### ***Well-being***

Several interviewees describe how participation in associational activities has made them feel better for different reasons. Some describe how the activity has helped them out from social isolation and passivity; one man expresses that without such activities there would be a risk him

mainly staying indoors watching television. Another man tells how important the new friends gained through the activity are to him; that his life situation has changed from being alone to many acquaintances who cannot all be considered friends but who at least share the same interest. . Several women are telling how participation in activities is generating belief in the future and making them feel more brave and resourceful. In some cases an activity, especially some individualized activities, can be reshaping person's identity and bringing back self-worth which has been damaged during long migration process and for the difficulties in establishing oneself in the labor market. An elderly Syrian man whose wife is in Turkey and who is alone in Sweden came to the country two years ago. He has practical working experience from Syria but because of his high age he does not have great hopes for finding a job; he also finds it very difficult to learn the language. His situation changed dramatically once he joined the activity. He is teaching chess to children at schools, and acting as a chess referee in tournaments. He describes how his language skills are improving, social isolation is diminishing and the activity has brought new content in life. He tells he is happy in the present situation. He describes his relations the following way:

"We go around and teach chess to children in ten schools. We also organized a competition with 150 participants and I was one of the referees in the competition. We are like colleagues in the club; we share the same interest. It is a very professional relationship. Whether this will lead to a job or not, is less important to me. We are volunteers; it was the same thing also in Syria. Everyone had their own jobs, their own livelihood. But here I can consider this to be my job. I feel I am liked and appreciated."  
(T)

This finding is interesting as civic engagement could be particularly important for elderly immigrants who often face special difficulties in settling in the new society. A prior study indicates that older immigrants experience more losses than gains in migration; they have lower exposure to new language, their skills are less transferable and they often lose their leading role in the community (Gele and Harsløf, 2012, p.168). In addition to self-reported well-being, social participation contributes to better health, which is often worsened by the migration. The association between membership in voluntary organizations and good health and well being has been documented in several countries, including Sweden (Sirven and Debrand, 2008, p.16)

Similarly, the middle aged woman from Caucasus region who has been in Sweden for several years has found a new way forward in the activity. She used to have a professional career in her homeland and is highly educated. Despite the qualifications, and the fact that she has learned Swedish, she has not been able to find a job. She tells how before joining the activity she felt she was living like an isolated flower. Joining the activity has given her new hope; she is able to use some of her skills and most importantly of all she has an opportunity to be with people. She hopes the activity will lead into a job in the future.

In addition, positive influence to general well-being has been experienced by a young man from Caucasus region. He is training and competing in wrestling; the club provides a network of friends who show respect towards each other. He tells how his Swedish language is still very limited but steadily advancing. At the club everyone speaks the same language, belong to the same group, the feeling of camaraderie is strong and he has found a direction in life through the club. He hopes that being active in the club will also benefit him when he will apply for future studies. He would like to become a policeman or find another way to work in support of young people.

Experiences described above contain signs of identity construction. A study about ethnic minority participation in sports in Norway indicates that expressive sports communities can produce feelings of being accepted by others as the person one is, which then is giving a positive confirmation of one's identity (Walseth, 2006, p.458). Even in situations where the activity is not providing new meaning in life or identity confirmation, the activity can improve general well-being. The middle aged Syrian man who has a long academic career from his homeland and highly specialized professional skills; he is waiting for validation of academic credentials and is hoping to re-establish his career in Sweden once documents are in order. He is focusing on learning the language but is suffering from social isolation. When not studying in SFI he is training in the gym or enjoying long walks in the nature. He says that he does not have any friends in Sweden. He joined cultural study circle and tells the following:

"For me personally it is the language which is most important element in such activities, perhaps for someone else it is the visits or the music, or other priorities, but for me it's clearly the language. The activity helps me to get in touch with the community, otherwise

I just go home. I would love to meet people who share the same interests with me. Activities are great, we learn many things which otherwise would take a very long time to learn. And also mentally, you feel better, actually. We play a musical instrument, for example, or see some little dance performance. Such activities allow one to exhale in a way. It is relaxing therefore it has an effect. It feels good, I'm very pleased. "(N)

### *Society knowledge*

Of all the activities informants have been participating in, only volunteering training is directly focusing on providing society knowledge. In other activities gaining society information is a secondary objective compared to language learning. Still many interviewees find the information gained during the activities useful; it has helped them to better understand the Swedish society and culture. A young African woman who has academic education and some working experience from her homeland has come to Sweden without family. She hopes that volunteering in an immigrant information center will provide her some tangible skills which could help her to get a job. She tells about her experiences the following way:

