“Fighting to Get Friends”
The Effect of Civil Society Activities on Social Integration of Refugees

Experiences of refugees from a Danish civil society organization

DUYGU OZBAY
810701T226

International Migration and Ethnic Relations
One-Year Master Thesis (IM627L)
15 Credits
Spring 2018
Supervisor: Anne-Sofie Roald
ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates how refugees experience their participation in civil society organizations and how such participation affects their social integration. Focusing on the experiences of refugees from a community center in Denmark, this qualitative study explores what resources refugees gain from civil society activities and whether these gains affect their social relationships within the host society. Data collected via seven semi-structured interviews and observations is analyzed using the concepts of social capital, human capital and social integration. The findings demonstrate that resources gained through civil society participation pave the way for socialization opportunities between refugees and communities in the host society, thus, enhance social integration. Social resources such as social networks, mental support and civic values, as well as human capital gains in the form of language skills and information foster refugees’ social integration. The study demonstrates that social capital, human capital and social integration are interconnected, as social and human capital affect each other’s accumulation and eventually contribute to social integration. Another significant finding is that refugees think integration needs to be a mutual process between newcomers and the native population. The study further indicates the importance refugees attach to language as an essential tool for social integration.

Keywords: refugees, civil society, integration, social capital, human capital, networks, language
# Table of Contents

1. Introduction ................................................................................................................................... 1

2. Aim and Research Questions ....................................................................................................... 1

3. Delimitations .................................................................................................................................. 2

4. Structure of the Thesis .................................................................................................................. 2

5. Contextual Background ................................................................................................................ 2

6. Previous Research ......................................................................................................................... 5

7. Theoretical Framework ................................................................................................................ 7  
   Social Integration ............................................................................................................................ 7
   Social Capital .................................................................................................................................. 9
   Human Capital .............................................................................................................................. 12
   The Interconnection ...................................................................................................................... 13

8. Methodology ................................................................................................................................ 14  
   Philosophy of the Research .......................................................................................................... 14
   Qualititative & Inductive Approach ............................................................................................. 14
   Case Study .................................................................................................................................... 15
   Access to Research Field and Sample .......................................................................................... 16
   Semi-Structured Interviews .......................................................................................................... 16
   Observations ................................................................................................................................. 17
   Analyzing the Data ....................................................................................................................... 18
   Validity and Reliability ................................................................................................................. 19
   Ethical Aspects .............................................................................................................................. 20
   Role of the Researcher .................................................................................................................. 20
   Interviewee Profiles ...................................................................................................................... 21

9. Results & Analysis ....................................................................................................................... 22  
   9.1 Refugees’ Motivations and Gains in Civil Society Participation ........................................... 22
   9.2 Refugees’ Experiences of Social Integration .......................................................................... 33

10. Conclusions .................................................................................................................................. 41

11. Future Research .......................................................................................................................... 42

References

Appendix: Interview Guide
1. Introduction

As migratory movements continue at full speed all across our globe, integration of immigrants remains a major challenge for multiethnic societies. Despite their high living standards and welfare state principles, Nordic countries are no exception and they also cope with this social phenomenon. Integration is not the easiest process and there are many factors to consider. Even if newcomers achieve a certain level of incorporation in host societies through access to employment, housing and public services, their social integration continues to be a long and bumpy road, as they keep struggling for inclusion in their new homes. Every day, we read critical views in the media and academia about the social exclusion and isolation of these minority groups and we hear comments from politicians for or against migrants.

In this context, the debate about refugees and their integration is a major agenda item. Establishing communication and relationships with members of the mainstream society is an essential step for newly arrived refugees in adapting to the culture and reconstructing their social lives, but it is also a challenging process. One can observe that civil society plays an important role in supporting refugees’ adaptation and facilitating social integration. In that sense, there is great value in exploring the specific gains refugees acquire from civil society activities and whether these resources lead to genuine social relationships between them and host communities. To explore this topic, this study looks into the activities of a Danish civil society organization which offers activities and assistance for refugees.

2. Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this study is to investigate how refugees experience their participation in civil society organizations and how these organizations affect social integration in terms of social relationships. To achieve this goal, I specifically explore which resources are made available to refugees through the activities of a Danish civil society organization and if such resources help them establish relationships within the host society, become a part of social life and be socially integrated. Accordingly, the study is constructed on the following research questions:

-What are refugees’ motivations to participate in the activities of a civil society organization?
-Do the refugees feel they gain anything from this participation, and if so, what are these gains?
-How do they experience these activities affect their social relationships and interactions in the host society?

