

The Effects of Identity and Natives' Attitudes in Young Refugee Immigrants' Experiences and Perspectives of Integration in Larvik

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ABSTRACT

The ongoing global refugee crisis has brought urgency to questions related to how integration of refugee immigrants should be approached in order to produce desirable social and economic outcomes, both for the immigrants and for the communities in which they arrive. Considering the complexity of identities in integration processes, and the significance of different attitudes towards refugee immigrants, sociocultural aspects of integration require elaborate examination - particularly from the perspective of immigrants themselves. Therefore, this study explores young refugee immigrants' experiences of integration in Larvik, with specific attention to the roles of identity formation and perceptions of natives' attitudes. The main objective of the study is to present suggestions as to how young refugee immigrants' voices and experiences of integration can be incorporated into narratives and policies of integration.

A qualitative research design guided by interpretivist and constructivist positions has been utilized in order to address the research problem and research questions, and to fulfill the research objective. Empirical findings are presented as a result of a thematic analysis of primary data collected through participant observation and semi-structured interviews with young refugee immigrants situated in Larvik, Norway.

Key findings indicate that both the national identity and young refugee immigrants' own cultural and ethnic backgrounds have played crucial roles in their experiences of integration, and that it must be seen as decisive for their well-being to be able to establish and maintain connections to both. By expressing signs of positive and welcoming attitudes, the majority population can lower the informal bar for what it takes to become a part of larger society, enable promotion and acceptance of ethnic diversity and thus enhance the benefits of identifying with more than one cultural background. Based on these findings, this study suggests an increased focus on highlighting positive aspects of immigration and integration, facilitating cultural exchange and raising awareness among young refugee immigrants on the benefits of being multicultural in integration policies, initiatives and narratives.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Global Refugee Crisis

Immigration and integration are two highly debated and frequently mentioned topics in Norwegian politics, as well as in the Norwegian public discourse. War, political crisis, climate change and other catastrophes have resulted in a global amount of 82 million refugees and internally displaced people (International Rescue Committee, n.d). This number is the highest ever recorded, and there are no signs - especially considering the consequences of the current Covid-19 pandemic and the ongoing war in Ukraine - that the situation will be less severe in the coming years (Norwegian Refugee Council, n.d). Refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPS) are, in many ways, among the world's most vulnerable groups. Being forced to leave their homes or countries of origin, a considerable number of refugees and IDPs risk their lives on the run from ethnic, religious, political or other categories of persecution. Living without proper safety nets in unfamiliar surroundings, they face great uncertainty regarding the safety of their own family, their own physical and mental wellbeing, and the stability of their economic future (Professionals in Humanitarian Assistance and Protection, n.d).

The magnitude of the different situations a record high number of refugees and IDPs find themselves in requires imminent action on global, national, regional and local levels. On the one hand, the global refugee crisis puts pressure on the international community to do everything in their collective power to protect refugees and enhance relief for people in areas of disaster and conflict. On the other hand, countries receiving asylum seekers and resettlement refugees are placed in a situation in which they need to pragmatically contemplate solutions, structures and policies that address immigrants' current and future safety, economic and social opportunities and their general wellbeing (Norwegian Refugee Council, n.d). At the same time, they need to make sure that these solutions go hand in hand with the country's social cohesion and economic prosperity (Regjeringen, 2018).

Examples from countries across Europe clearly show that policies and approaches to immigration and integration play a crucial role in the fulfillment of the two aspects of immigration mentioned above. A good example is Sweden, a country that is often pointed out - especially in comparison to Norway - as a symbol of how negative consequences of

immigration can take root in the host society. Critique towards the Swedish integration and immigration model have emphasized a link between heavy immigration flows and an increase in crime and gang culture (Suvatne, n.d). Sweden's prime minister has acknowledged this link, and admitted that many of the visible negative consequences of immigration have appeared as a result of inadequate integration policies mixed with large immigration flows. As a solution, the Swedish government has attempted to adjust its policies to facilitate a stronger sense of belonging for immigrants, and easier access to the labor market through education and sufficient language skills (Wernersen, 2020). Even though Sweden's "failed" attempt at integration involves more factors than the ones mentioned above, their case emphasizes the importance of solutions that can facilitate a stronger sense of belonging and opportunity, especially for refugee immigrants. Considering the significance of the refugee crisis, it is therefore safe to say that it will bring urgency to the question of how integration of immigrants with complex backgrounds and identities should be approached in order to produce desirable social and economic outcomes for both the immigrants, and the communities in which they arrive.

1.2 Identity Formation

Refugee immigrants arriving in Norway are part of a heterogenous group, in which individuals and sub-groups of immigrants each possess their own unique background and identity. Fluctuating between different identities and adapting behaviors in accordance with expectations from both the host society and their culture of origin can be a demanding task, especially if there is a conflict of interest between the two. A recent study from Friberg (2020) shows that young non-European immigrants, and children of non-European immigrants, are usually perceived by the native population as "less Norwegian" compared to what they consider themselves to be. At the same time, most immigrants face expectations from people with similar national, cultural and religious backgrounds to maintain or establish a connection to their original background, to a certain extent (Statistisk Sentralbyrå, 2021a).

Expectations from larger society, people of similar backgrounds and immigrants themselves blend and create a context in which immigrants adopt different strategies in order to adjust to the new society. Specific cultural, social, political and economic contexts largely define how these strategies are developed, making identity-formation a context-sensitive reality

(Uzbek,2019; Berry, 1997). Openly maintaining connections to one's culture of origin can, for example, be more challenging in rural areas of Norway, where reluctance towards minority cultures is generally more widespread. On the other hand, it might be more convenient for minorities to display cultural or religious traits in urban areas of Norway, where minority cultures and beliefs are, comparatively speaking, more accepted (Thanem, Farstad, Haugen, 2016).

1.3 The Significance of Attitudes Towards Immigrants

In addition to - and in connection with - facing challenges in relation to social identities when trying to adjust to a new society, immigrants in Norway often encounter negative attitudes towards their religion and/or culture (Martiny, Froehlich, Soltanpanah & Haugen, 2019). Red Cross Norway (n.d) point out that discrimination and negative attitudes towards immigrants is a global humanitarian challenge, and according to a report from Institutt For Samfunnsforskning in 2020, more than sixty percent of the native respondents claim that the culture and religion of immigrants - especially the non-European ones - is incompatible with the Norwegian society (Brekke,Fladmoe & Wollebæk, 2020).

Negative attitudes, whether they are conscious or unconscious, will most likely diminish immigrants' feeling of belonging to the host-society to a certain extent. Vice versa, immigrants' feeling of belonging to Norwegian society is usually increased through positive relations or experiences with people from the host-society. Red Cross Norway (n.d) has therefore underlined the collective responsibility of not only the Norwegian government, but also the society in general, to include immigrants in various social networks and communities to make them feel welcome. Young refugee immigrants are particularly vulnerable in this context, and therefore require more care and protection (Red Cross Norway, n.d).

Negative attitudes and discrimination towards refugee immigrants are not exclusively displayed by ordinary citizens within the native population. They are also a product of the sometimes harsh rhetoric fronted by government officials and other people with power to dictate the public discourse, such as the most popular media outlets. The current leader of the right-wing "Progress Party" and former minister of immigration and integration in Norway, has in several

debates and interviews made her critique worthy perception of Muslim immigrants clear. For example, in 2018 she argued that “all cultures do not have the same value”, when discussing Muslim culture and values (Karlsen & Newth, 2018). In 2015, when responsible for the government’s immigration and integration policy, she suggested that immigrants were treated too well, claiming that the number of immigrants arriving in Norway at the time would eventually affect the Norwegian welfare system negatively (Krekling, 2018).

Europe’s recent wave of right-wing nationalism is an example of how negative, polarizing, attitudes towards non-European immigrants are publicly expressed by people in power. The Hungarian prime minister’s self-proclaimed role as “the defender of Hungary and Europe against Muslim migrants” (Thorpe, 2018, para.1) is an epitome of this development, which is symbolized by nationalistic - and often unsympathetic - perspectives on immigration and refugees publicly expressed by politicians and people in power.

1.4 Integration & Global Development

Fundamentally, the process of integration of immigrants in Norway encounters challenges connected to the attempt of including complex, often marginalized, groups in socially and culturally complex communities, which is an underlying factor in many global development issues. Although the definitions of *development* as a term come in a wide variety of forms and from many different angles, both integration and modern local and regional development processes share an elementary interest with how “powerful economic, social and environmental as well as cultural and political forces are at work in the remaking of localities and regions” (Pike, Rodríguez-Pose & Tomaney, 2017, p. 3). The refugee crisis, and the cross-border flows of people and culture, and increasingly diverse communities it has produced, are among the forces that are shaping the structure of different local and regional contexts in several ways.

Even though this research has been conducted in the Global North, its discourse bears resemblance to many of the concepts and perspectives introduced in *post-development* and alternative development discourses. Just like post-development in general rejects the traditional perspectives of development and their supposed top-down, westernized, policies and practices, this thesis attempts to challenge the mainstream approaches to integration, and discuss

alternative ways of understanding how integration is experienced by immigrants themselves (Pieterse, 2009). Instead of proposing solutions to context-specific challenges from the outside, post-developmentalists claim that development processes, like integration, should be defined by the people involved in these processes (Pike et al, 2017). Adopting this perspective in the context of integration would imply an emphasis on the empowerment and incorporation of immigrant voices and experiences in integration policies and discourses.

1.5 Research Problem

Based on the significance of the global refugee crisis, the potential importance and complexity of identity in integration processes, and the significance of different attitudes towards refugee immigrants, it is clear that the complexity of social and cultural integration aspects need to be addressed - particularly from the perspective of immigrants themselves. Still, there is little scientific knowledge on the parallel between immigrants' social identities and their experiences of integration in Norway (Martiny, Froehlich, Soltanpanah & Haugen, 2019). Constant, Kahanec & Zimmermann (2009) found the native population's negative attitudes towards immigrants to be one of the most challenging factors in integration, and discrimination to be the single most urgent one. Yet, there is a need for increased knowledge as to how different attitudes affect young immigrants' social identities and their experience of integration in Norwegian communities.

At the same time, the popular narrative on immigration and integration usually focuses on cost-benefit analyses of such processes (Kühn, 2018). In other words, when researchers and policy-makers discuss immigration and integration, the discussion more often than not revolves around the economic benefits of effective integration for the host-society and immigrants, and it is thus likely that they fail to take into account the complexity of immigrant cultures and identities, and the sociocultural structures of the societies in which they arrive.

This research will therefore be seeking an understanding of how young refugee immigrants in Larvik have experienced the process of adapting to Norwegian society and its incorporated norms and culture, with particular focus on identity formation and different attitudes towards

refugee immigrants. It aims to achieve such an understanding by presenting and analyzing ideas and everyday life experiences from young refugee immigrants situated in Larvik, Norway.

1.6 Research Questions

The research problem outlined above implies a few research questions of interest, which will be addressed in this thesis:

1. What are the roles of ethnic and national identities in young refugee immigrants' experiences of integration in Larvik?

1.a) How have the young refugee immigrants experienced the balance between multiple identities?

1.b) How can these experiences be addressed in integration policies?

2. How are the young, refugee immigrants' perceptions of natives' attitudes towards them affecting their experiences of integration in Larvik?

2.a) How do these attitudes affect young refugee immigrants' feelings of belonging to Norwegian society and Larvik?

2.b) How can challenges and/or opportunities related to such attitudes be addressed in integration policies?

1.7 Research Objective

The main objective of this study is to present suggestions as to how young refugee immigrants' voices and experiences of integration most effectively can be incorporated into narratives and policies of integration. This is not to say that the study will contribute to notable changes in Norwegian integration policies, but rather that it will seek to present some ideas in respect of aspects of integration that can, or should, be analyzed further in order to better capture the

complexity of integration processes. Implied in the main objective of this study are a few subgoals:

1. To present, and analyze, young refugee immigrants' experiences of integration in Larvik.
2. To gain a deeper understanding of how young refugee immigrants in Larvik adopt different strategies to deal with challenges that arise when adapting to a new, unfamiliar society.
3. To highlight, discuss and understand factors and experiences that positively - or negatively - affect young refugee immigrants' experiences of integration in Larvik.

1.8 Thesis Outline

Subsequent to this section, the main body of the thesis will consist of seven separate chapters:

Chapter 2 - Geographical Context:

Chapter two provides brief insight into the study area - Larvik, Norway. It highlights general demographic statistics, and key immigration - and integration - related facts and numbers for both Larvik and Norway.

Additionally, this chapter introduces the Norwegian government's main integration strategy, which consists of four focus areas: education and qualification, everyday integration, work and the right to live a life based on freedom.

Chapter 3 - Literature Review

The literature review presents a critical summary of the most frequently discussed ideas surrounding the topic of integration. It brings up themes related to economic integration, economic assimilation, influential integration policies, and some of the most prominent sociocultural aspects of integration.

Chapter 4 - Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework displays key theoretical and conceptual perspectives that will be utilized in order to capture and understand immigrants' own experiences of integration. Theories and concepts included in this chapter are Berry's (1997) acculturation model and the four outcomes of acculturation, definitions and theories in relation to social identities, and finally perspectives on how different attitudes, discrimination and informal boundaries affect immigrants' feelings of belonging.

Chapter 5 - Methodology

Chapter four will lay out and justify the research design and the different research methods and strategies that have been applied in order to approach and analyze the research problem, research questions and research objectives. This includes the choice of a qualitative research design, semi-structured interviews, participant observation, snowball sampling, and thematic analysis. It will also highlight important ontological, epistemological and ethical considerations that have served as guiding principles in this study.

Chapter 6 - Findings

The findings chapter will present an exhaustive and objective summary of the most important findings of the qualitative data analysis. In accordance with the thematic analysis technique presented in chapter 5. The findings will be presented as two different themes, and several sub-themes. The three main themes presented in this chapter are: "Identity formation and attachment", "Balancing between multiple identities" and "Perceptions of natives' attitudes".

Chapter 7 – Analysis & Discussion

Whereas the findings chapter objectively presents an overview of the results of data analysis, chapter 7 will include a comprehensive interpretation and explanation of the findings that were presented in chapter 6. The findings will be interpreted and discussed in light of the research questions, literature review and theoretical framework. As in chapter 6, the discussion chapter will be structured in accordance with the already presented themes.

Chapter 8 - Conclusion

Chapter 8 will bring the thesis to an end by providing an outline of the most crucial findings in this study. It will do so with the research problem, the research questions and the research

objective in mind. Moreover, it will provide suggestions as to how some of the challenges and arguments presented in this study can be explored further in future research.

2. GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

2.1 Immigration and Integration in Larvik, Norway

The geographical area in which this study has been conducted is Larvik, a relatively sizable city and municipality in the south-eastern region of Norway. Larvik has a population of 47 509 inhabitants, including about 3600 immigrants, making it a city in which integration is a relevant and timely topic (Statistisk Sentralbyrå, n.d).

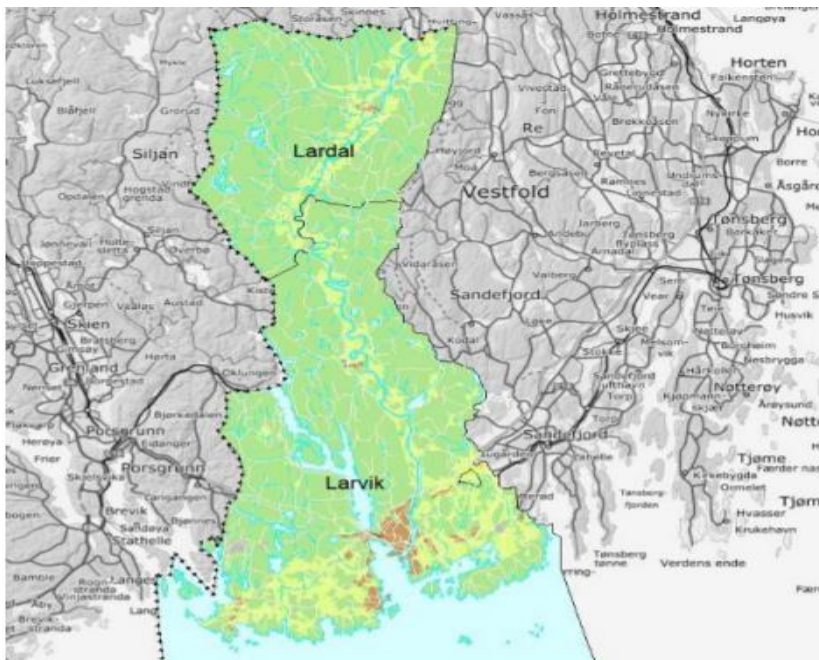


Figure 1. Map over Larvik subsequent to the municipality expansion, 2019, by Larvik Kommune (https://geoforum.no/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/01_05_Erfaringer-fra-nye-Larvik.-Bakke-Ludviksen.pdf)

As a measure to approach challenges related to integration on a local scale, the municipality offers various services and programs aimed at assisting immigrants in obtaining important tools in social and economic aspects of their everyday life. NAV (the Norwegian Labor and Welfare Administration) offers basic language skills, preparation and qualification for work life and basic knowledge about Norwegian society through “Introduksjonsprogrammet”. Introduksjonsprogrammet is a national initiative implemented locally by Norwegian municipalities (Integrerings- og mangfoldsdirektoratet, 2022). As of 2022, the “integration law” requires courses in parental guidance and life skills to be a part of the program. Courses in

parental guidance are only requirements for people with children, and life skills courses aim to strengthen participants' motivation and sense of achievement in a new country (Integrerings- og mangfoldsdirektoratet, 2022). In Larvik, this program is offered to newly arrived refugee immigrants in collaboration with "Larvik Læringscenter" (Larvik Kommune, 2021). In 2017, the municipality of Larvik employed a "migration advisor", whose role it is to effectively assist individuals with immigrant backgrounds in a wide variety of challenges, such as interpreting important information or demonstrating how to pay taxes (Larvik Kommune, 2022a)

Other services of relevance in Larvik are "FlexId" and "Fargespill Larvik". FlexId is a course which is implemented in order to raise awareness among "cross-cultural" youth with flexible identities. The course aims to encourage youth with more than one cultural background to recognize the potential benefits of their situations, and focuses on identity, abilities, resources and challenges (Larvik Kommune, 2022b). Fargespill Larvik is a child - and youth project with focus on art, culture, inclusion and identity. The project consists of around 100 children and youth from a wide variety of nationalities and backgrounds and focuses on creating artistic expressions based on history and culture. The main goal of Fargespill Larvik is to create respect and understanding towards different nationalities and cultures in Larvik through the universal language of art (Larvik Kommune, 2020).

2.2 Immigration and Government-initiated Integration Strategies in Norway

As of 2021, there are approximately 800 000 immigrants and 198 000 Norwegian-born individuals with immigrant parents in Norway. Together, these two groups make up 18,5% of the total population. 48,1% of immigrants in Norway come from other European countries, while the second largest group of immigrants come from Asia (33,5% including Turkey), and the third largest from Africa (14,1%). While the main reason for immigration is work - or family - related, around 2500 refugees arrived in 2020, and a total of 240 239 people are residents with refugee backgrounds or families of people with refugee backgrounds (Statistisk Sentralbyrå, 2021b).