“The idea to establish an information center for immigrants is very good and I am looking forward to the day we can open our doors. There is such a vast need of information; how the society is working. We volunteers are learning a lot about everything: health, discrimination, economy, business life, housing, costs and bills. The leaders are helpful and patient. We ask many questions and they try to explain it all. They really do well they job. They show that we are in the same team, they are not acting like a boss. They also talk about it, that we are one team. It works because they behave like that. Volunteering training is perfect, because for me, most valuable is the knowledge I gain. They give us the information in a good way; first they explain orally, and then they explain in more detail what we do not understand. It is a little bit too much, but we get things to read also. If you take the time to read the material, you can get it.” (Ö)

However, it is not only formal knowledge which is appreciated by the participants; also culture and language introduction provided by Homeland society (Hembygdsförening) and cultural study circle are seen as exceptionally good at providing informal social knowledge. A young Syrian woman who has finished SFI in a short time and is preparing herself for future studies sees the cultural study circle as a good transitional activity; it provides understanding how some things can be perceived differently in Sweden than in countries of origin and by being aware of

such differences one can avoid many embarrassing situations. A young Syrian man was participating in the same activity and he describes his experience the following way:

"I think that this activity made our trip much shorter, several years shorter. What I mean is that we got a chance to look inside a Svensson's life, how Swedes think and behave, what is acceptable and not acceptable. We've got these things already now, everything in place. "(P)

### 7.3. Participant impact assessment

How can the previous findings be understood in the light of the framework for impact assessment? (Rochester, Ellis Paine and Howlett, 2012, p. 167, see page 16 of this study) Based on the interviews potential human capital, social capital, physical capital and cultural capital gains can be identified as a result of the participation in associational activities. No economic capital gains are mentioned by the informants; however, some membership costs might have been saved when participating in club activities as a part of an introduction plan. Findings are similar to the study from Canada where it was examined if and how volunteering experiences can attenuate the negative effects of migration. The authors conclude that benefits of volunteering include social and human capital gains which provide a stepping stone for the integration of immigrants into the host society (Handy and Greenspan, 2008, p.956).

In this study *the human capital* gains mentioned are predominantly language skills but also other personal skills such as working with children, organizing activity groups or speaking in front of a group; also team work and improved employability can be identified. The positive impact on language skills appears very general as both men and women, young and elderly share the same experience; in addition, it does not seem to be conditioned by the level of previous language knowledge either. Beginner level Swedish speakers describe how they learn new words, understand better what they hear and learn new phrases. Advanced speakers describe how they learn to understand different speakers, different dialects and more complex new words and texts. They also describe how they get an opportunity to train speaking in front of others, explain Swedish concepts with different words to less advanced participants and train their pronunciation.

*The social capital* gains vary significantly from a few new social contacts gained through the activities to large networks of dozens of new acquaintances; and from new friendships to polite and friendly but more formal and distant relationships. Some new contacts appear resourceful as the interviewees value the information gained through the contacts and see them as a support in their job search; still most contacts appear to be beneficial in terms of language training but not particularly resourceful in any other ways.

Practically all organizers are described as helpful, supportive, encouraging and inspiring. Most interviewees describe how participation makes them feel more capable and valued as a person; and how they feel happier and mentally better after the activities. It is clear that the expressive returns of social capital dominate the experiences; physical and mental health and life satisfaction gains are very valuable and generally present, while instrumental social capital returns are only sporadic and seldom mentioned. Such findings coincide with prior findings that positive social interaction with the locals as well as practices of solidarity and reciprocity, lead to an overall positive change in self-image and self-appreciation. Self-worth is enhanced as immigrants could perceive themselves as individuals with qualities and abilities and not just as representatives of a stigmatized group (Iosifides, et al., 2007, p.1354). This could explain why some interviewees in this study attach to associational activities deeper emotions than what might be rationally expected. As in their daily lives many interviewees experience social distance with majority population and many are troubled for the feeling of being unable to create contacts with the locals; this could explain the great value attached to kind and open personal contacts experienced in activities. Relations with co-participants are positive and relaxing but not perceived the same way personally rewarding as social contacts with organizers.