3. Delimitations
The first delimitation in this research is about the location of the study. As a case study is conducted, the research focuses on one specific institution, a non-profit community center in Copenhagen that provides services for asylum seekers and refugees who are trying to navigate in their new country. The second delimitation concerns the group of people examined in the research. The study is limited to a group of refugees whose asylum applications have been processed and who have consequently received positive answers granting them the legal permits to live and work in Denmark. This is also a group who currently reside in the vicinity of Copenhagen area and frequently visit the community center explored in this thesis. By choosing interviewees with refugee status, the goal was to collect accurate data about experiences of social integration independent from the conditions of the asylum-seeking process. Interviewees were selected among people between 25-40 years of age in an attempt to capture the views and experiences of relatively young and/or newly arrived refugees.

4. Structure of the Thesis
This thesis is structured in a way that will first provide some contextual information regarding the immigration policies in Denmark, the current debate about refugees and a brief presentation of a Danish community center offering assistance to newcomers. In the following sections, previous research focusing on the relation between civil society organizations and social integration is presented, along with an explanation of the concepts of social integration, social capital and human capital and their interconnectedness in the theory section. Afterwards, methods used in this research are explained, as the rest of the document includes empirical findings and their analysis, conclusions and suggestions for further research.

5. Contextual Background
The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) defines refugees as people who fled conflict or persecution, are protected in international law and must not be returned to situations where their lives and freedoms are at risk, while the institution reports there are roughly 20 million refugees in the world\(^1\). Incorporation of refugees into receiving societies is an issue widely
discussed all across Europe and in Scandinavian welfare states, so this discussion takes place in Denmark as well. Media reports claim Denmark wants not to be so attractive for refugees anymore, especially after the recent introduction of restrictive measures to immigration policies (Delman, 2016; Boserup, 2017; Damon and Hume, 2016). UNHCR’s statistical yearbook provides us an overview of the refugee population in Denmark, as figures for 2016 point to 33,507 refugees. According to such data, around 7,250 asylum seekers received positive answers in 2016, which is the year after the “so-called refugee crisis”. This means only one out of nine people who got residence permits that year was a refugee. Official figures published by Statistics Denmark show that the country has granted asylum or refugee status to approximately 2,700 people in 2017, pointing to a significant decrease.

Denmark’s first integration law introduced in 1999 envisaged for refugees a three-year obligatory placement in municipalities where they could be immersed in local Danish communities, as well as a course on Danish language and culture (Larsen, 2012: 154). Refugees used to be located mostly in urban areas prior to this act and the Danish Ministry of Integration explained the goal of such spatial dispersal policy as promoting refugees’ integration into the mainstream Danish society by reducing their risk of social and economic marginalization in ethnic ghettos in cities (ibid. 155). The law is believed to have a contradictory aim as it encourages refugees to seek employment on one hand, but limits them to the local community on the other, depriving them off the opportunity to be in larger cities where more jobs are accessible (ibid.). Such mandatory placement also affects refugees’ daily lives, particularly their ability to build social networks (ibid. 157). According to The Danish Immigration Service and The Danish Agency for International Recruitment and Integration, “the purpose of the Danish Integration Act is to ensure that newly arrived foreign nationals get an opportunity to use their abilities and resources to become active citizens on equal terms with other citizens in the Danish society”. Contrary to such official stance, research on welfare states assert that, although Denmark has the self-perception of a country characterized by equality, it never embraces the multi-ethnic structure truly and immigrants are expected to adapt to the Danish society (Jørgensen and Emerek, 2014: 159). There is also further criticism

1 http://www.unhcr.org/refugees.html
2 http://www.unhcr.org/statistics/country/5a8ee0387/unhcr-statistical-yearbook-2016-16th-edition.html
5 https://www.nyidanmark.dk/en-GB/Words-and-concepts/Fælles/Integration-act
of Danish practices on ethnic minorities, as studies note that Denmark has been repeatedly criticized by the European Commission for not implementing the requirements of the directives on protection of immigrants against discrimination and unequal treatment (ibid.158).

The lack of social integration is a global problem and one can widely observe that migrant groups do not participate in the social life of the host society as frequently and equally as the native population (Diaz, 1993: 1). Immigrants, upon settling in a new society, might not easily possess the same level of social relationships they had back in their home countries and such lack of communication might complicate their social integration process. In that context, civil society organizations’ role is a very interesting aspect to explore in order to see if they can create a channel between immigrants and communities in the host society.