According to the Norwegian government, their main integration strategy from 2019-2022 is to make sure all immigrants are able to use their resources to contribute economically to

Norwegian society, and to provide for themselves and their families. Included in this strategy are four focus areas: education and qualification, everyday integration, work and the right to live a life based on freedom (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019). The “education and qualification” area was established with the intention of providing young immigrants with opportunities of obtaining adequate language skills and educational competence. It also includes the intention of increasing immigrants’ work participation through qualification and education, and to facilitate a safe and stable work life for more immigrants. “Everyday integration” and “the right to live a life based on freedom” encompass initiatives targeting immigrants’ feeling of belonging and participation in the social life, and solutions to prevent negative social control and barriers for individual freedom (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019).

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

As pointed out in the introduction, it is important to acknowledge the complexity of integration processes and the number of intertwined influences behind them. Therefore, this literature review will refer to a relatively broad range of ideas connected to integration. The first section of the chapter will outline the different perspectives from which economic integration has been frequently approached. Further, it will review characteristics of the most dominant integration policies and their influences, before it briefly describes and discusses the most prominent sociocultural aspects of integration. Overall, the objective of this chapter will be to present a critical summary of the most frequently discussed ideas in relation to the topic of integration.

While the emphasis in narratives of integration is put on different aspects of the topic, there are a few key points that most - if not all - researchers in the field agree on. First of all, the notion that it is easier for immigrants to integrate into a host-society after staying in that given society for a certain amount of time, is a notion that most researchers are in agreement on. However, this is more often the case in the economic sense of integration, while it is still more uncertain whether time has the same effect in sociocultural aspects of integration (Laurentsyeva & Venturini, 2017). Moreover, most academics agree on the assumption that the term “integration” fundamentally embodies the level of equality in immigrants’ opportunities to take part in crucial social institutions, whether that is education and language skills (Kulbrandstad, 2017), labor market participation (Bratsberg, Raaum & Røed, 2014), or merely social and cultural participation and belonging in general (Laurentsyeva & Venturini, 2017).

3.1 Economic Integration

There exist a variety of different angles and perspectives from which the topic of integration is being approached. Economic, social and cultural integration are, however, the three most considered aspects of integration among researchers and academics. Economic aspects of integration have - traditionally speaking - been concerned with immigrants’ socio-economic status compared to the native population, popularly referred to as *economic assimilation* (Algan et al., 2012).

3.1.1 The Cost of Refugee Immigration & Economic Assimilation

The concept, and the process behind economic assimilation is usually stressed for two main reasons: immigrants' own psychological well-being and the economic prosperity and welfare of host-countries. Even though assimilation is generally considered to have a positive effect on the psychological well-being of young immigrants, there is still great uncertainty around how it affects individuals across different ethnic backgrounds, and other conclusive factors are often vague (Greenman & Xie, 2008). The fiscal effect of economic assimilation is, on the other hand, more easily measured.

As a result of the refugee crisis, the emphasis of integration and how to approach it has, more than anything else, been put on the short-term costs of heavy immigration flows and therefore resulted in a considerable pressure on immigrants to rapidly assimilate into the labor market. Gál (2019) argues, in line with most researchers on the economic side of integration, that refugee immigration will invariably induce a negative impact on the host-country's economy. To examine this statement in a specific context, Ruist (2015) used public finance data from Sweden to show that the average net cost of a single refugee immigrant in 2007, including all public revenues and costs connected to refugee immigrants, came to a total of 70 000 SEK (approximately 6 672 Euro). In his concluding remarks, Ruist (2015) argues that this sum is by no means able to destabilize the Swedish public economy, or any other European host-country for that matter. And the negative impact refugee immigration has on the host-country's economy is not significant enough to overlook the moral responsibility of European countries to considerably increase their intake of refugee immigrants. However, in order to keep the net costs of refugee immigration stable and contribute to increased public revenue, labor market integration should be one of the top priorities, according to Ruist (2015). Aldén & Hammarstedt (2016) conducted similar research and concluded with corresponding net costs for refugee immigrants in Sweden. However, they added that public costs related to refugee immigrants peaked in the year of arrival and decreased notably with time, and that immigrants' educational background played a decisive role in decreasing net costs.

While authors such as Gál (2019), Ruist (2015) and Aldén & Hammarstedt (2016) approach the costs of immigration from slightly different angles, they all agree that refugee immigration will most likely produce a negative fiscal balance. Moreover, they all argue that economic

assimilation should be stressed in order to stimulate labor market participation among refugees, so that fiscal costs of immigration are reduced. On the other hand, other researchers argue that economic assimilation can benefit the host-country, and that the predominant short-term perspective on economic integration fails to recognize the potential of refugee immigration to produce a positive fiscal balance. This is highlighted by Fratzscher & Junker (2015), who claim that well implemented integration policies should be seen as an investment for future positive economic outcomes, both for immigrants and the host-country. This notion is explained by empirical evidence from Germany showing that “over the long term, the net contribution of refugee migration to the overall economic performance will be positive” (Fratzcher & Junker, 2015, p. 616). In the scenario presented by Fratzcher & Junker (2015), satisfying economic assimilation- and labor market integration-policies will generate positive economic outcomes, both for refugee immigrants and native Germans, after ten years or more. The best-case scenario is, however, that the results of labor market integration are visible after four or five years (Fratzcher & Junker, 2015).

3.1.2 Social and Cultural Factors’ Influence on Economic Assimilation

While still singling out economic assimilation and labor market integration as the highest ambitions, the economic narrative of integration has - in recent decades - moved towards an acknowledgment of social and cultural factors’ potential significance in this process. Cultural characteristics among immigrants can, for example, determine how they function in the labor market (Algan et al., 2012). “Oppositional identities” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, p.181), which is closely connected to natives’ social exclusion of - and negative attitudes towards - immigrants, emerge when immigrants or non-natives actively rejects the dominant culture, and have been found to negatively affect participation in the labor market (Battu, Mwale & Zenou, 2007).

Moreover, the roles and importance of language and education are of obvious significance in relation to economic assimilation and labor market integration. Several researchers have focused on and emphasized the causality between immigrants’ educational level and to what extent they are able to benefit from labor market participation. Kao, Vaquera & Goyette (2013) argue that education is one of the key factors to successful integration in the US, as it not only allows immigrants to contribute to the host-country’s economy, but also to establish crucial

social networks that are otherwise hard to attain. Educational attainment does, however, vary between different factors. Chiswick & DebBurman (2004) have for example found that immigrants arriving as teenagers are less likely than those arriving at earlier stages of their lives to economically assimilate, due to fewer years in the school system of the host-country. Acquiring sufficient language skills is, according to Bleakley & Chin (2004), a more accessible task for immigrants arriving at an early stage of their life and has also proven to be an important factor for economic assimilation and higher wages.

Place of origin, cultural background and ethnic attachment are also frequently discussed in relation to immigrants' success, or failure, to achieve economic assimilation and benefit from participation in the labor-market. Reitz & Sklar (1997) are among the many researchers that have discussed the link between ethnic attachment and economic assimilation, and point out that "racial minority immigrants pay a cost for their minority status in reduced occupational status and earnings" (p.269). This cost emerges from labor market discrimination and exclusion due to ethnic attachments such as accents or physical traits, and are not necessarily related to specific cultural backgrounds, but rather to the fact that they are generalized as "foreigners" (Reitz & Sklar, 1997). Although this study was conducted in Toronto 15 years ago, a number of Norwegian studies have also indicated that labor market discrimination of non-European immigrants is an evident challenge in the Norwegian context (Vrålstad & Viggen, 2017).

3.2 Integration Policies and Modes of Adaptation

When it comes to immigration policies, strategies and the politics of immigration in general, previous research has typically focused on influential perspectives and theories behind different integration strategies (like economic assimilation) on the one hand, or how immigration has become an increasingly hot topic in national politics and elections on the other. A good example of the latter is Grande, Schwarzbözl & Fatke's (2019) examination of "the politicization of immigration issues and its driving forces in the electoral arena" in Europe (p.1444). They have pointed out that the politicization of immigration, and the frequent political debates in relation to the topic, have strong connections to populist right-wing parties' asserted focus on the negative aspects and challenges related to immigration (Grande et al., 2019). Other researchers, like van der Brug, D'Amato, Ruedin & Berkhout (2015) have argued that government parties play the most crucial role in putting immigration challenges on the agenda. In this context,

immigration and integration become political symbols, stances, and heavily debated topics, rather than specific solutions and strategies.

Besides the politicization of immigration, the refugee crisis and the heavy influx of immigrants arriving in European countries require pragmatic solutions aimed at producing desirable social and economic outcomes for both immigrants and host-countries, as argued in the introduction. From a policy-oriented perspective on integration, *assimilation* and *multiculturalism* are broad categories of perspectives on how integration should be handled in practical terms, and undoubtedly the two most discussed and influential approaches. On paper, assimilation and multiculturalism are two opposing approaches with obvious conflicts of interest. In praxis, however, most countries' integration policies adopt elements from both approaches (Odmalm, 2006).

3.2.1 Assimilation

Assimilation is most popularly used in the economics of integration, but it can also be used as a more general term to describe immigrants' socio-cultural adaptation. The term has deep historical roots in immigration literature, especially in the United States, and has frequently been used in political debates regarding how to best include immigrants in the larger society.

In the more general context of immigration, assimilation refers to a set of policies, or processes, promoting or describing a sociocultural incorporation of immigrants into dominant cultural values and norms in the host-country. This process involves immigrants - gradually and to a certain extent - giving up their own norms and cultures of origin in order to adapt to the norms and culture favored by the country in which they arrive (Algan et al., 2012). Assimilationist approaches and ideas are often based on the notion that common values, and "a sense of shared community" (Aggestam & Hill, p.112) should be the cornerstones of a nation's immigration and integration policy, and that social cohesion should be favored over cultural diversity. In this context, the responsibility of integration largely falls on the immigrants themselves, and it is expected that they actively seek to adapt to the national identity of the host-country (van Breugel & Scholten, 2018). These approaches do, however, tend to ignore the psychological importance of retaining a sense of belonging to one's ethnic identity.

Friberg (2016) has attempted to make sense of “assimilation” in the Norwegian context, claiming that the concept has, in Europe and Norway, often been associated with harsh government-initiated policies forced upon minorities. This is in line with Odmalm (2006), who points out that the idea of assimilation is often criticized for the unrelenting pressure it puts on immigrants to change, and Algan et al. (2012) who outline its simplification of immigrants’ behavioral patterns and identities. For that reason, the term has, historically speaking, had negative undertones, and has therefore not been applied sufficiently in the Norwegian context. However, in his study Friberg (2016) describes assimilation as a process, rather than restrictive policies, and finds that minority groups’ adaptation processes in Norway are largely defined by assimilation. His argument is based on the observation that immigrants’ ethnic and religious backgrounds become less defining for their norms and values, and that children of immigrants gradually incorporate shared community values over time (Friberg, 2016).

3.2.2 Multiculturalism & Super-Diversity

Multiculturalism can be seen as a direct critique of assimilation, and refers to approaches, perspectives and policies promoting ethnic diversity. This approach can - according to its proponents - “facilitate contacts across communities, promote tolerance, trust, and respect towards other groups and, in the end, would help develop new national identities.” (Algan et al., 2012, p.3). This notion is echoed by Putnam (2007), who has indicated that integration should be approached by establishing new common values and identities, instead of attempting to assimilate immigrants into already existing, dominant, values and cultures. Further, Putnam (2007) argues that the benefits of ethnic diversity are clear in the long run, but that multicultural communities may be particularly prone to distrust between its members in the short run. He points out that multicultural societies often entail an apparent distinction between “us” and “them”, and that such contexts tend to produce lower rates of trust and friendships, not only between natives and immigrants, but also between natives and other natives, and immigrants and other immigrants (Putnam, 2007). Putnam’s (2007) research on the social effects of ethnic diversity has received considerable attention and sparked further debates on the topic. Van der Meer & Tolsma (2014) are among those embracing a somewhat opposing perspective, claiming that “heterogeneity is positively related to interethnic contact and (consequently to) interethnic trust” (p.32), and that negative relationships between ethnic heterogeneity and social cohesion are more likely to be relevant in the American context than in the European one.

Friberg (2016), on the other hand, takes up an unconventional view on the subject, claiming that ideas about multiculturalism and diversity impede reflections around how minorities gradually adapt to the dominant cultural norms and values in Norway. He also adds that the increased focus on radicalization and religious fundamentalism among Muslim minorities has the same effect. "Super-Diversity", a term coined by Steven Vertovec (2007), has also appeared frequently as one of the most popular terms in European integration literature and debates in recent years. The term is now used in many different contexts, and with several different intentions across multiple disciplines (Vertovec, 2019). Its original purpose was, however, to describe the multicultural society in London as a context in which diversity referred not only to ethnicity, but also to a much more complex and interrelated set of variables. According to Vertovec (2007), diversity is also defined by "differential immigration statuses and their concomitant entitlements and restrictions of rights, divergent labor market experiences, discrete gender and age profiles, patterns of spatial distribution, and mixed local area responses by service providers and residents" (p. 1025). Complex patterns of diversity like this call for policies that can grasp, recognize and deal with the situation, instead of simplifying it.

3.3 Sociocultural Integration

Economic assimilation and labor market integration can be efficiently estimated through many different factors "such as the development of wage, income, and employment gaps between natives and immigrants over time and/or across generations" (Nekby, 2012, p.172). Social and cultural processes of integration, on the other hand, are of more subjective nature, and it is therefore harder to pinpoint the most important factors behind these processes, and to measure their effect (Nekby, 2012). However, some of the most discussed factors behind the intertwined social and cultural processes of integration often include the broad categories of self-identification (Constant, Schüller & Zimmermann, 2013) and social inclusion (Hainmueller, Hangartner & Pietrantuono, 2017).

3.3.1 Belonging

The social aspect of integration is often perceived from two different angles - the role of immigrants, and the role of native populations. From an immigrant perspective, social

integration often revolves around forming a certain kind of belonging to the society in which they arrive. In this context, establishing a feeling of belonging often implies a process in which immigrants comply with the incorporated values, culture and norms of the host society, and feel comfortable with adjusting their behavioral patterns according to them (Laurentsyeveva & Venturini, 2017). An alternative way to define the question of belonging, from the perspective of immigrants, is to examine their feelings of inclusion, and determine whether they consider the host country to be their “home” (Wu, Schimmele & Hou, 2012). Berry (1997), among others, has also included immigrants’ abilities to retain their cultural background and feeling of belonging to their place of origin as an important factor in immigrants’ own perceptions of “successful” integration.

3.3.2 Attitudes Towards Immigrants

The native population - and the extent to which they “accept” immigrants - holds a crucial role in sociocultural aspects of integration. First of all, establishing a certain belonging to - and being able to participate in - the society in which immigrants arrive is practically impossible without the acceptance of the native population (Laurentsyeveva & Venturini, 2017). Public opinion, negative attitudes and outright discrimination are undoubtedly important factors in the sense that they may limit immigrants’ sense of belonging. In a similar manner, these factors can also negatively affect immigrants’ psychological adaptation and identity (Virta, Sam & Westin, 2004). Based on the notion that discrimination towards immigrants is the most urgent challenge in integration, Constant et al. (2009) have argued that well-designed integration policies can be formed by focusing on the specific context of immigrants’ everyday life and identity.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Based on the research problem, research questions and the literature review presented above, the theoretical framework will consist of key theoretical and conceptual perspectives that will be utilized in order to capture and understand the complexity of young refugee immigrants' experiences of integration, and their perceptions of belonging, identity and attitudes towards them. In accordance with Grant & Osanloo's (2016) characterization of the theoretical framework and its most important components, the theoretical framework in this thesis will serve as foundation for how - and in what context - the research problem is being approached, and through which "lens" the findings are viewed. It will also largely contribute to the research design and the choice of analysis method, as will be explained in the next chapter.

The theoretical framework in this thesis will, more specifically, be comprised of the concept of *acculturation*, Berry's (1997) acculturation model, the *multiculturalism* approach to integration, theoretical perspectives on ethnic and national identity, and perspectives on how different attitudes, discrimination and informal boundaries can affect immigrants feeling of belonging and their processes of adaptation.

4.1 Social Identity

In order to explore and understand immigrants' own experiences of integration, it is crucial to obtain an understanding of how their identities can be formed and maintained, and to analyze the extent of internal and external factors' effects on these processes. As this research seeks an understanding of how young refugee immigrants in Larvik have adopted different strategies to deal with challenges that arise when adapting to a new, unfamiliar society, it will also be useful to define a few concepts that can be used in order to understand these processes better.

A person in possession of a certain *social identity* feels belonging to a particular group of people, shares similar traits with people in a particular group and perceives the world around him or her through the eyes of this group (Stets & Burke, 2000). *Social identification* on the other hand, refers to "any social categorization used by a person to define him - or herself and others" (Turner, 1982, p. 18), and thereby contribute to the creation of social identities. Social

identification and social identities also imply the existence of in-groups and out-groups, where an in-group is the group with which a person identifies, and an out-group is all the other groups with which a person does not identify (Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, Flament, 1971). Muzafer Sherif's (1966) *Realistic Conflict Theory* describes how intergroup relations tend to be negative and include prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes when two or more groups compete over limited resources. On the other side, relationships between two or more groups are often positive and harmonious if the groups share a common goal or purpose, and are therefore interdependent (Sherif, 1966).

4.1.1 Ethnic and National Identities

Based on the definition of social identity, a person's ethnic *identity* can be seen as the extent to which that person feels belonging to, shares similar traits with, and perceives the world through the eyes of a specific ethnic group, and is most likely to be maintained in societies that facilitate and accept multiculturalism and diversity (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, Vedder, 2001). Encouragement and/or pressure to assimilate, in addition to an inclusive attitude towards immigrants, give room for national *identities* to be formed and maintained (Phinney et al, 2001). National identities are commonly established and defined by a "common culture, namely a system of traditions, ideas, symbols and patterns of behavior and communication that are shared by the members of the community" (Triandafyllidou, 1998. p. 599).

Neither national - nor ethnic - identities exist in a vacuum. Rather, they are constantly affected by - or formed through - interaction with other groups of people or cultures "outside" of the national identity. Triandafyllidou (1998) points out that national identities can develop in response to perceptions that so-called outgroups, such as ethnic minorities, threaten the authenticity of the majority culture. As briefly mentioned in the literature review, Putnam (2007), among others, have presented a resembling, yet different, perspective on how identities are formed in the interaction between minority and majority cultures. He claimed that interactions between majority and minority groups in multicultural societies can, or should, produce new common identities.

Phinney et al. (2001) adopt an interactional perspective on the psychological developments of immigration, and argue that ethnic and national identities' role in immigrants' adaptation to

their “new societies” should be analyzed as an interaction between natives’ and immigrants’ attitudes. Moreover, it is also crucial to consider the context-specific nature of immigrant groups and the societies in which they adapt. National and local integration policies can, for example, be decisive factors in how immigrants shape - and relate to - their own identities (Phinney et al., 2001).