*The cultural capital* gains include better understanding of Swedish traditions, way of life, culture and values; also more formal knowledge of rules and regulations, taxes, housing arrangements and health care is achieved. Cultural capital is appreciated but not perceived as central by the interviewees; with the exception of those interviewees who participate in voluntary training.

*The physical capital* gains include practical, conversational language training and the volunteer training course. It is suggested by some participants that some other more formal courses would be replaced by associational activities, and that associational activities would be made obligatory for all newly arrived refugees alongside SFI – courses. Through the activities, participants appear to have access to different kind of services, and services of higher quality, than what they otherwise would have access to.

In the figure 4 the impacts described by the interviewees are presented in the context of the activities they have been participating in. The graph is not a quantitative account but it is aimed

at visualizing the relative gains interviewees attach to the type of activity they have been participating in; how the participants have evaluated the impacts in terms of the five capitals. The interviewees were asked to rank the relative gains, and in the graph, number five is indicating very high gains, number four high gains; number three moderate gains, and number two some gains. The illustration is not a comparison between activities as there are only few interviewees who have participated in several activities and who could compare the activities.

The activities are divided in five groups: highly individualized activities, language cafés, study circle focusing on language, study circle focusing on culture and the Swedish code; and volunteering training. The group of *highly individualized activities* includes a wrestling club, a chess club, football training for children; boy scouts, social activities arranged by the church, cultural project in local schools; and language and society introduction in Homeland society (Hembygdsförening). In these cases participants are in the company of several native Swedish speakers and have varying roles and responsibilities. Individualized activities are very strong in providing human and social capital; and strong in providing cultural capital. *Language cafés* organized by the Red Cross and different church congregations are focusing on language training, and groups are either women only or mixed gender groups. Cafés are very strong in providing human capital, but are also appreciated for providing social and cultural capital. Language cafés are best suited for participants who value intensive language training in a safe and encouraging environment. In the two *study circles* the focus is in language training or in cultural activities combined with introduction to Swedish society. Both study circles are very strong in providing human capital in form of language training. The study circle which is focusing on the culture and the Swedish code provides in addition informal cultural knowledge which is highly valued by interviewees.

And, finally, in *volunteer training* the focus is in gaining society information and language training. Volunteering training is particularly strong in providing human and cultural capital, but also strong in providing social capital and even some physical capital as the training course can be documented and might be valuable in job search.

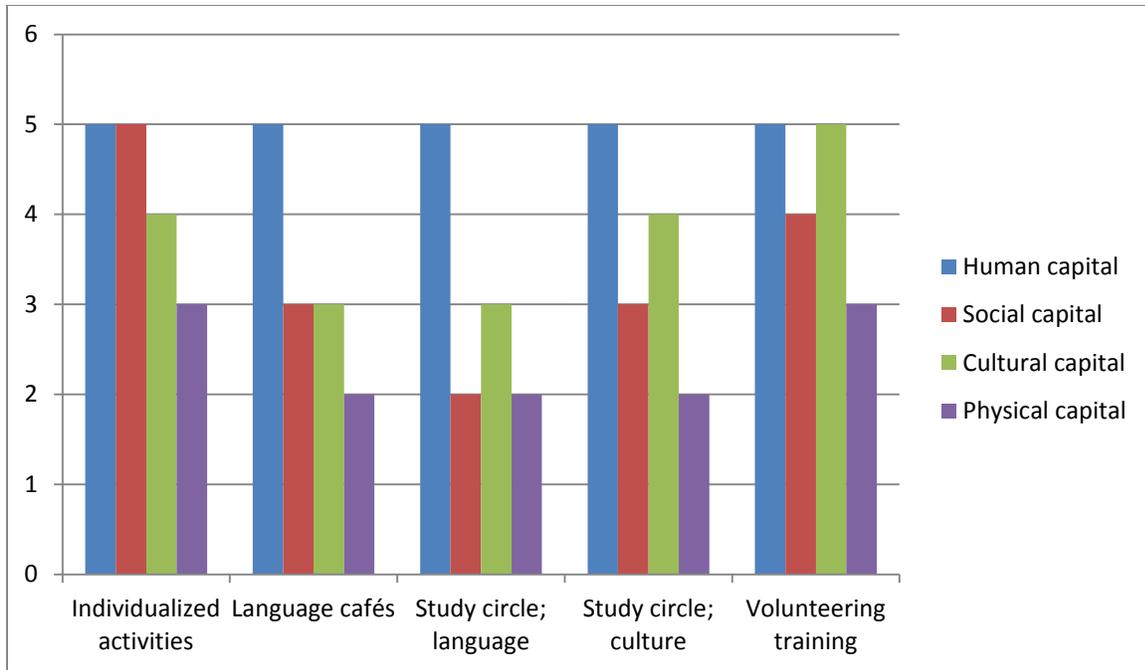


Figure 4. Evaluation of impacts of participation with respect to type of activities