Exploring a Community Center in Denmark
The Danish community center examined in this study offers activities for refugees and asylum seekers such as social and legal counselling, language classes, lectures, workshops, vocational trainings, film screenings, medical services, hot meals, a women’s club and childcare. It also provides specific assistance to refugees to help them through Denmark’s official integration program. The center was established by activists as a reaction to the Danish asylum system which prevents refugees and asylum seekers from participating in daily life together with the rest of the Danish society. With the aim to fight isolation and to provide a place of support, the founders wanted to create a user-driven house where people could actively participate, obtain knowledge for their new lives, build new communities and socialize with other residents of Denmark. The center also aims at informing the Danish public about the conditions faced by refugees and asylum seekers. The institution is not funded by the government and heavily depends on individual supports.

6. Previous Research
There is remarkable research exploring civil society and social connection’s role in providing social capital and facilitating integration, yet there is not sufficient examination of the potential collective effect of social and human capital gains on social integration. To my opinion, social and human capital are intertwined and inseparable in enhancing newcomer incorporation into social life. By pointing to such interconnection and assessing the human capital component in civil society’s role, this research tries to make a contribution towards filling in such gap in the literature.
Wollebaek and Selle’s study (2002: 33) aims at testing the proposition that associations, particularly through the opportunities they provide for face-to-face interaction between people, contribute to the formation of social capital. The study looks at indicators to measure the sub-dimensions of social capital such as social trust, social networks and civic engagement, and to find out the importance of participation in associations for the formation of social capital (ibid. 41-42). The authors base their analysis on quantitative data from a nationwide survey conducted via questionnaires mailed to randomly selected Norwegians aged between 16 and 85 (ibid.). The results of the 1,695 valid responses indicate that participation in voluntary associations contributes to social trust, expands social networks, introduces new friends and makes people more civically engaged (ibid. 42, 46, 51). The authors underscore that associations teach their members ways of cooperation and solidarity, while helping them gain skills and competencies (ibid. 35). The study also reveals that participation in associations can provide a sense of identification and flow of information (ibid. 56-57).

Ager and Strang (2008: 167) conducted a study to develop a conceptual structure for the key components of integration. They held qualitative fieldwork and 62 semi-structured interviews in two refugee-impacted communities in London and Glasgow, used data from a national cross-sectional survey to conduct statistical analysis and formulated a framework based on the emerging themes and domains (ibid. 167-169). Their research underscores social connection’s role in facilitating integration and emphasizes the necessity to see integration as a mutual process that enables social connection between refugees and the communities they settle in the host society (ibid. 177). Many of their respondents describe successful integration as a community with active mixing of different people and consider belonging as an indicator of living in an integrated community which involves family links, genuine friendships, respect and shared values (ibid. 177-178). Their analysis also points to the distinction between the concepts of social bonds and bridges as forms of social connection (ibid. 178). Refugees participating in the study express that bonds with family members and co-ethnics help them feel settled; while bridges established with host communities make them feel at home, secure and recognized, as shared activities enhance the feeling of integration (ibid. 178-181). The scholars underscore that it is necessary to further explore social capital as “an explanatory concept for the processes of integration” (ibid. 186).
There is also previous research investigating the impact of shared activities between immigrants and the native population in fostering integration. Jamie Johnston’s (2016) study focuses on the effect of language cafés on newcomer immigration in Sweden. In a case-study, the researcher looks into the Språkhörnan program at the City Library in Malmö (ibid. 10). Johnston shares findings from participant observations, five semi-structured interviews, a focus group with program facilitators and a questionnaire filled in by 24 people (ibid. 12-13). The empirical data obtained from participants from 16 mostly non-Western countries reveal that the information exchange provided by activities like conversation groups support integration by offering immigrants the opportunity of social interaction both with other immigrants and members of the mainstream society (ibid. 10). According to the study, such initiatives not only support language learning, but expand social networks, help people socialize, improve knowledge about the host society, and thus, foster integration (ibid. 10, 14).