4.1.2 Multiple Social Identifications

Immigrants’ multiple social identifications is a frequently discussed topic in academic literature, and is strongly connected to belonging, inclusion and immigrants’ well-being in general (Phinney et al., 2001). “Multiple social identities” is a term that, in this context, embodies both national identity/identifying with the host-country (Phinney et al., 2001) and ethnic identity/identifying with culture of origin, or dual identity/identifying with a mix of both (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005). Deaux & Verkuyten (2014), however, argue that multiple identifications from the perspective of immigrants encompass a more complex structure than simply national and ethnic identities. Immigrants’ multiple identifications should be understood in the light of national and ethnic identity, but also in light of other identifications of belonging such as class, religion and gender. These identifications are intersectional and will affect immigrants’ behavioral choices and experiences in the everyday life context of integration, according to (Deaux & Verkuyten, 2014).

4.2 Acculturation

Acculturation was first defined by Redfield, Linton & Herskovits (1936) as “those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups” (p.149). Later, Graves (1967) made the distinction between *collective* and *psychological acculturation*, separating between changes in the cultural patterns of groups and individual psychological changes. This thesis will mainly focus on the latter. In his research on psychological acculturation, Graves (1967) asserts that social and cultural adjustment towards the dominant values and norms of a particular society should be seen as a result of frequent contact and identification with people from the dominant group, as well as opportunities to reap

economic and social benefits within the society. Adjustments like this can also be understood as a direct or indirect effort from minority groups to achieve a feeling of belonging to - and acceptance from - the majority population (Graves, 1967).

4.2.1 Berry's Acculturation Model

Acculturation usually involves four different outcomes, depending on how immigrants or other minority groups position themselves in relation to two questions (yes/no answers): “Is it considered to be of value to maintain one’s identity and characteristics” and “is it considered to be of value to maintain relationships with larger society?” (Berry, 1997, p.10). The rest of the chapter will largely be built around the four outcomes produced by the answers to these two questions. Before going deeper into the content of the Acculturation Model (see figure 2.), Berry (1997) notes that it is important to keep in mind that different minority groups are exposed to acculturation for different reasons and might therefore experience these processes differently. Refugees, for example, experience acculturation on an unintentional basis, while labor immigrants have willingly exposed themselves to it. Berry & Sam (1997) have, however, found that the basic steps of acculturation are common for all minority groups, but that these steps vary in grade of complication and to a certain extent results. While acculturation occurs across a vast variety of minority groups, the next few sections will focus particularly on immigrants.

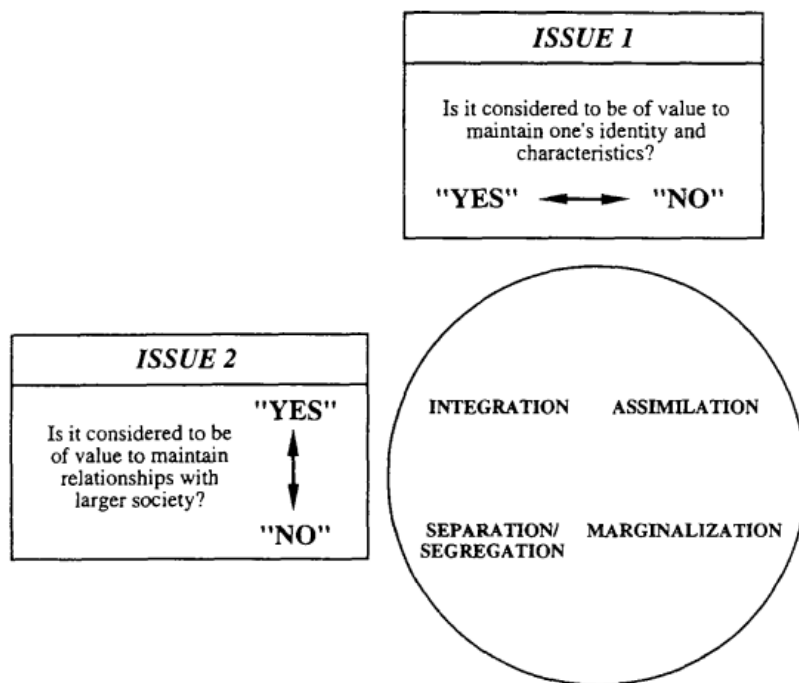


Figure 2. Berry's (1997) acculturation model - the four outcomes of acculturation. From "Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation" by J.W Berry, 1997, *Applied psychology*, 46 (1), p.10 (<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.1997.tb01087.x>)

4.3 Assimilation

Assimilation occurs when immigrants do not see the value of maintaining their own identity and culture of origin, but instead exclusively seek to maintain relationships with larger society (Berry, 1997). It is important to distinguish between self-driven and "forced" assimilation, as it is only when assimilation is directly or indirectly forced upon immigrants that stress and decreased wellbeing follow. However, Berry (1997) notes that minorities may not always be fortunate enough to pursue their own preferred outcome, especially in scenarios where self-interest comes in conflict with integration policies. Forced assimilation is thus, according to proponents of multiculturalism, harmful for the wellbeing of immigrants in the sense that it rejects the fact that they "actively shape their own identities rather than posing as passive subjects in front of the forces of assimilation" (Algan et al., p3). Based on ethnic identity's importance in immigrants' self-perception, Phinney et al. (2001) also argue that the forces of

assimilation and the loss of one's ethnic identity can lead to severe consequences like "anger, depression, and in some cases, violence" (p.505).

4.4 Separation, Marginalization & Oppositional Identities

Moreover, if immigrants exclusively maintain their ethnic identities and avoid interactions with - and relationships to - larger society and the dominant culture, the outcome is usually separation. *Marginalization* can develop if immigrants have no interest in - or are constrained from - maintaining neither one of the two cultural aspects of identity. (Berry, 1997)

These two processes, in which immigrants reject the norms of the majority population, are also referred to as adopting *oppositional identities* (Bisin, Patacchini, Verdier, Zenou, 2011). Bisin et al. (2011) assert that negative, discriminatory, and racist attitudes displayed by the majority population are key factors in the formation and persistence of oppositional identities, in addition to segregated everyday lives in which there is little contact between the minority and majority population. Similarly, Berry (1997) highlights that marginalization often stems from "enforced cultural loss" (p.9) and negative, exclusionary attitudes towards minorities. By the same token, native populations' informal criteria for what it takes to be welcomed as a part of the host country has been shown to greatly affect immigrants' sense of belonging. In other words, the more obtainable these criteria are, the more likely it is that immigrants will feel belonging to the host society. Informal criteria like these are often illustrated through negative attitudes towards immigrants, uncompromising national identities and boundary-setting through clear divisions between "us" and "them" (Simonsen, 2015).

4.5 Integration

The final outcome, *integration*, is the result of immigrants' wish and/or possibility of pursuing and maintaining both their identity and culture of origin and their relationship with the larger society (Berry, 1997). In line with Berry's (1997) arguments, integration is usually the most positive outcome compared to assimilation, separation and marginalization, as it facilitates both cultural maintenance and a sense of belonging to the host country, which has been shown to

increase immigrants' general wellbeing (Phinney et al., 2001). It is also, according to Berry (1997), the outcome that most immigrants favor.

An important implication deriving from Berry's (1997) acculturation model is that his definition of integration allows for - and is exclusively feasible - in societies promoting and allowing *multiculturalism* and diversity. In other words, promotion and acceptance of cultural diversity is required in order for immigrants to pursue and maintain both their ethnic and national identities, and thus successfully integrate into their "new society". Further, Putnam (2007) has argued that government agencies at the national level bear a certain responsibility to assist local communities and municipalities, both professionally and economically, when it comes to challenges related to integration and multiculturalism in general. These arguments are based on evidence suggesting that "the long run-benefits of immigration and diversity are often felt at the national level [...] whereas the short-run costs are often concentrated at the local level" (Putnam, 2007, p.164).

Based on everything that has been stated so far, integration is not likely to succeed if immigrants do not see the value of - or are unable to - maintain their original identity and culture, and simultaneously fail to establish connections to the larger society in the host country. It is, however, crucial to note that there exists several external, but also context-specific factors - such as negative attitudes and discrimination towards immigrants, informal criteria for inclusion and the nature of national and local integration policies - with the power to influence immigrants' possibilities to pursue their own self-interests in acculturation processes.

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1 Introduction

This research has been seeking an understanding of how young refugee immigrants in Larvik have experienced the process of adapting to Norwegian society and its incorporated norms and culture, with particular focus on identity formation and attitudes towards immigrants. Further, by achieving such an understanding, it has aimed to present suggestions as to how young, first-generation immigrants' voices and experiences of integration most effectively can be incorporated into narratives and policies of integration. Included in this objective are three sub-goals, namely to present and analyze young refugee immigrants' experiences of integration in Larvik, and to gain a deeper understanding of how they adopt different strategies to deal with challenges that arise when adapting to a new, unfamiliar society. And finally, to highlight, discuss and understand factors and experiences that positively - or negatively - affect young refugee immigrants' experiences of integration in Larvik.

As a means to approach the above-mentioned aims and objectives, it has been pivotal to incorporate a well-suited research design and research methods. This chapter will outline and justify the choice of a qualitative research design, including the utilization of both inductive and deductive reasoning and interpretivism and constructivism as key epistemological and ontological positions in this research. It will also describe how and why the purposive snowball sampling method, semi-structured interviews, participant observation and the thematic analysis technique have functioned as effective research methods in this study.

5.2 Qualitative Research Design

The research design for this study is to the greatest extent defined by the adoption of a qualitative research methodology. Qualitative research is, in contrast to quantitative research, predominantly concerned with the meaning of text, and focuses on the deeper meaning behind social phenomena, rather than generalizations (Bryman, 2012). As will be stated clearly and in detail throughout this chapter, the qualitative research methodology in this research entails a mix of inductive and deductive reasoning, interpretivist and constructivist positions, a

purposive snowball sampling technique, semi-structured interviews and participant observation, and finally a thematic analysis method.

A qualitative research methodology is suitable in contexts where the aim is to perceive challenges through the eyes of the target group, and to interpret how they make sense of the world around them (Bryman, 2012). The aim of this research is not to establish a generalization or to solve the challenges of integration in Norway, but rather to dive deeper into the minds and experiences of young immigrants and try to understand and analyze the connection between social identities, different attitudes towards immigrants, and their experiences of integration.

5.2.1 Inductive and Deductive Reasoning

Further, this research has involved both *inductive* and *deductive* reasoning. Even though inductive reasoning aims to produce theories and deductive reasoning seeks to test them, Bryman (2012) points out that they are often used in harmony with each other. Firstly, an integral part of this research is to generate new ideas and insights into young refugee immigrants' experiences of integration. This process has involved analyzing the collected data in order to find patterns from which some preliminary conclusions can be drawn, and therefore includes inductive reasoning (Bryman, 2012).

However, I am already assuming, based on existing theories and research presented in the literature review and theoretical framework, that identities and different attitudes towards immigrants play crucial roles in integration. While still aiming to produce new ideas and fill gaps in existing knowledge, this study has utilized existing theories and concepts to approach, characterize and make sense of the collected data. Therefore, it has also involved deductive reasoning to some extent (Bryman, 2012).

5.3 Epistemological and Ontological Considerations

Some of the most foundational assumptions in this research have been guided by the epistemological and ontological positions of *interpretivism and constructionism*.

This research's desire to perceive challenges through the eyes of the target group implies an *interpretivist* approach to knowledge. Interpretivism refers to an epistemological position from which researchers understand, and observe, reality as a product of the subjective meaning each individual attach to it (Bryman, 2012). In other words, the research design, as well as the findings and discussions, in this research will be based on the notion that reality is subjective, and that everyone - including myself - possesses his/her own subjective understanding of it.

Furthermore, the ontological assumption of this research is rooted in constructionism, suggesting that the collected data has been analyzed based on the assumption that knowledge and social reality is actively constructed by different social actors (Bryman, 2012). In the specific context of this research, the ontological position of constructionism implies an acknowledgment of the perspective that integration, immigration and the reality surrounding these phenomena are constantly being constructed by several social actors within this reality.

As will be elaborated on in section 5.5, the analysis of data collected in this research will be approached through the method of thematic analysis. It has been important, in this context, to acknowledge that themes do not appear as passive elements in isolation to the researcher's own interpretation of the data set. Rather, the researcher actively seeks themes that are of interest to them, based on their own understanding of the different aspects of the topic in question (Braun & Clarke, 2008).

5.3.1 Positionality & Reflexivity

An important implication arising from the interpretivist and constructivist positions is the rejection of an objective portrayal of reality. Therefore, qualitative research is often criticized for being guided by the subjective position of the researcher. In this criticism lies a notion that the findings in qualitative research are too dependent on the researcher's perceptions of "what is significant and important, and also upon the close personal relationships that the researcher frequently strikes up with the people studied" (Bryman, 2012, p.405). This challenge has been addressed by acknowledging that my social positions and values will influence the way in which I interpret different experiences in the process of this research, and how the research is conducted. Some of the factors that needed to be considered were my gender, nationality, my connections to both Larvik and refugee immigrants in Larvik, and other aspects of identities as

indicators of my social position. Similarly, I have taken into account that the answers I received - and the patterns I recognized - have most likely been shaped to a certain extent by the young refugee immigrants' perceptions of me.

5.4 Target Population

The target population in this research, from which the sample has been drawn, consists of young first-generation refugee immigrants situated in Larvik, Norway. In this context, “young” refers to people between the ages of 18 and 30. This age group was considered the most relevant for my research due to the notion that young refugee immigrants are particularly prone when it comes to feelings of belonging or exclusion, and because they are - or have recently been - at an important stage in their life in terms of identity formation and change (Red Cross Norway, n.d). It could be relevant to include even younger participants in this research as well, but for legal and practical reasons, the lower age limit was set at 18.

Individuals or groups of people who have migrated from their country of origin - and are unable to safely return - by cause of ethnic, religious, social or political persecution are referred to as *refugees* (Utlendingsdirektoratet, n.d). Exclusively including immigrants with refugee backgrounds in my research, instead of other types of immigrants such as labor immigrants, can be justified by previous research indicating that refugee immigrants from Africa and Asia are the most exposed group in relation to negative attitudes and informal boundaries (Friberg, 2021). However, at the same time as this thesis was written, Norway and other European countries welcomed millions of Ukrainian refugees, giving rise to debates with reference to attitudes towards - and acceptance of - Ukrainian refugees in comparison to other refugees from Africa and Asia (Traub, 2022). It would be interesting to include the distinction between European refugees and refugees from the rest of the world as a factor in this research. However, given the time frame and other legal and ethical considerations, this has been beyond the scope of this research.

5.4.1 Purposive Snowball Sampling

The process of selecting participants for this research has been approached using a “*snowball sampling technique*” (Bryman, 2012, p. 202). Finding young refugee immigrants who would like to speak openly about a sensitive subject like social identities and how they have perceived different attitudes towards them can be seen as a relatively challenging task without prior connections to immigrant communities. Not only as a result of the topic’s sensitivity, but also due to the challenge of gaining access as an “outsider” (O’Reilly, 2012). However, my network of young refugee immigrants - and of people working with young refugee immigrants - has made such communities in Larvik more accessible, and have established a basis for initiating contact with a few individuals within the sample frame, who again sent me in the direction of other people relevant to my research topic.

Therefore, in line with Noy’s (2008) arguments on the benefits of using snowball sampling when reaching out to “hard to reach” groups, in addition to my prior connection to the relevant community, this technique was the most sensible choice in the context of this research. The snowball sampling technique goes under the broader concept of purposive sampling, which means that the selection of participants in this research has not only been guided by previous connections and accessibility (Silverman, 2020). Participants have first and foremost been selected on the basis of specific parameters like age and reason for migrating. These parameters have in turn been established by the research problem and the concepts and theories presented in the literature review and theoretical framework. The practical implications of applying the snowball sampling technique in this research has included making preliminary contact with two young refugee immigrants from my network. Subsequently, these two people recommended other individuals within the sample frame who again recommended more. This process endured until a satisfying sample size was acquired.

5.5 Data Collection

Data for this study was collected between January and April 2022, and is exclusively composed of primary data. The data is a product of semi-structured in-depth qualitative interviews and participant observation with a sample from the target group, two methods that will be

contextualized and justified in the following section. Due to the ongoing pandemic and the government-initiated restrictions and recommendations that have followed, some of the interviews had to be conducted online via Zoom. Yet, some of the interviews and observations could be safely completed within the frame of the restrictions and recommendations implemented by the local and regional government. Conducting half physical/half virtual fieldwork has presented a couple of challenges, but has also made the fieldwork process significantly more flexible during the uncertain times we have found ourselves in. This flexibility can be seen as a result of a well-planned alternative plan to physical fieldwork, which was established a couple of months prior to conducting fieldwork.

5.5.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

In order to gather relevant data for this research, the method of semi-structured interviews has been applied. As all my research questions require an understanding of young immigrant's experiences, knowledge and perceptions, the research has had to incorporate methods that can capture these experiences.

O'Reilly (2012) highlights the benefit of the semi-structured interview by pointing out its flexibility in producing both fixed answers and the freedom to explore ideas with the participants. This flexibility has been useful in the approach of the research questions, as the emphasis in the interview process will be put on young immigrants' understanding of patterns and experiences in the context of their everyday life. At the same time, the interviews have been - to a certain extent - guided by the frame of the research questions, which will also be useful in order to capture themes and narratives that fit the theoretical framework of my research topic. Therefore, the semi-structured interview was favored over the unstructured interview, which is another common qualitative interview technique (Bryman, 2012).

The interviews have included questions related to the participants' general experiences of integration, how they have perceived and reacted to different attitudes towards them, and to what extent they have wished to - and been able to - maintain their identities and cultures of origin and pursue relationships and connections with the dominant culture and larger society. These questions have been developed and gathered in an interview guide which was established

with the intention of enhancing the opportunity of capturing the participants' experiences of the topics mentioned above (see appendix A).

15 in-depth interviews were conducted altogether between January and April 2022, resulting in approximately 100 pages of text transcribed verbatim. Time management was one of the biggest challenges that followed from applying semi-structured interviews as a data collection method in this research. This includes the process of setting up an interview guide, conducting pilot interviews, establishing contact with relevant participants, conducting the interviews, and finally transcribing them verbatim. As a solution to this challenge, a time-plan was established a few months prior to beginning field work, providing a clear overview of the tasks that had to be completed in order to most efficiently carry out a sufficient amount of productive interviews.

5.5.2 Participant Observation

Collecting data through participant observation has functioned as a mutually supportive method alongside the use of semi-structured interviews. It is, however, important to note that the interviews have served as the predominant method, and that participant observation has taken up significantly less time during the collection of data. Semi-structured interviews have facilitated opportunities to explore the participants' ideas and experiences of integration, while participant observation has been utilized as a method to understand and observe how the participants make sense of these ideas in practical real-life scenarios (O'Reilly, 2012). More specifically, it has been this method's intention to observe how immigrants react to - and behave in - everyday life scenarios in which they face challenges or situations related to ethnic and /or national identities. Participant observation have, among other things, involved taking part in young refugee immigrants' everyday life, observing how they react to cultural pressure from both the majority population and other refugee immigrants, observing how they adopt different strategies in order to approach challenges and opportunities of being multicultural. Finally, it has also encompassed observations in relation to how the participants have reacted to and approached a number of different attitudes from the majority population.