#### **7.4. Meaningfulness of associational activities**

This study reveals a strong connection between individual objectives and priorities in life, and meaningfulness attached to associational activities: if the activity alleviates problems identified by the interviewees (language, lack of social contacts); or if the activity supports personal objectives (job, traineeship, studies); and, if the activity fits to daily life in general (time pressure, family, personal interests), the activities appear to be most appreciated and considered meaningful.

In other words, if finding a job is perceived as an extremely urgent and simultaneously very challenging task, participation in associational activities is perceived as meaningful only if the activity is at least potentially useful in job search: if the activity is believed to provide useful contacts or if the new skills gained in the activity or the activity itself can lead to a traineeship with a potential of turning into a job. If this is *not* the case, even an activity, which to some other person could be very meaningful and valuable is perceived as meaningless and a waste of time. To strongly prioritize job search, does not seem to depend on gender, age, educational background or language skills as similar accounts are given very different types of interviewees: young analphabet women as well as elderly highly educated men.

If instead the focus is on learning the language, which is the case with the majority of interviewees in this study, associational activities are generally perceived as very meaningful; and this is the case in all types of activities. Interviewees who feel themselves lonely, who find it difficult to learn the language in a traditional classroom setting and those who would like to have local friends and contacts but do not know how to get in touch with majority population, are also generally very happy for the offered activities. In some cases the social need is even stronger than the language need, and if such wish is not fulfilled and the contact is not created, the activity leads into a disappointment and is perceived as providing only limited value compared to normal language school.

These findings are similar to ones made by Wikström (2009, p.219); based on a study conducted among resettled refugees, it is concluded that when participation in activities does not result in

employment, it can lead into a disappointment which can then undermine motivation and self-confidence. Therefore he suggests that the participation should be built on realistic expectations and that the offered activities should be chosen so that they would be meaningful also in the long perspective.

## 7.5. Feelings of social inclusion and social integration

All elements included in the framework of “indicators of integration” (Ager and Strang, 2004) are to some extent present in the daily lives of the interviewed refugees, but some themes are clearly dominating while others are only fugitively mentioned. The dominating themes include employment, language learning and social bonds. In the model, three different kinds of *social connections*: bonding, bridging and linking are described and analyzed. Similarly to the study of Ager and Strang (2008), this study indicates that bonding kind of social relations play a central role in the lives of newly arrived refugees. It is important to notice, however, that it is mainly *the core family* that is central in the lives of the interviewed refugees. The extended family in Sweden, in the countries of origin and in other countries is also important, both as a source of support and as a source of concern; but only seldom are local co-ethnic, co-national or co-religious contacts mentioned.

In this study interviewees mention the *permanent resident* status as a turning point for their settlement and integration. This finding slightly deviates from the one made by Ager and Strang (2008), who identify *citizenship* as a foundation for social integration. This could indicate that in Sweden, and when it is a question of people with refugee backgrounds in particular, citizenship status has a more distant and relative value than permanent resident status. Instead of focusing on citizenship it might be recommendable to adapt the use of concept to local circumstances and to use “legal status” as a point of reference when applying integration framework to a refugee population.

Ager and Strang (2004) consider *security and safety* a *facilitator* to integration; it is seen as a neighborhood issue which can also hinder integration. In this study interviewees tell how the safety which they experience in the Swedish society in general, forms the base for their wellbeing; and thanks to the experienced safety, any challenge appears easy to overcome; thus, security and safety is seen more as a *foundation* to integration. The difference between the study of Ager and Strang and this study could originate from the fact that Ager and Strang were collecting data among all immigrants, including labor migrants. This study is focusing on

refugees; and immigrants with refugee backgrounds might be more sensitive to the questions of insecurity, and value safety and security more highly.