7. Theoretical Framework

During this research, social integration, social capital and human capital prevailed as the most relevant conceptual framework to implement, considering the present topic and case. An important factor for the selection of such foundational framework is that these three concepts are very much interconnected, and when assessed together, they can provide us a picture of the level of immigrant incorporation and interactions in host societies. On the other hand, integration is a versatile term that might stand for different things for different people. In line with such sentiment, this research focuses on refugees’ experiences of social integration. In this section, an outline of the mentioned concepts will be provided:

Social Integration

Integration is seen by some scholars as a personal, contextual and somewhat “chaotic” concept and it is challenging to come up with a single, generally-acknowledged definition as it may have different meanings for individuals (Robinson & Castles et al. in Ager and Strang, 2008: 167).

When looking at relations between minority groups and members of the wider society, Berry’s (1997: 5) social-psychological model discusses how individuals coming from a certain cultural context behave when they try to re-establish their lives in a new culture. The scholar talks about the concept of acculturation which can be described as a process including
individuals from different cultures coming in contact, subsequently changing their original culture and adapting (ibid. 7, 9). Berry proposes four outcomes of acculturation in a plural host society: assimilation, separation, marginalization and integration (ibid. 9). According to him, integration appears when immigrants both preserve some part of their cultural integrity and participate as an integral part of the larger society (ibid.). In Berry’s approach, integration can be pursued by minority groups if the dominant society is inclusive towards cultural diversity and the two sides have a mutual acceptance of rights to live as culturally different groups (ibid.10).

Blau (1980: 787) believes that integration depends on social bonds and intergroup relations among members of different segments of the society. According to the author, knowing people with different backgrounds reduces prejudice, enhances objectivity and tolerance (ibid. 786). He suggests the less segregated different races and classes are, the more their differences penetrate into communities, and associations, by enabling the connection between different groups, can foster social integration (ibid. 787). Coleman also believes social integration represents immigrants’ participation in social relations in the host society, adding that it is the immigrants’ preference to socially integrate as they are the ones who decide to invest in acquiring social resources within the receiving society (Diaz, 1993: 124).

Several key domains that may indicate integration in a host society are employment, housing, education, health, citizenship and rights, social connection, language, cultural knowledge and the feeling of safety and stability (Ager and Strang, 2008:170, 182-185). In his study on immigrant integration in Sweden, Diaz (1993: 18) offers a multi-dimensional model focusing on aspects such as communicative, residential, social, structural and political integration. In his view, communicative integration stands for competence in the host language which is a fundamental condition for further steps of integration (Johnston, 2016: 12). For Diaz, social integration means integrating into various spheres of social relations and interactions in the host society (Diaz, 1993: 122). This research adopts such description and multi-dimensional model of social integration.

Diaz (1993: 4, 11) relates integration to the level of “inter-ethnic interactions and relations” in different spheres of social life. He describes social integration as the social resources acquired by immigrants through involvement in such multi-ethnic relations (ibid. 125). The scholar underscores that integration means becoming a part of the host society’s social life and is linked to the quality of social relations (ibid. 16-17). He further thinks integration requires
minority members’ increased participation in social relations within the majority society and the level of interaction between immigrants and natives in qualitative forms can help us assess social integration (ibid. 7, 125-126). In line with Coleman, Diaz sees social integration as an outcome of the immigrant’s decision to acquire social resources generating from various kinds of social relations within the receiving society (ibid. 124, 127). According to the scholar, inter-ethnic contacts coming from friendships, marriage, cohabitation and membership in voluntary organizations are the result of certain individual social choices (ibid. 126-127). Diaz also emphasizes that reconstruction of social life in the host country is a significant need for immigrants, while social networks and relationships are essential elements to build these new ties (ibid. 122). Empirical data from Diaz’s study point out that immigrants who participate in union organizations get more chances of contact and interaction (ibid. 162).

**Social Capital**

There is a multitude of perspectives about social capital and the concept is used both with a utilitarian aspect of capital and as an umbrella term to explain many sociological factors, therefore, there is the emphasis that research on social capital should be multi-level (Lin, Cook and Burt, 2001). Bourdieu (1986: 15-16) describes social capital as actual or virtual resources that one has access to through a network of institutionalized relationships founded on mutual acquaintance and recognition (ibid. 21). Such networks provide collective support, profits and solidarity; besides, different forms of capital can affect each other’s accumulation and social capital can be converted into economic capital (ibid. 21-22, 25). According to Bourdieu, the volume of one’s social capital depends on the size of the network connections he/she can mobilize (ibid. 21). The author sees networks as an outcome of the investment strategies aimed at establishing social relationships that can be directly used within a short or long period (ibid. 22). Bourdieu says an intense effort of sociability and continuous exchanges are required for the reproduction of social capital (ibid.). In his view, delegation of power and representation within a group affect the concentration of social capital (ibid. 23). The scholar believes opportunities for socialization and relationships are generally distributed very unequally among social classes and groups of different origins (ibid. 28).