Furthermore, the method has allowed this research to utilize the observation of social phenomena through the lens of young immigrants themselves (Bryman, 2012). By observing, and taking part, in the activities that form the social world around the target population, this

research has been able to obtain a better understanding of how social identities and different attitudes affect young refugee immigrants' experience of integration (O'Reilly, 2012). As a means to uphold and respect some of the most crucial points of the informed consent procedure (see Appendix B), including protection of personal data, the more specific contexts in which participant observation has been conducted will remain undisclosed.

A key aspect of participant observation, according to O'Reilly (2012), is that it requires a considerable amount of time in order to most efficiently utilize the method. First of all, it requires time for the participants being observed to get used to the idea of being observed, and thereby act more naturally. Additionally, it takes time for the researcher to become familiar with the group being observed and obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the group as a result of that (O'Reilly, 2012). A limitation of applying participant observation as a method of data collection in this study has therefore been the restricted time period in which data has been collected (approximately 3 months). In addition to that, participant observation has functioned as a method to complement some of the ideas and experiences of integration which were introduced and discussed during the semi-structured interviews, which has limited the amount of time used on the method further. However, this study has, through the adoption of participant observation as a method, been able to collect a satisfactory enough amount of data to pursue the purpose of applying the method, namely, to obtain a deeper understanding of how the participants have made sense of some crucial aspects of integration in practical everyday life scenarios.

5.6 Analysis

One of the most noteworthy challenges with qualitative research is the substantial bulk of unorganized data that is produced from the data collection (Bryman, 2012). Therefore, for the data collected through semi-structured interviews and participant observation to make sense, it has been essential for this research to implement a method of analysis that could fit the research problem, address the research questions and present the findings in a clear and structured manner. There exist a few different prominent methods through which a set of qualitative data can be analyzed. The findings in this research have, however, been guided using a *thematic analysis method* (Bryman, 2012).

5.6.1 Thematic Analysis

According to Braun & Clarke (2008), “thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (p.79). A thematic analysis method was, most importantly, considered suitable for this study due to a few practical considerations. The method has offered a flexible way of understanding the meaning behind a large data set, it has been accessible for me as a researcher with relatively little limited experience, and it has also helped facilitate a practical and coherent way of presenting results and findings (Braun & Clarke, 2008).

The definition of themes in this study has been guided by Bryman’s (2012) general description of some of the factors that categorize a theme. First, the themes that were identified from thematic analysis are produced from categories found in the collected data. Further, the themes should be seen in connection to - and to a certain extent as a product of - the research problem and research questions. Finally, as will be explained further in the next section, the themes in this research are a broader extension of codes that have been assigned to different extracts of text in the transcripts and field notes (Bryman, 2012). Moreover, concepts and theories highlighted in the theoretical framework, such as the social identity theory, the concept of acculturation, and Berry’s acculturation model have been used to analyze and illustrate themes in the young first-generation immigrants’ own experiences and perceptions of integration in Larvik.

Five steps of thematic analysis:

In order to avoid the pitfall of adopting a thematic analysis without any further explanation of the implications behind such a choice, this section will present a detailed description of the steps through which the final product of the analysis has been formed. These steps have been inspired by Braun & Clarke’s (2008) “step-by-step guide” (p.86) for thematic analysis.

The practical implications of adopting a thematic analysis method in this research has involved five different, but intertwined, steps. First, data collected through the semi-structured interviews was transcribed verbatim in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of its content.

Both the transcriptions and field notes from participant observation were read through several times in order to gain a detailed overview. Once becoming familiar with the content of the collected data, I moved on to the second step in which initial codes were assigned to the most interesting extracts from the data set. It is important to note that *codes* and *themes* are two different categories in this process, as codes are much more specific than themes (Braun & Clarke, 2008). For this step, I used a coding program called NVivo, which helped me gain a structured overview of the different categories of data developed from an initial review of the raw data.

The next two steps consisted of exploring and identifying themes and subthemes. First, I looked for different themes based on frequently mentioned topics, and on the connections between the already established codes. Themes and subthemes were then gradually established based on the requirements outlined in the section above. While exploring and identifying themes, I consistently had the theoretical framework in the back of my mind to help make sense of the themes that were developed. Braun & Clarke's (2008) illustration of *thematic maps* served as a significant inspiration in this process, and to make the relationship between the different codes clearer, I prepared my own thematic maps along the process which resulted in a final thematic map for each main theme (see figure 4). The final step in the thematic analysis process was the write-up of the results, which can be found in chapter 6.

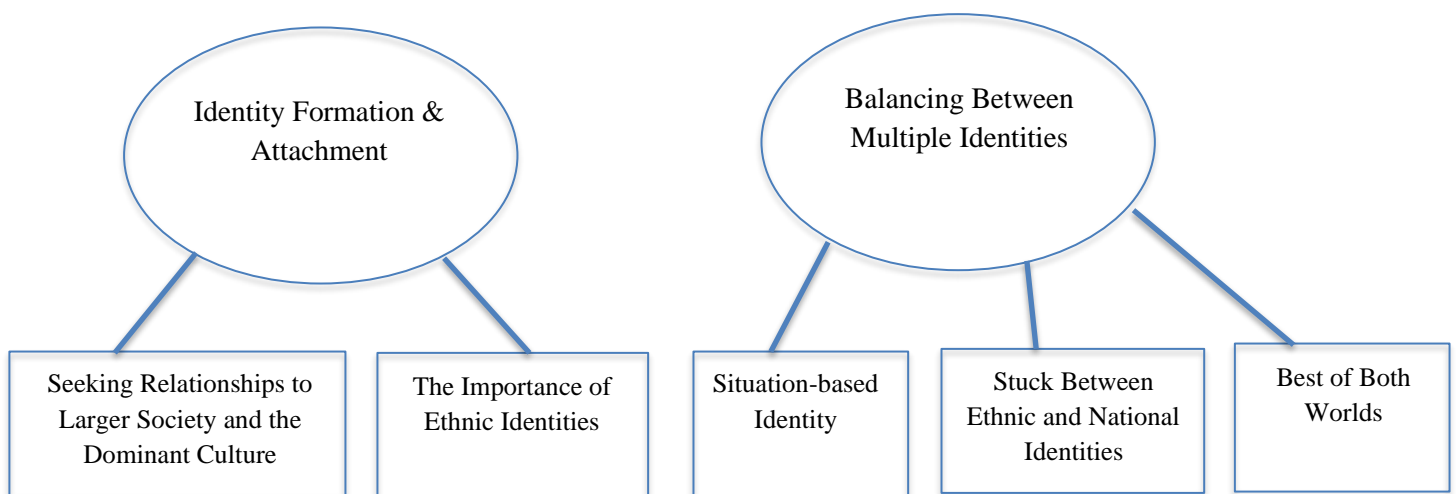


Figure 3. Final thematic map with two themes from this study, inspired by Braun & Clarke (2008).

5.7 Ethical Considerations

It has been crucial throughout this research to dedicate my full attention to establishing a strong relationship of trust and respect between me as a researcher and the participants. A decisive part of these relationships has been to respect the participants' desires, needs and boundaries. As claimed by Silverman (2004), among others, disregarding ethical issues, and failing to acknowledge their depth, is a common error which can result in a scenario where the interests and needs of research participants are overlooked and/or dishonored. Therefore, this research has been guided by several ethical considerations. The ethical issues that were considered before conducting this research can be divided into two different categories: internal and external ethical issues.

5.7.1 Internal Ethical Issues

According to Etikkom (2019), internal ethical issues encompass challenges related to ethical guidelines serving the purpose of regulating the research community and setting standards for "good scientific practice". Some of the internal ethical challenges that have been encountered during my thesis work include the challenge of establishing and maintaining an impartial, open, trustworthy and accountable research process.

These challenges have, in line with Etikkom's (2019) guidelines, been approached by acknowledging that my social positions and values have influenced the research methods and the way in which I have interpreted the collected data (see section 5.3.1). I have also ensured that my research has avoided influence from external political, religious and/or cultural pressure by providing relevant arguments even if they have contradicted the national or local government's integration strategy, for example. Similarly, I have conducted trustworthy and open research by presenting unselective findings, and by avoiding hiding any relevant information, as long as it has not stood in conflict with legal or ethical matters that could have harmed my participants.

5.7.2 External Ethical Issues

External ethical issues, on the other hand, have been concerned with the connection between me, as a researcher, and the research participants and society in general (Ettikom, 2019). I have approached these challenges by respecting the interests of immigrant communities in Larvik, by avoiding putting them at risk for physical and emotional harm, by securing their rights to privacy, and by respecting the variety of cultures I have been in contact with.

First, I have considered that my chosen topic may be a sensitive one that could have triggered emotional harm for my participants. The memories of fleeing from war may still be fresh for some of my interviewees, and negative attitudes and discrimination could be sensitive topics. Therefore, I chose my questions carefully and informed the participants in detail about the purpose of my research and how I wanted to use the information they gave me. Moreover, I familiarized myself with the research participants before interviewing them and refrained from generalizing them as a single group in the thesis. Finally, I have assessed the risk of harm for my participants, highlighted the procedures I have followed in order to gather informed consent and implemented a plan to store and collect personal data in a secure way (see Appendix B).

6. FINDINGS

6.1 Introduction

This research is seeking an understanding of how young refugee immigrants in Larvik have experienced the process of adapting to Norwegian society and its incorporated norms and culture, with particular focus on identity formation and attitudes towards immigrants. As indicated in chapter 1.6, research question 1 will address the roles of ethnic and national identities in the young refugee immigrants' experiences of integration in Larvik, including the experience of balancing between multiple identities and how these experiences can be addressed in integration policies. Research question 2 will address how the young refugee immigrants' perceptions of natives' attitudes towards them are affecting their experiences of integration in - and belonging to - Larvik, and how these challenges and/or opportunities can be addressed in integration policies.

This chapter will present an exhaustive, and as objective as possible, summary of the findings of data analysis considering the research problem, research questions and research objective. It will be approached by presenting the findings in themes and sub-themes, in accordance with the thematic analysis technique introduced in chapter 5. The themes introduced in this chapter are *Identity Formation and Attachment, Balancing Between Multiple Identities and Perceptions of Natives' Attitudes*.

6.2 Identity Formation and Attachment

“Identity formation and attachment”, the theme that will be presented in the following sections, consists of the participants' experiences of attaching to the dominant culture in Larvik and maintaining relationships to their ethnic identities and cultural backgrounds. The common thread in this context is that both ethnic and national identities represent essential aspects of their experiences in Larvik. However, it is evident that the two different identities play decisively different roles, and that they are dynamic of nature. Further, the theme will be directly related to and touch on topics addressed in research question 1: “What are the roles of

ethnic and national identities in young refugee immigrants' experiences of integration in Larvik?").

The theme appeared in many ways to be a central aspect in the young refugee immigrants' experiences of adjusting to society in Larvik. First, both the interviews and observations show that the participants have adopted a great interest in forming relationships to larger society, and in making the dominant culture a considerable part of their own identities. Moreover, it is also clear that their ethnic backgrounds have played a somewhat less important role in their everyday life. However, they have played an active role in the participants' self-identification.

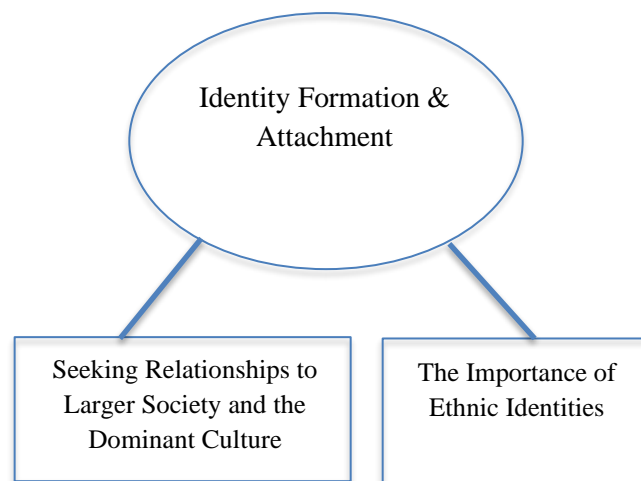


Figure 4. Thematic map illustrating the theme “Identity Formation & Attachment”, including sub-themes.

6.2.1 Seeking Relationships to Larger Society and the Dominant Culture

When asked about their relationship to “the Norwegian culture”, and whether it has been important for them to establish connections to it, the interviewees all declared that it had played an active role in their experiences in Larvik. The importance of national identities was underlined without exceptions during the interviews. The emphasis was, however, put on different cultural aspects of the national identity, and the reported degrees of attachment to the

dominant culture varied from individual to individual. In other words, some had made - or wished to make - the dominant culture a more substantial part of their life than others, but they all recognized its importance. In order to illustrate these differences, it can be useful to compare two quotes that differ somewhat in the emphasis which is put on the importance of establishing relationships to larger society:

If you come to a new country with boundaries for how much you can change, clinging to your own language, your own culture, it becomes hard to integrate. It is actually very important when you come to a new country that you see it as your new home country. You are not a tourist; it is where you will live. Therefore, it is very important to become part of larger society (Interview, 2022).

Whereas this perspective on the importance of establishing relationships to the dominant culture and larger society describes it as an uncompromising process, other participants characterized it as more flexible:

Well first of all, it is important for me to act in accordance with some of the culture here as well, to integrate and contribute to society [...] but I am trying to balance between both the Norwegian culture and my own culture in order to function in society, especially when it comes to work (Interview, 2022).

In addition to the strong recognition of the dominant culture found during the interviews, observations show strong motivation and eagerness among the participants to adapt to larger society in Larvik as well. Without concluding on the intentions of it, a clear majority of the participants displayed a considerable interest in the dominant culture by asking questions like “how does this work in Norway?”, by getting involved in several activities with other Norwegians, and by willingly adjusting their public behavior in accordance with common norms and practices in Larvik and Norway.

Acquiring the perks that follow from attaching to the dominant culture and larger society:

The driving force behind the participants’ attachment to larger society in Larvik can be split into two different, but intertwined, categories. First of all, it was frequently described as a result

of ambitions to actively acquire the perks that follow from such attachments. As one of the interviewees argued:

I live in Norway now, so it is important for me to use their culture to some extent, to integrate. If I do not follow the culture at all, and do not integrate, it will be hard for both the society and for myself. We will not get along if I do not understand them and they do not understand me [...] (Interview, 2022).

Most of the participants described their desire to build relationships to the dominant culture and larger society in this manner. They often highlighted the importance of actively seeking to meet other Norwegians, and to build networks with them. Establishing networks with - and being in frequent contact with – people from the majority population in Larvik was mainly described, in this context, as a way of gaining beneficial knowledge about cultural values and norms, and as a doorway to a sense of belonging to larger society.

Some of the most frequently mentioned perks of attaching to the dominant culture include the feeling of belonging to something, better opportunities of labor and education, being able to communicate with people in the local community and taking part in larger society in general. Although material well-being was brought forward as one of the benefits, psychological or spiritual well-being occupied significantly more space in the young refugee immigrants' narrations of how, and why, they had built relationships to the dominant culture and the local community in Larvik. In this context, psychological and/or spiritual well-being refers to feelings such as achievement, belonging, inclusion, acceptance, happiness etc. Psychological well-being was, for example, highlighted as a result of attachments to the local community by one of the interviewees who said that “If I do not adapt to the dominant culture, I will not feel good. I do not want to live outside of society. So I am, first and foremost, adapting for my own well-being” (Interview, 2022).

An inevitable process:

On the other hand, some of the participants argued that the process of attaching to the dominant culture and larger society was more of an inevitable process. That means, instead of actively and intentionally seeking to acquire the perks that follow from such attachments, a few of the participants argued that this had occurred naturally, or expressed that it was something they

rarely paid active attention to. In this context, slowly adapting to - and becoming a part of - the dominant culture is understood as something that happens whether you like it or not. One of the interviewees exemplified this by saying that: “...that is how it is when you are with them, when you live with them. Of course, you become a part of them, you become a part of the community in which you live. That is just how it is” (Interview, 2022). Another participant expressed a similar view and said that:

Sometimes I have been thinking that [...] if you live in a society, you will be influenced by that particular society whether you like it or not. You will be more and more similar to people in that particular society as the years pass by (Interview, 2022).

This is not to say that the participants tried to reject this process, but rather that they paid somewhat less attention to it. As implied at the start of this section, all of the participants welcomed the dominant culture to make an impact on their everyday lives.

This way of describing their relationship to the dominant culture was most common for - but not exclusively related to - the individuals who arrived in Norway at a young age, a factor that will be discussed more in detail in the next chapter. Finally, it is important to note that the two “driving forces” behind attaching to the dominant culture are not mutually exclusive.

Based on what the participants said during the interviews, it is possible to actively seek relationships with larger society while still perceiving it as an inevitable process, i.e., something that had to be done.

Language skills:

Even though the desire of establishing relationships to the dominant culture and larger society was strong with all the participants, this process was not free of challenges and interference. Adapting to new and unfamiliar norms, routines and values, which is an important part of integration, came with both ups and downs. Acquiring Norwegian language skills stood out among the most frequently mentioned challenges in this context. Simultaneously, language was often highlighted as the most crucial key to be able to form relationships to larger society.

Obtaining language skills that can be used to understand and to be understood by Norwegians was repeatedly mentioned as one of the most, if not the most, important processes in the

participants' experiences of adapting to life in Norway. The importance of language skills was repeatedly underlined by the whole sample, and it was mentioned in relation to the frustration that developed as a result of not being able to communicate: "For me, language was by far the greatest challenge. I was often angry because I could not speak or communicate with people in the local community. It was very frustrating" (Interview, 2022). Another interviewee reflected on similar frustrations: "First of all, it was very difficult to get to know Norwegians without the language. It made me think that they would not speak with me, that they did not like us" (Interview, 2022).

Further, the participants elaborated on the many opportunities and benefits that followed when sufficient language skills were obtained: "[...] after gaining language skills and being able to read and speak Norwegian [...] everything blossoms, I can do everything. I can study, work, have discussions with people, help people, everything. The significance of language is enormous" (Interview, 2022). According to several of the participants, language skills are therefore highly necessary in order to be able to function in the local community: "Everything becomes so much easier. Simple things like going to the store, going on the bus, just walking around in Larvik" (Interview, 2022).

In general, language skills came up in relation to belonging to the dominant culture and larger society, but it was also mentioned in other contexts such as how the participants' perceived the majority population's attitudes towards them: "I know many people, myself included, who have been hesitant to practice their language skills in public because they are afraid of saying something wrong, and thereby being judged" (Interview, 2022). These experiences were echoed by another interviewee who expressed that: "I do not mind speaking the language with other non-Norwegians [...] but when I am speaking with Norwegians, I am always thinking about what I am saying, and whether or not I am saying it wrong" (Interview, 2022). Similar patterns were observed during participant observation, especially when the participants were observed in public settings. The participants who felt comfortable with their language skills acted with more confidence around people in the local community, while participants whose language skills were less advanced were often more insecure.