In the model of Ager and Strang (2004), *language and cultural knowledge* are grouped together as one facilitator. This study is consistent with the study and confirms that language and cultural knowledge are seen as a facilitator to social integration; however, interviewees are predominantly focusing on the role of the language, while cultural knowledge is not gaining as much attention. Interviewees in this study describe as their perception that there is formal and informal kind of cultural knowledge and that it is especially the informal kind of cultural knowledge which is most valuable for integration; and that it is the informal kind of cultural knowledge which is more difficult to have access to. Consequently, it might be recommendable to separate language and cultural knowledge from each other and widen the concept of cultural knowledge to include both formal and informal kind of cultural knowledge.

This study shows that there can be a difference between hard and soft inclusion; that is, factual participation in planned activities and participants' *feeling of "being a part of"* a social group or activity (Stigendal, 2008). It appears from the study that it is possible to factually participate in planned activities but simultaneously not to feel oneself included either because one does not understand what is going on in the activity, or because one senses social rejection. The study reveals also an opposite experience where an interviewee feels being part of the activity even though her factual participation in the activity is described as very limited by the organizers.

As mentioned earlier, social inclusion can be depicted as a three leveled model which starts from gaining access; advances through engagement and participation; and finds its peak in the use of human potential and gaining empowerment (Gidley, Hampson and Wheeler, 2009, p.130). In this study, we can observe that the overall objective of associational activities which are organized by voluntary organizations and associations and then offered to refugees as a part of their introduction plans, is to build bridges, create opportunities for meeting people and train language in those activities. Thus, the focus of authorities and organizers could be located in the first level of Gidley's model, in *providing access* to participants. The findings indicate that all

individuals who were offered the opportunity to join the activities and who accepted the offer, gained the factual access. Thus, the aim of hard inclusion appears to be achieved.

The interesting question is what do the participants gain access to? In this study many interviewees gain access to *people* and *places*: some interviewees gain access to regular weekly activities of associations; while some others gain access to institutions, old peoples' homes and companies. In the first case the interviewees describe the experience as *participating and learning*, while in the second case experiences are described as *visiting and learning*. Many interviewees gain access to *information*: some interviewees remain mainly in the same physical location but are visited by people who share their personal experiences and cultural knowledge; in volunteering training interviewees are gaining access to formal information; and in language cafés and in a study circle interviewees gain access to some local people while they focus in Swedish conversations. The study shows that there are *different dimensions of access* depending of the type of activity; it could be argued that the more participants interact with local people, both what comes to the quantity of people interacted with and the intensity and time spent together, wider and deeper is the access facilitated. This finding concurs with observations made by Wikström (2008) that it is necessary to see what people are doing together, and how groups are organized.

Some interviewees describe how they are *active* in the association or how they feel *empowered* as a result of the activity; such accounts can be linked to the second and third level of Gidley, Hampson and Wheeler's (2009) model on social inclusion. The second level directs our attention to the social relations and roles inside the association. Interviewees who describe experiences which belong to the second or third level are typically participating in regular activities of associations, have roles as assistant trainers, or assistant leaders; have clear tasks and responsibilities and are acting relatively independently. Examples include an interviewee who is making a film with school children, one who is organizing activity groups in the church; or one who is teaching chess for children. One interviewee describes how he feels empowered as he can use his skills and how he feels appreciated by those who he is assisting. This could confirm findings of a previous study according to which feeling of being valued by others is a relevant indication of social inclusion (Nawyn, et al., p.257). In addition, interviewees indicate that it is

possible to experience participation and feelings of empowerment also in less individualized activities. Some interviewees who during the activities have a chance to present their skills, for example, by cooking food and sharing it with others in language cafés or study circles, express their satisfaction and feelings of being recognized. In conclusion, even though authorities and organizers would only be aiming at facilitating access to social inclusion; some indications of experiences of higher levels of social inclusion, participation and empowerment are also present in the interviews.

The question of participation and empowerment directs our attention to how associational activities are incorporated into introduction plans. Some interviewees describe how the fact that activities are limited in time is undermining the potential of building meaningful social relations and benefitting truly from the activities: firstly, because people are less interested in investing energy in relationships which are limited in time; and secondly, because when the person experiences participation and empowerment, ending the relationship and activity just because it is no longer included in the introduction plan can mean a serious blow to a person's aspirations. Interviewees describe how the activity can give a content life and awaken new hopes for finding a job; but they also express some frustrations for being unable to influence how long time they can continue in the activity. Such accounts, as well as descriptions of cases where interviewees become close to organizers and would like to continue keeping in touch with them after the planned time in the activity has run out, give raise to a question if the activities could be organized in a flexible manner so that prolongations would not only be possible but even encouraged. Parallel findings have been made in a comparative study of resettled refugees in Italy and the Netherlands; the narratives of refugees reveal that integration is perceived through its functional aspects such as housing and employment but also very much through social participation in the wider community (Korac, 2003). Therefore, it has been recommended that the complexity of social integration should be recognized and refugees acknowledged as social actors not as mere policy objects (Korac, 2003, p.51).

## 7.6. Barriers in associational activities

Interviewees who have been participating in associational activities as a part of their introduction plans represent ten different nationalities, men and women, different ages and educational backgrounds. Consequently, there is no direct indication of any target group barriers; that some group would have been deliberately excluded from the activities based on predetermined criteria. In this study target group barrier is more linked to the fact that *not all* individuals who have introduction plans are offered an opportunity to participate in associational activities. Interviewees report that there is much more interest in participation than there are places available. Participants have been sharing their experiences with their family members and friends, and many interviewees have asked from organizers if their friends and relatives could also join the activities.

Behavior barriers are connected to requirements of how “one must behave” in order to be allowed to participate. Some interviewees with very little or without any Swedish language skills describe how they are normally accompanied by one of their children, husband or other friend or family member, who can translate from Swedish to their mother tongue when necessary. Going to an activity without such a support, especially when activity takes place in a group of native Swedish speakers, can become a barrier to these people. One interviewee tells how she took her teenage son with her in the activity as she does not want to go such places alone; son’s presence was approved by the organizers and other participants but it was not how the activity was meant to take place. This could be an indication of potential behavior barrier.

Resource barriers are linked to issues “one must have” in order to be able to participate, such as money, skills, contacts or education. Interviewees in this study do not identify any money, contact or educational barriers but some information, time and skill barriers are mentioned. *Information barrier* appears in two different contexts: some interviewees would like to participate more in associations but lack information of existing opportunities. Some other interviewees, namely those participating in volunteer training, feel that information flow can become overwhelming and too much to handle. *Lack of time* is mentioned by some mothers with children; they feel they cannot participate in activities if the activities are organized late in the

afternoon as the time collides with family responsibilities. *Swedish language skills* are taken up by many interviewees as a potential barrier of participation but the experiences and opinions are contradictory. Most interviewees who have advanced language skills believe that lack of language skills forms a barrier for participation; however, most interviewees who *themselves* lack Swedish skills do *not* find it as a barrier to participation. The topic is relevant to participants but also to organizers therefore, through the following individual examples, I try to show how different people are tackling this barrier.

Example 1: An interviewee with very little understanding of Swedish is participating in an activity where she is with several local native Swedish speakers. The interviewee is nervous and finds it difficult to understand what is happening; she also feels uncomfortable in a strange environment. The interviewee is warmly met; organizers show understanding and patience in communication. Nervousness starts to fade away; the interviewee writes down new words she is learning, repeats the words, and studies the words in a bus on a way home. She feels happy; and is looking forward to the next meeting. The content of the activity is of secondary importance to her; it is the meeting on a personal level which is most important; her understanding of Swedish is improving.

Example 2: The meeting is similar as described above but the interviewee does not say much. She relies on her son who takes care of translation. From the organizers' perspective the encounter appears unsuccessful; however, interviewee herself finds the organizers very kind and welcoming and enjoys observing what the organizers are doing. She feels she is participating and finds the activity both positive and meaningful. She would like to continue in the activity if her son can continue accompanying her.

Example 3: An interviewee with very little understanding of Swedish is participating in a study circle focusing on language, where most participants are more advanced in Swedish than herself. She does not understand what is being said and gets frustrated. She feels isolated, and feels that nobody is paying attention to her; she feels herself badly treated. She wants to leave the activity and is not interested in joining any other activity either.

Example 4: In a similar situation, another interviewee also with very little understanding of Swedish, starts to search company of other participants whom she knows before and who speaks the same language than herself. She does not engage herself much in Swedish conversation, but still finds the activity relaxing and socially enjoyable; however, some other participants in the same group find her conversations in other language, distracting. She would like to continue in the activity.