6.2.2 The Importance of Ethnic Identities

Together with seeking connections to the dominant culture, maintaining connections to one's ethnic and cultural background has been considered by academics as one of the most decisive aspects of "successful" integration. Maintaining connections to one's cultural background can refer to a variety of things, but in this context, it refers to the degree to which the participants' ethnic backgrounds influence their identities in Larvik, the degree to which it influences their everyday lives, and the degree to which it defines how the participants see themselves in general. Data collected for this research contains patterns pointing toward a strong desire to retain such connections. Like the participants' connections to larger society and the dominant culture, the connections to their own roots were often emphasized as a decisive factor in the formation of their identities: "[...] it is hard to forget your own culture just because you live in Norway. It is your identity; it is who you are. Therefore, I would never be able to forget it. I will never forget it" (Interview, 2022).

However, their national identities and their ethnic identities played two rather different roles. While their connections to the dominant culture - as outlined in the section above - had become a significant part of their everyday lives and produced many benefits, their cultural background represented a more symbolic rather than practical part of the participants' identities: "[My original culture] might not be as big a part of my life as it should have been, but I am absolutely trying to nurture my relationship to it. It is me; it is a big part of me" (Interview, 2022). Some of the recurring themes within the participants' relationship to their own cultural backgrounds were the safety it represented in complex and uncertain situations, the permanent influence it had on their perception of themselves, and finally the feeling of slowly losing personality traits and values connected to their ethnic identity.

Safety:

First of all, the participants' ethnic backgrounds represented, for many, a form of safety. In this context, safety refers to a safe space in social contexts, or a small respite from a demanding everyday life. A safe space or respite could, according to the participants, come as a result of being able to communicate and express themselves with people who shared their native language and ethnic background. This form of safety was particularly visible when observing

the participants in groups. In scenarios where people of diverse ethnic backgrounds were gathered, or in which the young refugee immigrants spent time around a majority of native people, they often tended to stick to people with whom they could communicate in their native language. Moreover, the safety outlined above was not solely a product of communicating and clinging to people of the same ethnic background, but was also described as a result of being in the same situation as other people with immigrant backgrounds in Larvik: “Things felt better when I started to attend school with people my age, from different parts of the world. Everyone experiences the same challenges there. It makes you realize that you are not alone” (Interview, 2022). Because they were in relatively similar situations, young refugee immigrants across different nationalities and ethnic backgrounds benefited from encouraging and assisting each other, and often felt more comfortable around each other.

It was predominantly during participant observation that these feelings were visible, but they were also touched on several times by a handful of the interviewees. A good example of this is an interviewee who stated that her experiences in Larvik slowly became more positive once she attained some basic language skills. Further, she claimed that her motivation to learn improved even more when she came in firsthand contact with people her age at school, who also were in the same situation as her. After establishing networks with other non-natives, it was supposedly easier to collectively overcome social and cultural challenges which previously had seemed overly complicated. Similar experiences were also repeatedly used by other interviewees as examples in relation to how both their ethnic identities and “immigrant identities” had granted them feelings of safety and belonging in a complex situation. For instance, another interviewee elaborated on the benefits of working and learning together with other non-natives, at school or in other social arenas. She said that:

We were kind of a big group of friends from different nationalities and backgrounds at school. I think we helped each other, because many of us did not have families here, and we were all in the same situation. We were always together, helping each other both at school and outside of school, we became a family (Interview, 2022).

Slowly losing connections to ethnic identities:

Besides the fact that ethnic identities - and the togetherness that could be felt within multicultural groups - played an important role in the participants’ general well-being in Larvik,

it was often said that the relationships to their ethnic backgrounds was something that slowly declined over time: “My culture has slowly faded after participating in the Norwegian society over a longer period [...] I think it is natural. You get used to a particular way of living” (Interview, 2022). It is, however, important to point out that none of the participants claimed to have lost connections to their ethnic backgrounds entirely, and that these connections only declined to a certain extent. Additionally, it was often the participants’ connections to their ethnic values and norms in their everyday lives that were highlighted as declining, and not their overall identifications with their ethnic background: “I do not use it as much as when I first arrived in Norway, because I have become so used to Norwegian culture [...] but I use some of it... with my family for example, cooking traditional food and celebrating holidays” (Interview, 2022).

Another interesting pattern was that ethnic personality traits and values generally possessed less and less practical significance the longer the participants stayed in Norway. A factor to consider is that participants who arrived in Norway in their mid to late teens, were more likely to hold onto such traits and values longer. One of the participants, a 30-year-old person who came to Norway at the age of 16, is a good example of this:

[Holding onto one’s original culture] is important. I came [to Norway] at the age of 16. I exclusively used my original culture over a period of 16 years. It was the only culture I knew and the only culture I had a relationship to (Interview, 2022).

Another participant who came to Norway at the age of 8, shared a quite different perspective: “[...] I have lived in Norway, used the Norwegian language and the Norwegian culture for most of my youth. This is the culture I am used to, but I still feel a strong connection to my background.” (Interview, 2022). These patterns were exclusively discovered through what the participants said in the interviews, as it would take years of observation to find similar patterns in their actions.

Similar to the perspective of slowly adapting to the dominant culture as an inevitable process, gradually giving up or losing particular aspects of one’s ethnic identity was, by many, seen as a rather natural and unavoidable process: “Of course, the longer I stay, the more used I get to Norwegian culture. It creates a certain distance to my original culture. But I think that is a natural development, it is how life works.” (Interview, 2022). However, people who came to

Larvik as unaccompanied minor asylum seekers often pointed at a lack of social environments in which people of the same ethnic backgrounds as themselves frequented. This was not necessarily portrayed as a negative thing, but it had often meant that their lack of attachment to such groups or environments contributed to the steady decline of their ethnic identities: “It depends on the amount of contact I have with people from my home country, which is very little here in Larvik. So, it is hard to actively maintain my culture as much as I would like” (Interview, 2022).

Immovable part of their identities:

Despite not playing an as important role as the dominant culture in the participants’ everyday life, the participants all claimed that their ethnic background was something they could never change, an immovable part of their identities: “Adapting to a new society is not the same as changing your whole identity. There are certain things you cannot change, like your background, your language, who you actually are” (Interview, 2022).

A common idea portrayed both during the interviews and observation, was that immigrants could never be 100% Norwegian. This statement was often directed inwards, meaning that individual participants made statements referring to the feeling that they could never identify as entirely Norwegian. One of the interviewees echoed this idea and pronounced that: “I can never be 100% Norwegian. No matter how long I stay here, I will always have another background. My children will also feel that even though they are born in Norway, they will still identify with my home country” (Interview, 2022). Assertions like these were recurrent in a broad range of the interviews: “Even though I have stayed here for many years, and my whole life is in Norway, I still have a different background than Norwegians. So, I can never feel that I belong 100% to Norway, or that I am Norwegian” (Interview, 2022).

Similar ideas were also observed, often in group contexts, in the form of verbal reminders that no immigrant could ever be regarded as 100% Norwegian. The most common scenario in which these ideas, or reminders, became apparent were when an individual or group of participants pointed out that another individual or group of participants’ actions were considered “too Norwegian”. Equivalently, the participants were often reminded by other participants that they had to remember where they came from, or that they had to act in accordance with their ethnic identity and cultural background.

6.3 Balancing Between Multiple Identities

Based on the two former sections, identity formation and attachment might seem like a relatively clear-cut process. According to the participants, the process is, however, more complicated than simply choosing to establish and retain connections to both larger society and to their cultural backgrounds. Despite being able to both retain connections to their cultural backgrounds, and to establish relationships to the dominant culture, balancing between these two different identities have presented a few challenges for the participants. At the same time, a clear majority of them suggest that the best-case scenario would be to adopt the best parts of both sides and transform them into something unique. Therefore, the next few sections will present and describe “Balancing Between Multiple Identities” as a theme consisting of the participants’ experiences of challenges and opportunities related to being young and multicultural.

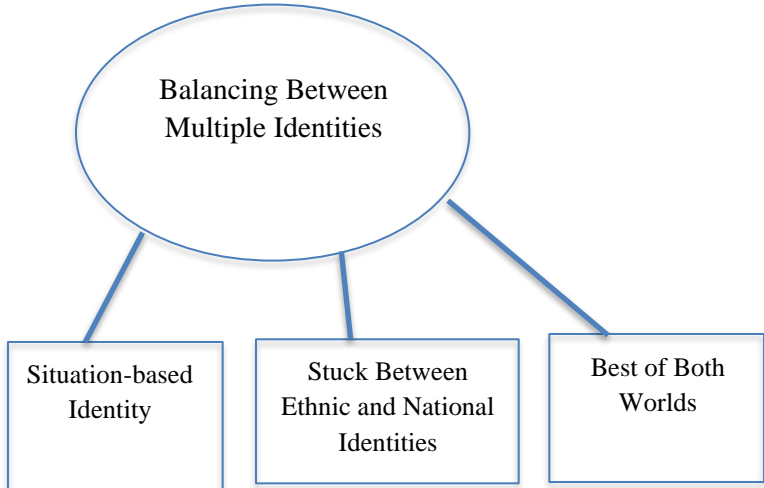


Figure 5. Thematic map illustrating the theme “Balancing Between Multiple Identities”, including sub-themes.

6.3.1 Situation-based Identity

Throughout the interviews and during participant observation, it was often made clear by the participants that identities were perceived as flexible, and that they could be adjusted based on the context in which the participants found themselves. Firstly, a majority of the interviewees

directly expressed that they adjusted their behavior and way of thinking according to the situation they were in: “I usually adjust to what the situation requires. When I am at work, it is probably expected that I act more like [Norwegians]. For example, you act one way in public, and at home you are different” (Interview, 2022). In situations where it was expected of them to be “more Norwegian”, they explained that they tried their best to fulfill these expectations: “[...] if I go out with a friend from my home country, we speak a little bit differently. However, if I am with a colleague at work, I think and act more like a Norwegian, because that is what is expected.” (Interview, 2022).

Similarly, the interviewees generally argued - and came up with examples to illustrate - that they were able to adapt their behavior and way of thinking in situations where it was expected of them to act in line with their own ethnic background as well: “There are many groups in which you have to adapt to people saying or thinking ‘okay, you are from that and that country, you cannot act too Norwegian’. So, you must adapt in order to fulfill those expectations” (Interview, 2022). This was more relevant for those who had lived with their families in Larvik, and therefore had to live two rather different lives at home and at school or work: “No one has ever pressured me to become Norwegian, but my family often tells me that I have become too Norwegian. So [...] I am two different people at home and out in public” (Interview, 2022).

Nevertheless, it was also mentioned in relation to a certain pressure to act in accordance with a set of cultural values and norms, when being around people of similar nationalities and/or ethnic backgrounds. Some of the interviewees illustrated this pressure by using school or other social arenas as an example: “It would be a bit unnatural for me to be the only foreigner in a group of Norwegian friends at school. I think other foreigners would point that out as well.” (Interview, 2022). As implied in the section above, the pressure to act in accordance with a set of cultural values and norms was also visible during participant observation. Especially in relation to comments that were intended as reminders to other participants that they should act in a certain way.

6.3.2 Stuck Between Ethnic and National Identities

Situation-based identity, as it is depicted above, was something that all the participants could relate to in one way or another. Even though it appears convenient, fluctuating between different

identities has produced several challenges as well, according to the participants. One of the most apparent and commonly referred to challenges in the participants' experiences, was the lack of absolute belonging to either one of the sides, i.e., to their ethnic identity or to larger society and dominant culture in Larvik or Norway:

Sometimes I feel that I have lost my own culture. At the same time, I am not fully a part of Norwegian culture either. At the moment, it is hard to know who I really am. People from my home country do not really acknowledge me as one of them, and people from Norway definitely do not see me as Norwegian (Interview, 2022).

Similar to the quote above, a large number of the interviewees reported that while they had managed to form positive relationships to larger society, and to retain some form of connection to their cultural backgrounds, they often struggled with the feeling that they did not fully belong to any of the "groups". They often expressed that when they were in groups of predominantly native Norwegians, for example at school or at work, they tended to "feel like a foreigner", or to identify more with their ethnic background. One of the interviewees put this feeling into words in her reply to whether balancing between different identities had led to any challenges: "Yes, sometimes I see myself as 100% Norwegian. And other times... you are an immigrant. I am thinking 'oh yeah, of course I am not Norwegian'. And then suddenly you are not whole on that side either. But that is how it is" (Interview, 2022).

Equivalently, many also suggested that they often identified more with Norwegian culture when they visited their home country, or when they spent time with parents or other family members: "If I travel back to my home country, they will tell me that I am not from that country anymore, that I am a mix" (Interview, 2022). Feelings like these were outlined by another interviewee, stating that: "My parents always ask me 'why do you talk like Norwegians' [...] So, I am a combination of both, meaning I will always lack something on both sides" (Interview, 2022).

6.3.3 Best of Both Worlds

In general, the feeling of not belonging fully to any specific social identity was talked about with negative undertones. However, a large group of the participants tried to - or expressed a desire to - take this situation and turn it into something positive. Therefore, another way the

balance between ethnic and national identities was talked about can be understood through a more positive idea of being able to, or at least trying to, take the best from both cultures and merge these parts together into something positive: “I cannot identify 100% with my original background when I live in Norway. There are a lot of flaws in our culture, but there are also flaws in Norwegian culture. I am trying to take the best parts of each culture, right?” (Interview, 2022). A similar way of expressing this was through highlighting the benefits of being multicultural or having flexible identities: “You can talk to and understand Norwegian people, and at the same time use your cultural background to benefits that Norwegian people do not have. It is important to utilize the benefits of having multiple identities” (Interview, 2022). Another participant shared similar ideas regarding the benefits of being able to use more than one culture in his everyday life: “Yes, of course it is positive [to be multicultural]. I know more than one language, and my identity consists of some of the most positive aspects of both Norwegian culture and my original background” (Interview, 2022)

This idea resembles many of the topics that were discussed during participant observation. A number of these ideas and actions became particularly visible in contexts where identity and the potential benefits of being multicultural were discussed. Participants who were new to these sorts of topics and ideas initially expressed that they identified mainly with their original background. However, after discussing the benefits of being multicultural over a longer period, they showed signs of becoming more and more aware of their individuality, and thus distanced themselves from the initial clear division between ethnic and national identities.

6.4 Perceptions of Natives’ Attitudes

Chapter 1, 2 and 3 all feature literature, previous research and examples from the Norwegian context to show how negative attitudes, informal boundaries and discrimination towards immigrants are commonly recognized as the most critical challenges in integration. As a result of negative attitudes and discrimination’s influence on social coherence, this is not only a challenge for immigrants, but also for host-societies. As implied by the urgency of negative attitudes and discrimination, positive and welcoming attitudes towards immigrants will likely be an important part of any “successful” integration process. Based on the experiences of the participants in this research, positive and welcoming attitudes can, in fact, produce important outcomes. Negative attitudes and discrimination, on the other hand, did not occupy as much

space in the young refugee immigrants’ experiences of integration in Larvik. In fact, the emphasis was most often put on positive attitudes and their influences on the participants’ everyday life and general experiences in Larvik.

This section will not go into the details of why, but it will rather present a balanced and as accurate as possible picture of the attitudes that were repeatedly mentioned and observed during data collection. As will be displayed in the following sections, attitudes - mostly positive but also some negative - have played an important role in the participants’ experiences of integration in Larvik. Among the most frequently mentioned attitudes were welcoming attitudes and interest, the importance of guides to larger society and positive experiences with people from the majority population. Even though the most commonly mentioned attitudes were of positive nature, the participants also elaborated on experiences including stereotypes, prejudice and misunderstandings.

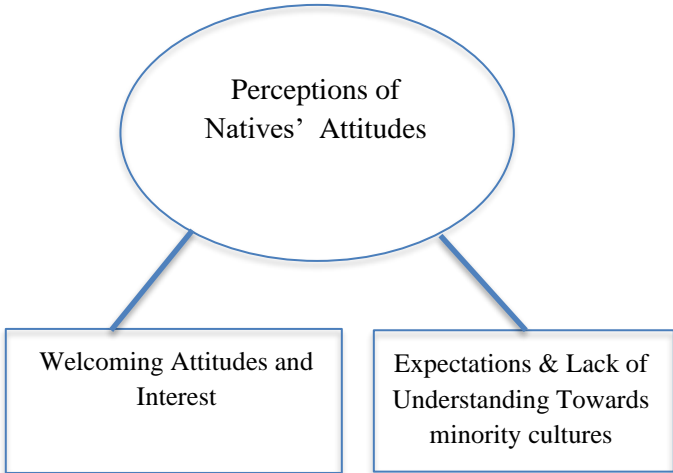


Figure 6. Thematic map illustrating the theme “Perceptions of Natives’ Attitudes”, including sub-themes.

6.4.1 Welcoming Attitudes and Interest

In relation to how the young refugee immigrants had experienced and perceived native people’s collective and individual attitudes towards them in Larvik, clear patterns in the data show that welcoming and accepting attitudes possessed a high value in integration processes.

Guides to larger society:

Among the welcoming attitudes that were mentioned, what will be referred to in this thesis as “guides to larger society” appeared frequently as a form of manifestation of these attitudes. The guides appeared, in the participants’ experiences, as native individuals with a particular influence on their attachment and belonging to society in Larvik. One of the interviewees’ descriptions of her own personal guide to larger society, who she met at the reception center, can be seen as a great illustration of characteristics that were commonly referred to in this context: “...we used to sit with each other and color every day. She taught me important words like ‘where’, ‘what’ etc. I just needed someone to talk to, who could make me feel comfortable with the situation I was in.” (Interview, 2022).

Through their own guides to larger society, many of the participants felt that the process of establishing crucial connections and belonging to the dominant culture and society in Larvik was undoubtedly made more accessible: “A Norwegian woman helped me sign up to sports activities, and through those activities I made friends who helped me establish a sense of belonging to the local community. It is important to know people outside of school too”. (Interview, 2022). Another interviewee also elaborated on the difference guides to larger society can make: “[...] you need to establish connections to people in the local community who can tell you what you should do, what you can do, and what you cannot do. It makes life in Norway so much easier” (Interview, 2022).

Positive experiences:

Another type of positive attitude appeared in the form of “positive experiences” with people the participants had met, often strangers. The participants, and especially the interviewees, often stressed the importance of these types of experiences: “[...] it makes me happy when people look at me in a positive way [...] welcoming me and smiling at me. It makes me feel like they want me to be here. So that has been very positive for me.” (Interview, 2022). The positive experiences were usually characterized by a certain amount of respectful interest towards the participants and their backgrounds: “Many people are interested in how I am, and who I am. They show interest in my culture and some of the holidays that are different from those in Norway”. (Interview, 2022). Resembling experiences were also observed when taking part in -

and observing - the participants in some of their everyday life activities. When faced with respectful interest and welcoming attitudes in the form of everything from smiles to initiation of conversations, the participants consistently reacted in a positive way, and showed signs of becoming more comfortable.

It was not the frequency of positive experiences that was underlined, but rather the substantial effect of merely one or a few positive experiences. For example, one of the interviewees elaborated on a situation that took place after he had lived in Norway for two years, and had yet to feel any sort of belonging to larger society: “One situation turned things around for me. I was walking in the mountains when an old man came up to me and said hello. It made me feel seen [...] I realized that I needed to be more open” (Interview, 2022). Experiences like these were often highlighted with gratitude by the participants, and had made some form of impact on all of them. Therefore, a small gesture or simply a greeting can - according to the participants who highlighted them - greatly influence the general experience of integration.