Example 5: Finally, in a similar situation, in a study circle focusing on culture, an interviewee when he does not understand what is being said asks for help from other group members who translate the main parts of the conversation. The conversation then continues in Swedish. The participant finds the activity very meaningful both in terms of content and language; he tells that the activity has saved him many years in terms of integration, and that his understanding of Swedish language has improved significantly. Other participants from the same group are positive about their own roles as mentors; they are able to use Swedish language when helping the beginner. Learning the language is seen as a common project in the group. The interviewee would like to continue in the activity.

The examples show that non existing Swedish language skills do not automatically lead into a resource barrier which would hinder participation; if the activity is structured and carried out in a controlled manner, the potential barrier can be avoided.

## 8. Conclusions

The aim of this study was to gain understanding about social inclusion through associational activities when participants are adult refugees recently settled in Sweden. The focus of the study was on the experiences of the participants themselves, so that their individual life situations, aims and limitations would create the framework against which the meaningfulness of associational activities would be evaluated. The topic is relevant because while migrants and refugees are struggling in finding their way deeper into the society, there is an unutilized potential in the associations and voluntary organizations as an arena of social integration. Simultaneously there is a potential risk that harnessing or activating such potential would take place as a top-down exercise where the voices of the end-users, in this case refugees, would not get rightfully heard. Through this initiative, to collect and analyze experiences of refugees who have been participating in associational activities as a part of project NAD, this study hopes to amplify their voices.

This study indicates that social inclusion can be facilitated by a common effort of authorities and civil society operators, and that such activities are generally experienced as welcome and highly meaningful by refugee participants. Associational activities are opening a door to a new social sphere which has appeared to be out of their reach before. Through the interviews it is shown that the associational activities can provide access to people, places and information; and that all these elements are highly appreciated by the participants. However, the positive findings are conditioned by the individual needs, aims and limitations of the participants. Motivation and associability expressed by the participants is depending on, if the person is finding the participation meaningful from his or her personal point of view. If the most urgent need which is expressed by the person, concerns a job, language skills or local social contacts, the activity should preferably have the same focus, so that positive results could be achieved. In addition, the results indicate that the barriers of lack of time and limited language skills can influence the outcomes. Participants without any Swedish language skills are particularly fragile and need special attention in order to allow for their successful participation in the activities. Finally, this study indicates that not only can such activities support and facilitate access to social inclusion, but also participation and in some cases indicative experiences of empowerment are achieved.

More research is needed however, to be able to establish under what conditions the second and third level of social inclusion can be achieved; what is needed so that refugee participants have even more opportunities to use and further develop their skills within the associations? And maybe even more importantly, how it can be guaranteed that refugee participants are able to act on equal terms both within the activities and already in the preliminary phase, during the preparation and decision making process?

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Date and place:

Interviewee; name, country, language, interprets used:

Introduction: presentation (also interpret), purpose, consent, confidentiality, expected time, results, consent for recording

Explain structure of the interview: two parts; everyday life and activities, specify activities

Questions:

First part; everyday life

Please tell me about yourself?

Additional questions if needed: time in Sweden, reason for migrating, family situation, educational or professional background

Could you please describe a typical day for you?

Additional questions if needed: how is the day structured; language studies, other activities, free time, local friends, chances to speak Swedish, role of family, ethnic networks, participation in ethnic, cultural or religious organizations, contacts in the society

When you think about your daily life, how does it feel?

Additional questions if needed: Can you describe a situation when you feel satisfaction or happiness? Can you describe a situation when you feel frustration or sadness?

If you think 5 to 10 years ahead, how would “a good life” look, for you personally?

Additional questions if needed: Is there something you would like to achieve? Is there anything that can prevent you from achieving it? What kind of challenges are there on your way to your aim? If there are no dreams, how is the life then perceived? Is it satisfactory?

Second part; associational activities

Inform about the change of focus; repeat the activities interviewee has told about; specify the activity which is in focus

Can you please tell about the activity? What did you do together?

Additional questions if needed: how many times, how often, with whom, what location

Could you tell me more about...?

How do you feel about the activity in general?

Additional question if needed: what was good/ not so good/why?

How did it go with the languages?

Additional questions if needed: languages used, how much Swedish/Arabic/other?

How did it feel?

Additional questions if needed: too difficult, good, impossible? Do you think it influenced your Swedish language skills?

How were the social relations in the activity?

Additional questions if needed: Were there other newcomers in the group? Can you describe how the group was working together? How was the relation with the group leaders? Did you feel yourself as a guest, student, friend, or something else? If you imagine a situation when you need help in writing an application in Swedish or a recommendation, would you approach the leaders with such a wish?