6.4.2 Expectations and Lack of Understanding Towards Minority Cultures

With that being said, it is important to note that a few positive experiences do not exclude room for improvement. Despite having their experiences positively affected by welcoming attitudes and positive experiences, more than half of the participants expressed that people in Larvik and Norway in general would benefit from learning more about different “immigrant cultures”, and thereby facilitate a more welcoming and accepting society: “[...] understanding why people do what they do and act the way they act. That would be key for both immigrants and Norwegians, it could open infinite doors. Maybe we could get rid of prejudice, discrimination and misunderstandings” (Interview, 2022).

The participants all demonstrated a solid understanding of - and acceptance towards - local and national norms, values and practices through what they said and how they acted in different situations. Nonetheless, this understanding was not always reciprocated by people in the local community: “I have experienced that people feel sorry for me because I still follow many of the cultural practices from my own home country. They do not understand that I enjoy it, it is my own choice” (Interview, 2022). In some cultures, for example, handshakes are usually not accepted as a form of greeting between men and women. Despite her reluctance towards

shaking hands with men, one of the interviewees argued that people would rarely accept this: “They suggest that it is disrespectful from our side. However, in our culture it is regarded as disrespectful [to shake hands]. I am trying to understand you, so I am hoping you can understand me” (Interview, 2022).

Along the same line, the participants were often observed altering their behavior significantly in line with expectations from larger society. The way in which they spoke, thought and acted in general changed notably in situations where it was likely that they would encounter such expectations, like for example in public places. This change of behavior was often explained as a fear of being judged: “I was very afraid, especially at the beginning. I was afraid that people would not like me because I was different. Therefore, I tried to be someone else in fear of being judged for who I really was.” (Interview, 2022). This fear was generally found to be making it harder for the participants to open up and establish connections to larger society on their own initiatives as well.

Prejudice & Stereotypes:

Although negative attitudes rarely came up as a subject during the data collection, the participants often brought forward experiences that were characterized by a certain amount of prejudice or stereotypes: “Even though I feel very connected to Norwegian culture and society, I am often treated like an outsider by people who do not know me. They notice that I look different, and therefore treat me differently” (Interview, 2022). These experiences were rarely described as insulting or deliberately unpleasant, but rather as a result of misunderstandings or a lack of knowledge about different cultures, as noted by another interviewee: “They mean no harm, but I think they need to get to know the individual, and not create stereotypes based on where we are from or how we look”. (Interview, 2022).

In fact, experiences as those described above were often apparent - according to a handful of the interviewees - in contexts where they were treated differently, often with excessive helpfulness, because of the color on their skin and/or other features that made them distinguishable from native Norwegians. One of the interviewees reflected on a specific scenario in which she had experienced this:

[...] at university, I feel Norwegian. I go to school, and I am confident in what I am doing. Despite all of this, people still approach me and say things like ‘do you want me to explain this to you, maybe the language is too complicated for you?’. Strangers usually see me for who I am on the outside, and therefore treat me as a foreigner (Interview, 2022).

Experiences like these led many of the participants to argue that there existed an apparent division between Norwegians and “foreigners”, often referred to as an “us/them” mentality: “I have felt very welcome in Larvik. But at the same time, people look at me as an outsider. [people in the local community] do not treat me like they treat other Norwegians. It is “them” and “us” (Interview, 2022)

7. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

7.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 introduced the background and rationale for this study, including the ongoing global refugee crisis, the complexity of identity in integration processes, the significance of different attitudes towards refugee immigrants, and the lack of immigrant voices in integration narratives and policies. Together, these factors have brought urgency to the question of how integration of refugee immigrants with complex backgrounds and identities should be approached in order to produce desirable social and economic outcomes for both the immigrants, and the communities in which they arrive.

This research has therefore been seeking an understanding of how young refugee immigrants in Larvik have experienced the process of adapting to Norwegian society and its incorporated norms and culture, with particular focus on identity formation and attitudes towards refugee immigrants. Based on a qualitative thematic analysis of data collected through semi-structured interviews and participant observation, the former chapter presented ideas and everyday life experiences from young refugee immigrants situated in Larvik.

Further, the objective of this research has been to present suggestions in relation to how young, refugee immigrant's voices and experiences of integration most effectively can be incorporated into narratives and policies of integration. These suggestions will be presented in the final section of this chapter. As a means to approach the above-mentioned objective, this chapter will discuss and analyze the young refugee immigrants' experiences of integration in Larvik, as outlined in the former chapter. It will also aim to gain a deeper understanding of how young refugee immigrants in Larvik adopt different strategies to deal with challenges that arise when adapting to a new, unfamiliar society. Finally, it will outline, discuss and attempt to understand factors and experiences that positively - or negatively - affect young refugee immigrants' experiences of integration in Larvik.

7.1.1 Summary of Findings

Ethnic and national identities:

In relation to research question 1: “What are the roles of ethnic and national identities in young refugee immigrants’ experiences of integration in Larvik?”, the results from data analysis show that they have both played crucial roles. They have, however, played two rather different roles. National identities have had an important practical role in the participants’ everyday lives, and have generally been built in order to acquire the benefits that come with such connections. Ethnic identities, on the other hand, have been retained as a more symbolic part of the participants’ identities, and a large number of the participants reported experiences of slowly losing their connections to their ethnic and cultural backgrounds, up to a certain point.

Balancing between multiple identities:

Further, in relation to research question 1.a: “How have the young refugee immigrants experienced the balance between multiple identities?”, the findings and results chapter outlined that these experiences have been defined by both challenges and potential opportunities. Most importantly, balancing between multiple identities has - according to the participants’ experiences - been characterized by adapting to the “requirements” of specific situations. It has also brought into existence feelings of not belonging to any particular identity. Finally, on a more positive note, having multiple identities has also been seen as an opportunity to adopt what the participants have seen as the best parts of each identity, and merge them together into something positive and unique.

Perceptions of natives’ attitudes:

Findings related to research question 2: “How are the young, refugee immigrants’ perceptions of natives’ attitudes towards them affecting their experiences of integration in Larvik?” and 2.b: “How do these attitudes affect young refugee immigrants’ feelings of belonging to Norwegian society and Larvik”, show that welcoming attitudes, positive experiences, and guides to larger society have all been crucial aspects of the participants’ experiences and their reported degree of belonging to larger society. However, there were also reports of a need for a

stronger mutual understanding between immigrants and natives, and that stereotypes, prejudice and the division between “us” and “them” has been present in some of the participants' experiences.

7.2 Identity Formation and Attachment

Acculturation was introduced in chapter 4 as a concept used to describe individual psychological changes which occur when people with different cultural backgrounds interact over a longer period (Redfield, Linton & Herskovits, 1936). When arriving in a new country with unfamiliar values, norms, practices and ways of living, the young refugee immigrants in this research have had to adjust their cultural patterns in line with sociocultural structures, norms and expectations in Larvik and Norway. These adjustments have not always been intentional, but must also be seen as an unconscious reaction to the situation they have found themselves in.

The participants' expressions of their own experiences underline the importance of both ethnic and national identities. Ethnic and national identities are two terms that were also presented in chapter 4, and will be frequently used to explain the participants' relationships to larger society and the dominant culture (national identities) and to their own ethnic and cultural backgrounds (ethnic identities). “The dominant culture” will be frequently used as a term to refer to the prevalent cultural norms, structures, values, and ways of acting in general, among the majority population in Larvik.

Another theoretical perspective presented in chapter 4 was Berry's acculturation model. According to Berry (1997), integration is generally considered to be the most favorable outcome of acculturation, especially for immigrants. Integration is only feasible in societies which allow for - and encourage - both ethnic and national identities to be formed and maintained. Naturally, it also requires a particular amount of interest from immigrants to form and maintain the different identities. The findings in this research indicate that integration is the most welcomed outcome, and that it is also within reach according to the requirements laid out in Berry's model. Also, the findings suggest that the participants all had a certain desire to both establish relationships to larger society and to retain connections to their cultural backgrounds. Therefore,

the most interesting aspect to discuss is to what extent they find these relationships important, and why.

7.2.1 Seeking Relationships to Larger Society and the Dominant Culture

The findings in chapter 6.2, “Identity Formation and Attachment”, point towards a strong desire from all the participants to build relationships to the dominant culture and larger society. According to the participants, these relationships consisted of processes such as becoming a part of the local community, identifying with Norwegian culture and society, acting - to a certain extent - in accordance with its cultural values and norms, and finally being able to contribute to society.

Why are relationships to larger society and the dominant culture important?

From the participants’ point of view, the main driving force behind the processes mentioned above was to acquire the benefits that come from such attachments. Among the most frequently mentioned benefits of establishing relationships to larger society and the dominant culture were the feelings of belonging to something, being able to communicate with people in the local community, taking part in larger society in general, and acquiring better opportunities of labor and education. All in all, these perks were usually seen as a way of gaining and developing individual well-being in what was commonly described as a complicated scenario.

These findings are similar to Graves’ (1967) arguments in his research on psychological acculturation as they were described in Chapter 4. Graves (1967) argued that sociocultural adjustment towards the dominant values and norms of a society should be seen as a result of frequent contact with the majority population and the economic and social benefits it potentially brings. It can also be seen as an attempt - directly or indirectly - to establish a certain sense of belonging to larger society and acceptance from the majority population (Graves, 1967). Based on patterns in the collected data, and with this theoretical perspective in mind, the participants’ desire and apparent success of forming relationships to larger society and the dominant culture can therefore be seen as a way of acquiring the sociocultural benefits that follow from such relationships, and thereby increase their chances of well-being and belonging.

Age of arrival:

A potentially interesting factor to discuss in relation to the process mentioned above, is the separation between perceiving the formation of relationships to larger society as a process which requires active participation and awareness, and - on the other side - as an inevitable process. As highlighted in the findings chapter, the latter perception was often shared by individuals who arrived in Norway at a relatively young age (usually before the age of 13). The way in which they described the process of integration suggest that sociocultural adjustments towards dominant values and norms in Larvik had either occurred naturally without any substantially conscious involvement from the participants, or that it would eventually occur whether they played an active role in it or not. This idea of adopting dominant cultural values and adjusting to larger society as inevitable, implies a perception of young refugee immigrants as passive subjects in the process of integration.

On one side, it would therefore be natural to understand these findings and implications considering the concept of *assimilation*, as it is portrayed in the literature review and theoretical framework. In this context, assimilation refers to the process in which immigrants are gradually giving up their own cultural and ethnic background in order to adapt to the dominant norms and culture of their host-society (Algan et al., 2012). It is also relevant within this frame of reference to bring in one of the sub-themes in chapter 6.2.2, namely the experience of slowly, but steadily, losing connections to one's ethnic identities. As pointed out by most of the participants, the presence of their ethnic identities in practical aspects of their everyday lives steadily decreased up to a certain point.

On the other hand, the participants who described integration as a natural or inevitable process had usually - as one of the participants pointed out - spent their whole adolescence in Larvik or Norway. Compared to the refugee immigrants who arrived in Norway at the very end of their adolescence, it is natural to believe that those who arrived as children were more sensitive to sociocultural change, and thus had substantially different preconditions for adopting the majority norms and culture. As outlined in Chapter 3, Chiswick & DebBurman (2004) found that immigrants arriving as teenagers were less likely than those arriving at earlier stages of their lives to economically assimilate, due to fewer years in the school system of the host-country. Also, acquiring sufficient language skills is, according to Bleakley & Chin (2004), a more accessible task for immigrants arriving at an early stage of their life. Therefore, it can also

be argued that assimilation is an inadequate label to use in order to describe their experiences of building relationships to larger society as a natural or inevitable process.

The distinction between refugee immigrants who arrived at a relatively young age, and those who arrived at the end of their adolescence requires more detailed attention than what this study can offer. However, in reference to research question 1: “What are the roles of ethnic and national identities in young refugee immigrants’ experiences of integration?”, it can be valuable to distinguish between different ways of experiencing the role of national identities, and to explore some of the factors shaping these experiences.

7.2.2 The Essential Role of Language Skills

Based on everything that has been stated so far, the participants have all wanted to acquire a certain sense of belonging to larger society, both locally to Larvik and nationally to Norway. The Norwegian language is inarguably an important aspect of the national identity and the dominant culture, and it is therefore also crucial to obtain sufficient language skills in order to be able to establish connections to the dominant culture and larger society. Norwegian language skills, and the many benefits which appeared as a result of it, had also played a crucial role in the participants’ experiences of integration in Larvik. The fact that acquiring Norwegian language skills was highlighted by most interviewees as one of the most crucial aspects of integration is not surprising. What is more interesting, however, are all the doors that are opened as a result of gaining just enough language skills to be able to understand - and to be understood - by the majority population. Examples of sociocultural benefits from the findings and results chapter include increased self-esteem, the ability to communicate with individuals from the majority population, the opportunity of using language as a key to achieve educational goals, and a greater sense of belonging to larger society in general.

Acquiring sufficient language skills is a cornerstone in Norwegian integration policies as well. As outlined in chapter 2, “Geographical Context”, the Norwegian government’s main integration strategy is to facilitate all immigrants’ opportunities of contributing economically to Norway, and of providing for themselves and their families. One of the main subgoals of this strategy is to provide immigrants with the education and language skills that are needed in order to establish oneself in the Norwegian labor market, and thereby contribute economically to

Norwegian society (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019). Paid work and education were mentioned as benefits of language skills by some of the participants. However, the sociocultural benefits of obtaining language skills, and the way in which it made their social life more pleasurable through feelings of being increasingly accepted by the majority population, were excessively emphasized.

It is not the purpose of this research to argue against the seemingly crucial role of language skills in labor market integration, economic assimilation, education and integration in general. Nor is it the purpose of this research to claim that language skills are more important in identity formation and sociocultural integration, than in the aspects of integration mentioned above. With that being said, language can - in the context of this research - be seen as a minimum requirement for being able to form connections to the dominant culture and larger society, and thereby increase the participants' psychological well-being and feelings of belonging.

7.2.3 Ethnic Identities

In addition to experiences of forming relationships to larger society and the dominant culture, the theme "identity formation and attachment" also highlighted to what extent, and in what way, the participants' ethnic identities, or their cultural backgrounds, had influenced their experiences of integration in Larvik. As implied by the former sections, the participants' desire to seek relationships to larger society and the dominant culture played a crucial role in several ways. The findings indicate that this process can be seen as a conscious or unconscious effort to achieve belonging and well-being through the benefits that follow from such relationships. Similarly, the participants' ethnic identities also played crucial roles in their well-being. As the next section will discuss further, this part of their identities represented a more symbolic - rather than a practical - role.

The symbolic role of ethnic identities:

Within the framework of this research, retaining connections to one's ethnic identity and cultural background refers to the degree to which the young refugee immigrants' backgrounds have influenced their identities in Larvik, and the degree to which it has influenced their everyday lives. In relation to ethnic identities as a subtheme, the former chapter made clear that

the participants' ethnic backgrounds could represent a form of safety, and that it would always be a substantial part of how they perceived themselves as individuals. At the same time, ethnic identities' general role in the young refugee immigrants' experiences was perceived as symbolic, rather than practical. This can most likely be seen as a product of two important factors.

First of all, clear patterns in the collected data pointed towards a slow, but steady, loss of connection to their ethnic identities, and unlike the majority culture, the participants' cultural backgrounds did not play a significantly practical role in their everyday lives. A considerable amount of the participants expressed that the practical significance of their cultural backgrounds had slowly declined as a result of getting used to a "different way of living". However, as several of the participants outlined, their cultural background was frequently used when it came to traditions such as traditional food or holidays.

At the same time, none of the participants indicated that they had lost connections to their cultural background entirely, and that the loss of connection to it only occurred up to a certain point. By some means or other, they all expressed that their background would always serve as a foundation for how they perceived themselves, i.e., their social identities. One of the quotes that were used in Chapter 6.2.2 exemplified this perception perfectly: "Adapting to a new society is not the same as changing your whole identity. There are certain things you cannot change, like your background, your language, who you actually are" (Interview, 2022). Considering the participants' experiences and frequent mentions of slowly losing connections to several aspects of their ethnic identities, in addition to interpreting their cultural and ethnic backgrounds as immovable parts of their identities, it is natural to assume that these two factors have resulted in a more symbolic, rather than practical, perception of their own ethnic identities.

How can ethnic identities be retained?:

Even though the participants' ethnic identities can predominantly be understood as symbolic features of their identities, retaining connections to one's cultural background was indicated to have significant effects on their general well-being, and should therefore not be underestimated as an important aspect of their everyday lives. Therefore, despite being frequently reported to slowly decline, their cultural backgrounds might play a more decisive role than what the young refugee immigrants are aware of. As highlighted in Berry's (1997) acculturation model, having

the opportunity of retaining relationships to one's ethnic and cultural background is regarded as a decisive part of any successful integration process. Those opportunities also seemed to play an important role in the participants' experiences, as they all - in one way or another - highlighted their ethnic background as a defining factor in the formation of their own identities. Therefore, it is timely to ask questions in relation to how opportunities of retaining relationships to one's ethnic identity and background most sufficiently can be facilitated.

In reference to the feeling of slowly losing connections to one's cultural background, and other findings in the data suggesting that retaining such connections was seen as a demanding task, there are a few apparent challenges that need to be addressed in order to come up with appropriate solutions. For example, as was highlighted in section 6.2.2, few of the participants in this study had any strong connections to social environments, other than family, in which people of the same ethnic backgrounds as themselves frequented. Therefore, retaining relationships to their own ethnic background was not something that came as a natural process, as their exposure to people and other aspects of their background was relatively limited, especially compared to their exposure to the majority culture. It should be noted that, compared to some of the largest cities in Norway, Larvik is a relatively small city with a relatively modest number of inhabitants with refugee backgrounds. Therefore, it is also crucial to take the geographical context of integration processes into account when approaching these challenges.

Intergroup relations between refugees:

At the same time, results from data collection suggest that belonging can be established through identification with other people who have found themselves in similar situations as the participants, without necessarily sharing the same ethnic backgrounds, i.e., other people with refugee backgrounds. These relationships were often referred to as generating a feeling of togetherness, self-belief, comfort and safety, and can be linked to one of the key theories in chapter 4, *Realistic Conflict Theory*, which highlights that intergroup relations are often positive if the groups share a common goal or purpose (Sherif, 1966).

It would also be natural to discuss further the role of such relationships and identifications in attachments to ethnic identities. While it was made clear that they have the potential of functioning as a safe space for the participants, it would also be interesting to assess some of the other positive outcomes such relationships could potentially establish. One of the limitations

of this research is that it does not consider the specific countries, religions or cultural backgrounds from which the refugee immigrants' ethnic identities are formed. Therefore, it is challenging to go deeper into the role of these multicultural group identities, as their role could probably vary across different nationalities, religions, and other factors related to the participants' backgrounds. However, such identifications deserve more attention, as they can seemingly facilitate feelings of belonging and safety, and ultimately increase refugee immigrants' well-being.

7.3 Balancing Between Multiple Identities

As made clear throughout this chapter, the findings in this research point towards a strong desire from the participants to both establish relationships to the dominant culture in Larvik and larger society in general, and to retain connections to their ethnic and cultural backgrounds. If Berry's (1997) acculturation model is applied in this context, this universal desire suggests that integration is facilitated, and that it should be a feasible outcome for young refugee immigrants in Larvik. However, the participants' experiences of balancing between different identities portray a picture of integration which is far less straightforward than simply yes/no answers to whether it is considered of importance to both establish relationships with larger society, and to retain one's cultural background. As argued by Deaux & Verkuyten (2014), multiple identifications from the perspective of immigrants encompass a more complex structure than simply national and ethnic identities (see chapter 4.1.2). Findings related to research question 1.a: "how have the young refugee immigrants experienced the balance between multiple identities?", show that these experiences have presented both challenges and opportunities of complex nature.

7.3.1 Flexible Identities and the Challenges of Being Young and Multicultural:

First and foremost, most participants argued that their identities were flexible, and that they could adjust them based on the situation in which they found themselves. It was made clear during the interviews, and was often illustrated through their actions, that the participants were used to adapting their behavior and way of thinking in line with expectations from the majority population, and from individuals and groups of people with the same background as them. This

points towards an active fluctuation between different identities, and an awareness of this from the participants' point of view.

Lacking Belonging to a Specific Identity:

While the flexibility portrayed above is undoubtedly a practical tool to possess for multicultural individuals in general, it can also be argued - based on the participants' experiences - that the active fluctuation between different identities can cause confusion and a lack of full belonging to either their national or ethnic identities. As was brought up in the findings chapter, a frequently mentioned experience among the young refugee immigrants was the feeling of losing connections to their ethnic identity and simultaneously being unable to fully identify with Norwegian culture, giving rise to challenges of not fully belonging to any specific identity.

The lack of a culture, or an identity, to which the participants felt full belonging can also be seen in light of how different attitudes towards them were perceived - from the majority population, but also from people with the same ethnic and cultural backgrounds as them. As pointed out in section 6.2.4, the participants often asserted that they - or anyone else with immigrant backgrounds - could never be 100% Norwegian. At the same time, family or friends from the same background as the participants often questioned their strong connections to Norwegian culture, and thus implied that they had lost too much of their original culture. Together, these two factors can potentially create an environment in which young multicultural individuals might feel lost, and in the worst-case scenario feel no acceptance or belonging from either the majority population or from people with the same background as them.

7.3.2 Best of Both Worlds:

The dynamic nature of identities in the participants' experiences of integration in Larvik did not only produce challenges. A more positive way of perceiving the balance between multiple identities was through the notion that being multicultural, or cross-cultural, was predominantly a benefit. Even though many of the participants struggled with a lack of belonging to any specific identity, most of them expressed a desire to turn this situation into something positive. As presented in section 6.3.3, the most common way to approach this situation was to utilize and adopt the aspects that were perceived as the most positive, in both the national and ethnic

identity. In other words, the participants expressed a desire to embrace “the best of both worlds”, and thereby establish an identity that goes beyond the classifications of ethnic and national. This way of perceiving the flexibility of identities was naturally described as the most positive outcome.

Further, the “best of both worlds” perspective might be beneficial to analyze in light of *multiculturalism*, one of the main theoretical perspectives presented in the literature review and theoretical framework. Multiculturalism is established on the notion that intercultural communication, acceptance, respect and positive relationships between majority and minority groups can be produced by initiatives and policies promoting ethnic diversity. One of the most important intentions of such approaches is to develop “new national identities” (Algan et al., 2012, p.3) which both individuals from minority groups and majority groups can relate to through common values. The theory of multiculturalism can, in the context of this research, therefore be used to understand how acceptance towards - and promotion of - ethnic diversity and young refugee immigrants’ maintenance of their ethnic backgrounds can produce “new identities”.

The term “new identities” can, within this framework, refer to a positive outcome of being able to adopt the most attractive parts of both the national identity and the ethnic identity, and thereby blend these parts together into a “new identity”. These identities may, to a certain extent, reduce the clear division between national and ethnic identities, reduce feelings of not belonging fully to any specific group, and therefore have a preventive effect on the division between “us and them”. Therefore, based on the description of the “best of both worlds” approach, raising awareness among multicultural youth of the benefits that comes with being in possession of multiple identities can possibly be a solution to the challenges that were presented in the section above, namely the lack of a culture or an identity to which one feels full belonging.

7.4 The role of Natives’ Attitudes Towards Young Refugee Immigrants

To sum up everything that has been discussed so far, both relationships to the majority culture in Larvik and connections to ethnic identities have had significant roles in the young refugee immigrants’ experiences of integration in Larvik. More specifically, based on the participants’

experiences, establishing relationships to the majority culture and larger society can, in general terms, be seen as a pursuit of psychological well-being and belonging. Retaining relationships to ethnic or cultural backgrounds can also be understood as a way of acquiring psychological well-being and belonging. However, as a result of slowly losing connections to them, and simultaneously seeing them as an immovable part of their identities, the participants' ethnic backgrounds represented a more symbolic rather than practical aspect of their identities. Furthermore, balancing between different identities have produced challenges such as a lack of complete belonging to any specific identity. All things considered, it should be seen as crucial for the well-being of young refugee immigrants to be able to take part in larger society, while also having the opportunity of retaining connections to their ethnic and cultural backgrounds. It is also vital for their well-being that they are made aware of - and are able to realize - the benefits of having multiple identities, i.e., being multicultural.

7.4.1 The Significance of Young Refugee Immigrants' Perceptions of the Majority Population's Attitudes:

This is where the young refugee immigrants' perceptions of Norwegian's attitudes towards them become significant. According to the findings, welcoming attitudes, guides to larger society and positive experiences with people in the local community were all important aspects in the participants' experiences of integration in Larvik. Although previous studies on the effects of different attitudes towards immigrants have predominantly focused on negative attitudes and discrimination, the findings in this research show that positive experiences overshadow the negative ones. There can be several explanations behind these findings. First of all, it is most likely easier to discuss positive experiences than negative ones, especially with a person you have never met before. Along the same lines, it is also reasonable to assume that refugee immigrants with positive experiences of integration, and strong connections to larger society, are more likely than individuals with little sense of belonging to larger society to participate in a study like this one. Therefore, it is difficult to conclude on the balance between negative and positive attitudes towards immigrants in Larvik. Based on the findings, however, it is hard to argue against the possible effects of welcoming attitudes, positive experiences and guides to larger society on the participants' general experiences of integration in Larvik.

Taking young refugee immigrants' backgrounds into account:

In order to understand the possible significance of welcoming attitudes, it can be useful to consider the background from which the participants came prior to arrival in Norway. Background does not, in this context, refer to ethnic, national or religious background, but to the entire group of participants' common backgrounds as refugees. This is not to say that the participants are all part of a homogenous group defined by their background, but rather to acknowledge and point out that their previous histories are different from those of other immigrants, such as for example labor immigrants. A refugee is per definition individuals or groups of people who have migrated from their country of origin - and are unable to safely return - by cause of ethnic, religious, social or political persecution (Utlendingsdirektoratet, n.d). In addition to that, refugees often arrive in countries and localities in which they have no cultural or social experience, meaning that it can be both hard to communicate with the majority population and to understand their way of living. As outlined in the findings and results chapter, many of the participants had experienced great uncertainty and frustration in relation to being unable to communicate with people from the majority population. In addition to that, they also expressed a desire to receive broader understanding for some of their cultural values and norms. Considering their uncertain and at times vulnerable situations, it is therefore crucial to take into account their backgrounds as refugees, and most often also as completely new to Norwegian culture and norms.

7.4.2 Guides to Larger Society and Positive Experiences

As a result of this, natives' attitudes towards - and acceptance of - newly arrived immigrants can be key to establishing a sense of belonging to the society in which they arrive as foreigners with no social or cultural experience. In this context, it becomes apparent that guides to larger society and positive experiences with people in the local community are of great importance in particular. Chapter 6.4.1, "Welcoming Attitudes and Interest", displays how the participants have highlighted a variety of positive attitudes and experiences as valuable aspects of their experiences in Larvik. It becomes clear that the positive attitudes and experiences that are mentioned have enhanced their motivation to seek relationships to the dominant culture and larger society in Norway, and to the local community in Larvik.

The “guides to larger society” were - predominantly - described as individuals providing the participants with highly valuable information about Norwegian society, and its incorporated norms and culture. As one of the participants pointed out, the guides were most importantly valuable role models in terms of explaining what should be done, what can be done, and what cannot be done in Larvik. In other words, they assisted the young refugee immigrants in gaining valuable knowledge about the dominant norms and culture.

Are guides to larger society more than simply guides?:

However, it becomes clear in the participants’ descriptions of these people that they have not only served practical purposes in terms of providing valuable information in regard to common norms and cultural practices. The guides also symbolized a sign of acceptance from larger society and the majority population. A perfect example of this is one of the interviewees’ elaborations on a specific experience that made him realize the value of seeking relationships to larger society, and thereby feel more accepted. He commented on a situation in which an old man had walked up to him and said hello. While this gesture may seem natural and insignificant, it had made him feel seen and accepted, which eventually led him to realize that he needed to “be more open” (see chapter 6.4.1).

In relation to Simonsen’s (2015) argument on how majority populations’ informal criteria for becoming a part of larger society can determine immigrants’ sense of belonging, welcoming attitudes can be perceived as an act of reducing these criteria. Even though the participants did not directly state this, the way in which they characterized their connections to the guides implies a turning point in their experiences. As indicated in the findings, one positive meeting with an individual or group of people from the majority population could transform a struggle to find belonging into a feeling of being accepted, and thereby provide motivation to seek relationships to larger society. Thus, the importance of facilitating such meetings cannot be underestimated in local integration policies and initiatives.

Welcoming attitudes’ influence on connections to ethnic identities:

Further it can also be relevant to analyze how - and to what extent - welcoming attitudes, guides to larger society and positive experiences can remove potential stigma or fear related to openly expressing relations to one’s ethnic identity. As one of the participants made clear: “[...]”

understanding why people do what they do and act the way they act. That would be key for both immigrants and Norwegians, it could open infinite doors. Maybe we could get rid of prejudice, discrimination and misunderstandings” (Interview, 2022). A large number of the participants also expressed that welcoming attitudes, in the form of respectful interest towards their ethnic and cultural backgrounds, had enhanced their feelings of belonging, and of being accepted.

Experiences like these indicate that signs of interest in non-natives’ cultural backgrounds, and expression of welcoming attitudes, can produce two highly desirable outcomes. Firstly, these attitudes can lower the informal bar for what it takes to be included in larger society, and thereby make the process of establishing relationships to the dominant culture more accessible. Therefore, the participants’ strong desire - and apparent accomplishment - of seeking relationships to the dominant culture and larger society must be seen in light of the frequency and nature of the majority populations’ welcoming attitudes towards them, as described in the former section.

Secondly, welcoming attitudes and signs of interest in young refugee immigrants’ backgrounds can lead to positive dialogue between people from the majority population and the immigrants’, and - in the best-case scenario - produce a more comprehensive understanding of the cultural values and norms which exist within their cultural backgrounds. Several the participants expressed a desire to establish such a dialogue, and in that process create a deeper understanding between them and the majority population.

7.4.3 Prejudice, Stereotypes & the Division Between “Us and Them”

Despite being a rare topic in comparison to positive attitudes during data collection, the mere presence of negative attitudes, prejudice and stereotypes in the participants’ experiences requires further analysis. Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 both highlighted the relevance and potential consequences of negative attitudes and discrimination in integration processes. For example, Laurensyeva & Venturini (2017) indicated that negative attitudes towards immigrants could seriously impede their opportunities of establishing belonging to larger society. Virta, Sam & Westin (2004) argued that such attitudes had the potential of negatively affecting their

psychological adaptation and identity, while Constant et al. (2009) singled out discrimination towards as the most crucial challenge in integration.

“Us and Them”:

As suggested in section 6.4.3, the participants often expressed that, despite feeling strong connections to larger society and the Norwegian culture, they were often treated differently as a result of the color on their skin, or other traits which clearly separated them from the majority population. Such experiences were claimed to remind the participants, in a negative manner, that they were in fact “foreigners” and not as connected to larger society as they might have thought. Similar findings have been outlined by Friberg (2020), who found that young non-European immigrants were often perceived by the native population in Norway as “less Norwegian” than what they considered themselves to be (see Chapter 1). These actions and experiences imply the existence of a division between “us” and “them”, i.e., between native Norwegians and refugee immigrants, in the participants' experiences. Putnam (2007) has previously emphasized that multicultural societies can be prone to this division, and also that it can produce lower rates of trust and friendships, not only between natives and immigrants, but also between natives and other natives, and immigrants and other immigrants. Moreover, according to Simonsen (2015), majority populations' informal criteria for what it takes to become a part of larger society can to a great extent determine immigrants' sense of belonging to that particular society. It was previously argued in this thesis that welcoming attitudes can be perceived as an act of reducing these criteria. The division between “us and them” can, however, possibly have the opposite effect by unintentionally raising the bar for what it takes to become a part of larger society.

Despite being delivered with good intentions, unintentional prejudice or stereotypes impose a distance between young refugee immigrants and the communities they seek to adapt to. In other words, the intentions of such actions are not important in this context. What matters are the potential boundaries they can potentially establish for refugee immigrants. By establishing such informal boundaries, this division can in the worst-case scenario, seriously diminish refugee immigrants' opportunities of taking part in larger society. In the long run, it can produce negative consequences such as decreased wellbeing, decreased sense of belonging, and oppositional identities. It is therefore crucial to address possible solutions that can address the division between “us and them”.

Possible solutions to the division between “us and them”:

Keeping in mind the participants’ perceptions of welcoming attitudes, positive experiences and guides to larger society, it is relevant in this context to underline the possible effect such experiences might have on the division between “us and them”. By means of stimulating relationships to larger society and maintenance of ethnic identities, as well as establishing feelings of acceptance and belonging among refugee youth, the positive attitudes that have been highlighted and discussed throughout the last two chapters should inarguably be seen as experiences that can prevent or neutralize the “us and them” division and reduce prejudice.

Also, the “best of both worlds” attitude, presented in section 6.3.3, can also be seen as an attempt to break down the division between “us and them”. By taking the best parts of the ethnic backgrounds and merging it with the best parts of the Norwegian culture, the young refugee immigrants are establishing a new identity which is more personal and adapted to their specific needs and values, and might therefore also reduce the clear division between “us and them”. As argued in the section presenting the “best of both worlds” attitudes, facilitating opportunities of establishing such perspectives requires acceptance towards - and promotion of - ethnic diversity. As a consequence of promoting ethnic diversity, the majority population will arguably obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the young refugee immigrants’ cultural backgrounds, and thereby contribute to the reduction of prejudice and stereotypes.

7.5 How Can Young Refugee Immigrants’ Voices and Experiences Most Effectively Be Incorporated into Narratives and Policies of Integration?

The main objective of this study has been to present suggestions in relation to how young refugee immigrants’ voices and experiences of integration most effectively can be incorporated into narratives and policies of integration. This objective assumes that development processes, like integration, should to the greatest extent be influenced by the wishes and needs of the people that are subject to these specific processes.

Based on the presentation and discussion of the participants' own experiences of integration in Larvik, the following section will present some suggestions as to how these experiences most effectively can be incorporated into narratives and policies of integration. It is important to note that these suggestions will by no means aim to contribute to notable changes in Norwegian integration policies. They will rather seek to contribute with ideas in relation to aspects that can, or should, be analyzed further in order to better capture the complexity of integration processes. All things considered, it should be seen as crucial for the well-being of young refugee immigrants to be able to take part in larger society, while also having the opportunity of retaining connections to their ethnic and cultural backgrounds. It is also vital for their well-being that they are made aware of - and are able to realize - the benefits of having multiple identities, i.e., being multicultural. Last but not least, based on the participants' perceptions of natives' attitudes towards them, it can also be seen as deciding to encourage cultural exchange between minority and majority populations in order to stimulate a mutual understanding and respect between different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, based on these key findings, it could be beneficial to focus more on:

Facilitating welcoming attitudes, positive experiences and guides to larger society:

Instead of repeatedly pointing out the pitfalls of integration, or how integration has failed, it could be a good idea to explore the successful aspects of these processes, and how refugee immigrants have managed to adapt to the dominant culture, values and norms of a given community despite finding themselves in vulnerable and uncertain positions. Highlighting positive aspects of integration and immigration can result in increased acceptance and welcoming attitudes towards refugee immigrants, and thereby make it more accessible for them to establish positive relationships to the dominant culture and larger society, but also to express and maintain connections to their own ethnic identities and cultural backgrounds. This responsibility should likely fall on policymakers, government officials, and the national and local media, and researchers in the field of integration who all have a great influence on the public immigration - and integration - narrative.

Facilitating cultural exchange:

Moreover, increased focus on cultural exchange between people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and between majority and minority populations, could be beneficial for several

reasons. First, it can facilitate opportunities of establishing crucial networks between refugee immigrants and the majority population, and consequently make it easier to acquire belonging through positive experiences and crucial knowledge about larger society.

Increased focus on cultural exchange could also help refugee immigrants retain relationships to their own ethnic backgrounds. By creating room for a deeper understanding of their backgrounds and cultures, the majority population could be more likely to show acceptance towards refugee immigrants and cultural values which differ from those of the dominant culture and norms. Integration is, as outlined in the theoretical framework, only viable in societies where ethnic and cultural diversity is both accepted and celebrated (Berry, 1997). Fargespill Larvik (see chapter 2.1) is a good example of a project which is already approaching the challenge of establishing respect and understanding towards different nationalities and cultures through cultural exchange (Larvik Kommune, 2020).

Raising awareness of the benefits of being multicultural:

Finally, it should be seen as a vital challenge in integration policies and narratives to increase young refugee immigrants' awareness of the benefits of being multicultural. Being able to establish a perspective in which your own identity is seen as an appropriate mix of more than one background or culture, undoubtedly requires a certain amount of reflection and enlightenment. Therefore, it can be useful to further explore and analyze factors that can enhance and diminish refugee immigrants' opportunities of building up such a perspective. Subsequently, solutions that are produced from the assumed analyses should be implemented in awareness courses - such as Flexid (see chapter 2.1) - and other relevant initiatives.

Raising awareness among young refugee immigrants of the benefits of being multicultural can stimulate a more positive experience of balancing between multiple identities by making it easier to establish individual, unique identities, and thus prevent challenges such as a lack of belonging to any specific social identity, and the division between "us and them".

7.6 Limitations

As highlighted throughout this thesis, the process of immigration and integration encompasses several different, complex, and in most cases intertwined, factors. An overall limitation of this study is therefore that it will, evidently, be unable to capture some of the most important aspects of both identity and natives' attitudes towards refugee immigrants in integration, and of sociocultural integration in general. Principally as a result of restricted amounts of time and resources, this study has not been able to include an analysis of potentially relevant factors such as gender-specific challenges related to social identities and attitudes in sociocultural integration, and attitudes towards refugee immigrants from the perspective of the native population. Additionally, due to practical, ethical and legal considerations, this study has not been in the position to provide an analysis of the more specific cultural, national and religious backgrounds from which young refugee immigrants' ethnic identities have been influenced. An analysis like this could contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how, and in what ways, the participants' complex and context-specific backgrounds have influenced their experiences of integration in Larvik.

All the above-mentioned aspects could be crucial sociocultural factors in the context of identity and attitudes towards young refugee immigrants. Still, the purpose of this research has been to acquire an in-depth understanding of how social identities and the perception of various attitudes from the majority population have affected young refugee immigrants' experiences of integration in Larvik. The factors discussed above have therefore been beyond the scope of this research, but should nevertheless be considered in future research.