Was there any situation when you felt uncomfortable? Why was that?

Do you think you gained some new information or skills? What kind?

Do you think it somehow influenced your health or well-being?

Do you think it is a good idea to include such activities into introduction plan?

Additional questions if needed: What do you think about these activities compared to other courses and activities you have been participating in? How well do such activities fit into your everyday life?

Do you have some recommendation how such activities could be improved?

How would you summarize the overall value of such activities to you personally?

Thank you; assure usefulness of interview and confidentiality of data

## Appendix 2

## Interviewee profiles

Person A: middle aged woman from Sudan, with a child in Sweden, husband and family in Africa, university education and working experience from homeland, one year in Sweden; interview language Arabic

Person B: young woman from Afghanistan, husband and children in Sweden, no formal education, analphabet, one year in Sweden; interview language Farsi

Person C: middle aged woman from Caucasus, husband and child in Sweden; university education and long working experience from homeland, four years in Sweden; interview language Russian

Person D: elderly woman from Syria, several children and large family in Sweden, basic education from homeland, less than two years in Sweden; interview language Arabic

Person E: young woman from Palestine, husband and children in Sweden, basic education from homeland; four years in Sweden; interview language Arabic

Person F: young woman from Syria, husband and children in Sweden, family in Syria and other countries, education from homeland; two years in Sweden; interview language Swedish

Person G: middle aged woman from Syria, husband and eight children in Sweden, basic education from homeland, two years in Sweden; interview language Arabic

Person H. young woman from Palestine, husband and children in Sweden, basic education from homeland; four years in Sweden; interview language Arabic

Person I: young woman from Iraq, husband and several children in Sweden, no formal education, analphabet, three years in Sweden; interview language Arabic

Person J: middle aged woman from Palestine, husband and several children in Sweden, family in Palestine, basic education from homeland, two years in Sweden; interview language Arabic

Person K: young woman from Syria, lives with parents in Sweden, husband in Syria, basic education from homeland, three years in Sweden, interview language Arabic

Person L: middle aged man from Palestine, no family in Sweden, professional education and working experience from homeland and other countries, two years in Sweden, interview language English

Person M: young woman from Iraq, husband and children in Sweden, basic education from homeland, two years in Sweden; interview language Arabic

Person N middle aged man from Syria, no family, academic education and professional career from homeland, one year in Sweden; interview language Arabic

Person O: young woman from Syria, lives with parents in Sweden, international education and academic ambitions, one year in Sweden; interview language English

Person P: young man from Syria, no family in Sweden, family in Syria, basic education from homeland; interview language Arabic

Person Q: elderly woman from Afghanistan, husband and large family in Sweden, no formal education, analphabet, less than a year in Sweden; interview language Dari

Person R: elderly woman from Syria, husband and large family in Sweden, no formal education, analphabet, five years in Sweden; interview language Arabic

Person S: young man from Syria, lives with parents in Sweden, basic education from homeland, three years in Sweden; interview language Arabic

Person T: elderly man from Syria, no family in Sweden, wife in Turkey, practical working experience from homeland, less than two years in Sweden; interview language Arabic

Person U: young man from Caucasus, wife and several children in Sweden, children and family in homeland, some education and professional experience from homeland, three years in Sweden; interview language Swedish

Person V: middle aged man from Afghanistan, wife and children in Sweden, dependents in homeland, manual skills from homeland, two years in Sweden; interview language Swedish

Person W: Young man from Sudan, no family in Sweden, academic education from homeland, two years in Sweden; interview language English

Person X: Young woman from Syria, husband and a child in Sweden, academic education from homeland, one year in Sweden; interview language English

Person Y: Middle aged man from Jemen, wife in Sweden, dependents in Yemen, professional education and experience from homeland, less than a year in Sweden; interview language English

Person Z: Middle aged woman from Somalia, husband and large family in Sweden, no formal education, less than a year in Sweden; interview language Arabic

Person Å: Middle aged woman from Syria, husband and children in Sweden, academic education and professional career from homeland, two years in Sweden; interview language Swedish

Person Ä: Middle aged woman from Iraq, husband and large family in Sweden, no formal education, two years in Sweden; interview language Arabic

Person Ö: Young woman from Ethiopia, no family in Sweden, academic education from homeland, two years in Sweden; interview language English