Another more practical and methodological limitation of this study is the timeframe within which it was conducted. It would be both beneficial, and interesting, to extend the time frame of participant observation in particular. This could assist the study in obtaining an even deeper understanding of the community which was observed, and thus profit even further from the advantages of the method. However, the study is part of a master's program, and the results, key findings and conclusions should therefore be seen in light of the limited timeframe which has been set.

8. CONCLUSION

This chapter will wrap up the thesis by providing an outline of the most crucial findings in this study. It will do so in specific consideration to the research problem, the research questions and the research objective. The first part of the chapter will consist of an outline of the key findings, including the roles of ethnic and national identities, and the role of natives' attitudes in young refugee immigrants' experiences of integration in Larvik. It will also summarize the suggestions that have been made in relation to how young refugee immigrants' voices and experiences of integration in Larvik can be utilized in integration policies and narratives. The final part of the chapter will, based on the key findings and limitations of this study, critically present suggestions as to how some of the challenges and arguments presented in this study can be explored further in future research.

8.1 Key Findings

In line with the research problem, this research has been seeking an understanding of how young refugee immigrants in Larvik have experienced the process of adapting to Norwegian society and its incorporated norms and culture, with particular focus on identity formation and refugee immigrants' perceptions of natives' attitudes towards them. In recent times, the global refugee crisis has brought urgency to challenges related to how integration of immigrants with complex backgrounds should be managed in a way that produces desirable social and economic outcomes for both immigrants and the host-countries. In order to approach this challenge, it is important to take into account the complexity of identity in integration processes and the significance of different attitudes towards refugee immigrants.

The research problem has been approached through presenting and analyzing ideas and everyday life experiences from young refugee immigrants situated in Larvik, Norway. Furthermore, the findings that have been presented are the result of a qualitative research design, including methods and techniques such as semi-structured interviews, participant observation and a thematic analysis technique.

8.1.1 The Roles of Ethnic and National Identities in Young Refugee Immigrants' Experiences of Integration in Larvik

In relation to research question 1: “What are the roles of ethnic and national identities in young refugee immigrants' experiences of integration in Larvik?”, the findings in this study show that both ethnic and national identities have possessed great importance in the participants' own experiences.

The significance of national identities:

Essentially, the participants' relationships to larger society and the dominant culture, referred to in this thesis as their national identities, have functioned as a decisive aspect of their experiences in Larvik. Norwegian language skills and the multitude of sociocultural opportunities that are produced by acquiring it should - according to the participants' experiences - be seen as one of the most vital features of their national identities. All things considered, the process of acquiring relationships to larger society and the dominant culture can be commonly understood as a way of obtaining the sociocultural benefits that are produced from building such relationships, and ultimately acquire a stronger sense of belonging and well-being.

Ethnic identities and intergroup relations between refugees:

Furthermore, the participants' connections to their own ethnic and cultural backgrounds, commonly referred to as ethnic identities in this thesis, have also played essential roles in their experiences. The participants' ethnic identities did, however, represent a more symbolic, rather than practical, role in their everyday lives. The symbolic role that ethnic identities have played in the participants' experiences can seemingly be understood as a result of slowly losing connections to practical aspects of their cultural backgrounds, while at the same time perceiving them as immovable parts of their own self-image. Further, this study has presented findings which indicate that retaining connections to one's cultural and ethnic background can have a positive effect on well-being, suggesting that questions related to how ethnic identities most effectively can be retained should be taken into serious consideration. Another important finding presented and discussed in chapter 6 and 7 was the significance of intergroup relations

between refugees, and the positive effect such relationships can have on feelings of togetherness, self-belief, comfort and safety.

Challenges and opportunities of being multicultural:

Moreover, research question 1.a has addressed how the participants have experienced balancing between multiple identities. The findings in this study indicate that the participants' experiences have been defined by both challenges and opportunities of complex nature. Despite being convenient in the participants' everyday lives, their abilities to adjust behavioral patterns and ways of thinking in accordance with the situations in which they have found themselves, their situation-based – or flexible identities can seemingly lead to challenges like a lack of belonging to any specific identity or group. A more positive way of perceiving this situation has been referred to in this thesis as the “best of both worlds” attitude. This attitude encompasses the ability to create an identity based on a combination of what the individual sees as the most valuable traits from both the national and ethnic identity, and should necessarily be seen in light of how young refugee immigrants' perceive natives' attitudes towards them.

8.1.2 The Role of Natives' Attitudes in Young Refugee Immigrants' Experiences of Integration in Larvik

In reference to research question 2: “How are the young, refugee immigrants' perceptions of natives' attitudes towards them affecting their experiences of integration in Larvik?”, the results, analysis and discussion have, first and foremost, highlighted the impacts of positive attitudes. The most notable positive attitudes outlined by the participants include relationships with “guides to larger society”, positive experiences with people from the majority population and welcoming attitudes in general. With that being said, negative attitudes such as prejudice, stereotypes and harsh expectations have also been present in some of the participants' experiences, and were indicated to have undesirable consequences on their well-being and belonging to both ethnic and national identities.

Guides to larger society, welcoming attitudes and positive experiences:

The findings in this study indicate that welcoming attitudes and positive experiences with people from the majority population, including so-called “guides to larger society”, can have positive effects on young refugee immigrants’ opportunities of establishing relationships to larger society and the dominant culture in Larvik, as well as retaining connections to their own cultural and ethnic backgrounds. By virtue of meeting and forming relationships with individuals from the majority population who could provide them with valuable information about Norwegian society and its incorporated norms and culture (i.e., guides to larger society), young refugee immigrants’ motivation – and opportunities – to establish relationships to larger society were increased.

Moreover, together with welcoming attitudes, guides to larger society can also symbolize a sign of acceptance from the majority population, and thus be understood as having a significant effect on the accessibility of establishing relationships to larger society and the dominant culture by lowering the bar for what it takes to form national identities. Additionally, welcoming attitudes and signs of interest in the young refugee immigrants’ cultural backgrounds were argued to facilitate positive dialogue between individuals and groups in the majority and minority population. This dialogue could potentially lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the cultural values which exists within the young refugee immigrants’ backgrounds, and therefore make it easier – and more accepted – for them to openly maintain connections to their own ethnic identities.

Prejudice, stereotypes and the division between “us” and “them”:

Even though negative attitudes did not occupy as much space in the participants’ experiences as the positive attitudes outlined above, their significant implications on well-being and belonging to larger society in Larvik should not be underestimated. Key findings in this study suggest that experiences with prejudice and stereotypes, in the form of being treated differently because of traits which clearly separated them from the majority population, could significantly increase the bar for what it takes to become part of larger society. In line with the participants’ experiences, these types of attitudes could potentially remind the young refugee immigrants’ that they are in fact “foreigners” and not actually as integrated in the dominant culture as they might have thought, and thereby create a clear division between “us” and “them”.

Promoting ethnic diversity and increasing the majority populations' understanding of young refugee immigrants' different cultural backgrounds and values have, moreover, been pointed out in this thesis as important preventive measures against the division between "us and them" outlined above.

8.1.3 How Can Young Refugee Immigrants' Voices and Experiences Most Effectively Be Incorporated into Narratives and Policies of Integration?

As indicated by the research objective and its incorporated sub-objectives, the objective of this study has been to present suggestions as to how young refugee immigrants' voices and experiences of integration can be utilized in integration policies – and narratives. This objective is also present in research questions 1.b and 2.b, which present questions as to how the young refugee immigrants' experiences and perceptions regarding identities and natives' attitudes can be addressed in integration policies. As a means of achieving the research objective, this thesis has presented and analyzed young refugee immigrants' experiences of integration in Larvik, acquired a deeper understanding of the strategies they have adopted to deal with potential challenges, and discussed factors and experiences that can positively – or negatively – affect their experiences.

As a result of the key findings, the discussion chapter was concluded by a presentation of three points of potential improvement in integration policies, initiatives and narratives (see chapter 7.5):

- By outlining positive aspects of integration and immigration, policymakers, government officials, the national and local media, and academics could potentially increase acceptance and welcoming attitudes towards refugee immigrants. Highlighting how young refugee immigrants have managed to overcome challenges despite finding themselves in potentially vulnerable and uncertain positions could therefore make it more accessible for young refugee immigrants to both build relationships to larger society and to express and maintain connections to their ethnic identities.

- An increased focus on cultural exchange between majority and minority populations can have the potential to facilitate belonging through positive experiences and crucial knowledge about larger society and the dominant culture. It could also prove to have an impact on the majority population's acceptance towards the diverse nature of refugee immigrants' cultural values by creating room for a deeper understanding of their backgrounds and cultures.
- Increasing young refugee immigrants' awareness of the benefits of being multicultural can enable them to establish a perspective in which their individual identities are seen as an appropriate mix of more than one background or culture. Acquiring such a perspective can make it more accessible to establish individual, unique identities by preventing challenges in relation to being "stuck between two social identities", and thus facilitate more positive experiences of balancing between multiple identities.

8.2 Recommendations for Future Research

This study has been able to achieve a deeper understanding of young refugee immigrants' own experiences of integration in Larvik by presenting and analyzing their experiences of identity formation, how they have approached the balance between multiple identities, and how their perceptions of natives' attitudes towards them have affected their experiences of integration. It has also, based on a comprehensive discussion and analysis of the participants' experiences, presented suggestions as to how these specific experiences can be implemented in integration policies, initiatives and narratives. By achieving such an understanding and presenting suggestions as to how young refugee immigrants' own experiences can be utilized in integration policies, this study has contributed with an alternative perspective to the most common way of discussing integration in both research and the public narrative, namely through a cost-benefit analysis of integration and how to approach this from the perspective of the host-country.

Some of the key findings in this study, however, require further exploration and analysis in order to obtain a deeper understanding of their effects on young refugee immigrants' experiences of integration in Norwegian contexts. For example, future research should analyze the distinction between refugee immigrants who arrived at a relatively young age, and those who arrived at the end of their adolescence, as this distinction requires more attention than what

this study has been able to offer. Furthermore, while this study indicates that intergroup relationships between refugee immigrants can function as a safe space and enhance young refugee immigrants' motivation to establish relationships to larger society, it would also be natural to discuss and analyze the nature and possible positive outcomes of such relationships further. It could also be valuable to assess further the potential effects of raising awareness among young refugee immigrants on the benefits of being multicultural in order to most effectively utilize it in integration policies and narratives. Finally, in order to supplement the significance of geographical contexts in young refugee immigrants' experiences of integration, it can be of great importance to conduct case-studies in other Norwegian communities with different context-specific sociocultural structures, and with different demographic structures than Larvik.

Moreover, as presented in chapter 7.6, it has been important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The processes of immigration and integration encompass several different, complex, and in most cases intertwined factors. It has, however, been beyond the scope of this research to include potentially important factors such as gender-specific challenges in integration, as well as an analysis of attitudes towards young refugee immigrants from the perspective of the majority population. It has also been beyond the scope of this research to analyze specific cultural, national and religious backgrounds' role in young refugee immigrants' experiences of integration. Therefore, in order to obtain a more comprehensive and detailed understanding of identity and perceptions of natives' attitudes effects on young refugee immigrants' experiences of integration, future research should include these factors in their analysis.

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Appendix A - Interview Guide

Semi-structured Interviews translated from Norwegian to English

General Questions About the Experience of Integration

1. Can you tell me about the experience of coming to Norway and Larvik?
 - Can you tell me more about some of the challenges?
 - Can you tell me about some of the most positive aspects of this experience?
2. What are some of the most important things for you to feel like a part of larger society in Larvik? Why is this important?

Identity + Attitudes

1. Do you feel belonging to your culture of origin (the interviewee is asked not to expose his/her nationality, religion or ethnicity)?
2. Is it expected of you to retain relationships to your original culture?
3. Do you feel belonging to larger society and the dominant culture in Larvik and Norway?
4. Do you think it is expected of you to build relationships with larger society and the dominant culture?
5. (If the answer to question 1 and 3 is yes), how have you approached the balance between your original culture and the dominant culture in Larvik?
6. How have you been welcomed by people in Larvik and Norway?
 - Do you feel included?
7. How have these experiences influenced your everyday life in Larvik?

Appendix B – Invitation Letter to Participants

Vil du delta i forskningsprosjektet

“The Effects of Identity and Natives’ Attitudes on Young, First-generation Immigrants’ Experiences and Perspectives of Integration in Norway”?

Dette er et spørsmål til deg om å delta i et forskningsprosjekt hvor formålet er å undersøke hvordan unge flyktinginnvandrere har opplevd integrering i Larvik og Norge. I dette skrivet gir vi deg informasjon om målene for prosjektet og hva deltakelse vil innebære for deg.

Formål

Mer detaljert er formålet med prosjektet å finne ut av hvordan unge flyktinginnvandrere har opplevd integreringsprosessen i Norge, og deretter foreslå hvordan disse opplevelsene kan brukes i integreringspolitikk - og prosjekter.

Problemstillingen er basert på mangelen på fokus rundt den sosiale delen av integrering, og mangelen på innvandreres egne stemmer og ideer i integreringspolitikk. Forskningsspørsmålene søker detaljerte svar på hvordan etnisk og nasjonal identitet, og negative holdninger mot innvandrere, påvirker deres opplevelse av integrering i Norge, og hvordan disse problemstillingene kan tas opp i integreringspolitikk.

Forskningsprosjektet er en del av et mastergradsstudium i “Global Development and Planning”, med spesialisering i “Development Management”.

Hvem er ansvarlig for forskningsprosjektet?

Institutt for global utvikling og samfunnsplanlegging ved Universitetet i Agder er ansvarlig for prosjektet.

Hvorfor får du spørsmål om å delta?

Du får spørsmål om å delta fordi du passer inn i målgruppen “ung flyktinginnvandrere”, og fordi du enten er en del av mitt nettverk, eller fordi jeg har fått en anbefaling om at du kunne passet godt til å være med i dette prosjektet av noen i mitt nettverk. Mellom 15-20 personer får den samme henvendelsen som du nå mottar.

Hva innebærer det for deg å delta?

For å hente inn tanker og ideer om integrering fra unge førstegenerasjonsinnvandrere vil dette prosjektet ta i bruk «semistrukturerte kvalitative intervjuer» og “deltakende observasjon”. Kort forklart er disse intervjuene basert på et par temaer som er forberedt i forveien, men vil samtidig ligne på en samtale der du som blir intervjuet er fri til å snakke om det han/hun føler er relevant innenfor disse temaene. Intervjuet vil bli tatt opp med en lydopptaker, og blir slettet så fort det ikke er nyttig lenger. “Deltakende observasjon” vil si at jeg deltar i og observerer aktiviteter du deltar på i hverdagen, og inkluderer ikke lydopptak - kun notater som vil bli lagret på en kryptert server (passordbeskyttet) eller på papir som beskyttes i låste rom.

- Deltagelse i prosjektet innebærer at du deltar på et 45 minutter (minimum) langt intervju. Intervjuet vil inneholde spørsmål om dine opplevelser av å tilpasse seg hverdagen som innvandrere i Larvik og Norge, i tillegg til spørsmål om forholdet ditt til din opprinnelige kultur, den norske kulturen, og hvordan du har opplevd å bli tatt imot av det norske samfunnet.

og/eller

- At jeg vil delta i og observere aktiviteter du er en del av i hverdagen. Du vil da alltid være klar over når jeg deltar, og du vil ikke bli observert uten å være klar over det.

Det er frivillig å delta

Det er frivillig å delta i prosjektet. Hvis du velger å delta, kan du når som helst trekke samtykket tilbake uten å oppgi noen grunn. Alle dine personopplysninger vil da bli slettet. Det vil ikke ha noen negative konsekvenser for deg hvis du ikke vil delta eller senere velger å trekke deg.

Samtykket kan trekkes via den samme kontaktinformasjonen du mottar dette informasjonsskrivet på.

Ditt personvern – hvordan vi oppbevarer og bruker dine opplysninger

Vi vil bare bruke opplysningene om deg til formålene vi har fortalt om i dette skrevet. Vi behandler opplysningene konfidensielt og i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

- Vetle Karlsen Søiland - student ved institutt for global utvikling og samfunnsplanlegging ved Universitetet i Agder vil ha tilgang til dine opplysninger.
 - For at ingen andre skal få tilgang til dine personopplysninger vil datamaterialet lagres på en kryptert (passordbeskyttet) server. Lydopptakeren som brukes i intervjuet vil bli låst inn i et personlig rom når den ikke brukes.
- Deltakerne vil ikke kunne direkte gjenkjennes i publikasjonen av masteroppgaven.

- Ingen opplysninger som kan lede direkte tilbake til deltakerne vil publiseres.
- De eneste opplysningene som vil publiseres er bosted (Larvik), aldersgruppe (18-30), eventuelt kjønn hvis relevant, og at deltakeren er innvandrер med flyktningbakgrunn.

Hva skjer med opplysningene dine når vi avslutter forskningsprosjektet?

Opplysningene anonymiseres når prosjektet avsluttes/oppgaven er godkjent, noe som etter planen er ved slutten av Desember 2022. Personopplysninger og lydfiler vil slettes ved prosjektslutt.

Hva gir oss rett til å behandle personopplysninger om deg?

Vi behandler opplysninger om deg basert på ditt samtykke.

På oppdrag fra institutt for global utvikling og samfunnsplanlegging ved Universitetet i Agder har NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS vurdert at behandlingen av personopplysninger i dette prosjektet er i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

Dine rettigheter

Så lenge du kan identifiseres i datamaterialet, har du rett til:

- innsyn i hvilke opplysninger vi behandler om deg, og å få utlevert en kopi av opplysningene
- å få rettet opplysninger om deg som er feil eller misvisende
- å få slettet personopplysninger om deg
- å sende klage til Datatilsynet om behandlingen av dine personopplysninger

Hvis du har spørsmål til studien, eller ønsker å vite mer om eller benytte deg av dine rettigheter, ta kontakt med:

- Institutt for global utvikling og samfunnsplanlegging, Universitetet i Agder, ved Christian Webersik på epost (christian.webersik@uia.no) eller på telefon: 99 43 19 88.
- Vetle Karlsen Søiland - Student ved institutt for global utvikling og samfunnsplanlegging, Universitetet i Agder, på epost (vetles16@uia.no) eller på telefon: 45 49 09 84.
- Vårt personvernombud: personvernombud@uia.no

Hvis du har spørsmål knyttet til NSD sin vurdering av prosjektet, kan du ta kontakt med:

- NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS på epost (personverntjenester@nsd.no) eller på telefon: 53 21 15 00.

Med vennlig hilsen,

Vetle Søiland

Christian Webersik

Vetle Karlsen Søiland
Christian Webersik

(Student)

(Veileder)

Samtykkeerklæring

Jeg har mottatt og forstått informasjon om prosjektet **“The Effects of Identity and Natives’ Attitudes on Young, First-generation Immigrants’ Experiences and Perspectives of Integration in Larvik”**, og har fått anledning til å stille spørsmål. Jeg samtykker til:

- å delta i intervju
- at opplysninger om meg samles gjennom “deltakende observasjon”

Jeg samtykker til at mine opplysninger behandles frem til prosjektet er avsluttet

(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)