Coleman (1998: 168) describes social relations as an important form of social capital which provides information that facilitates people’s actions. He suggests all social relations enhance social capital, people establish relations for a purpose and tend to maintain them as long as they get benefits (ibid. 169). Furthermore, Burt (1997: 340) emphasizes that social capital
provides information benefits in terms of access, timing and referrals. The scholar underscores “people who are better connected do better” (Burt, 2000: 347). Portes (1998: 2-3) suggests social capital’s strength comes from its positive consequence of sociability, the benefits it introduces through group participation and its influence as a non-monetary source just like financial power. The author highlights social capital’s role in generating human capital elements such as educational credentials and employment (ibid. 5, 12). Lin (2001: 8, 10) perceives social capital as a relational asset, noting that it can be seen as similar to human capital considering the benefits it presents through investments in social relations.

There are views suggesting that social capital provides benefits through networks and enables interactions with people outside of one’s own intimate circle (Portes, 1998: 12; Hooghe and Stolle, 2003: 2). There is a growing consensus in literature that accepts social capital as assets and resources embedded in and gained through social networks (Portes, 1998: 6, 12; Lin, 2001: 3). Networks are interpersonal connections which bring together migrants, former migrants and non-migrants through kinship, friendship and shared community ties, and many researchers see networks as a form of or a tool for social capital (Massey et al, 2005: 42-43; Hollifield and Wong, 2015: 241). Massey et al (2005: 43) note that networks provide people access to various kinds of financial capital like employment, savings and remittances. Scholars suggest there is a strong relation between mental and physical health and network position, besides, possession of social contacts and ties reduces the likelihood of pathological behaviors (Hooghe and Stolle, 2003: 4; Diaz, 1993: 123). For Lin (2001: 7, 19-20) social relations can provide emotional support, a feeling of worthiness and life satisfaction, and through such reinforcements and expressive returns, they can maintain mental health. Bourdieu (1986: 22) thinks a network of social connections and relationships is the outcome of intense efforts both at individual and collective level which create exchange, knowledge and recognition.

In Putnam’s (2000: 19) understanding, social capital stands for “connections among individuals - social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them”. The author believes social capital is related to civic virtues which gain their strength from a network of reciprocal relationships (ibid.) He notes social capital has the capacity to do both “private and public good” by providing benefits for the individual and the wider community, adding that generalized reciprocity and trustworthiness make a society more efficient and nurture social life (ibid. 20-21). According to him, informal social connections
can be formed at all levels in social hierarchy and they can provide remarkable social support (ibid. 94-95). The scholar also suggests that cooperation is easier in a community with substantial social capital; mutual help constitutes an investment in social capital and strengthens solidarity; while trust increases social exchange (Putnam, 1993: 167, 169, 172). The scholar thinks face-to-face interactions within voluntary associations, with neighbors and friends enable the creation and generalization of trust, and those who have a high feeling of trust can interact with others more easily (Hooghe and Stolle, 2003: 8). Putnam (1993: 173) sees networks of civic engagement as an essential form of social capital which offer their members cooperation and benefits. Meanwhile, Lin (2001: 8) points out that interacting members keep networks alive and ensure their continuous operation.

At this point, it would be helpful to talk about the distinction between strong and weak ties. According to Granovetter (1973: 1361), the strength of a tie depends on the effort and time spent on it. For him, friends represent strong ties and a dense network, while acquaintances correspond to weak ties in a less dense network (ibid. 1368, 1370). Granovetter describes organizations as sources of weak ties, and in his view, when information and influence are shared between individuals, such resources are passed along to their contacts and these indirect connections refer to bridges that are equated with weak ties (ibid. 1364, 1375). People to whom we are weakly tied have access to contacts and information different than us, therefore, weak ties can link members of different small groups and provide mobility opportunities (ibid. 1371, 1373, 1376). Weak ties are seen indispensable in creating opportunities for individuals and enhancing their integration into communities (ibid. 1378).

Another categorization of social capital elements that can be considered within the context of integration includes social bonds established with family and co-ethnics, and social bridges built with host communities. Putnam (2000: 22) says bonding social capital focuses on interactions between similar identities, while bridging interactions include people from diverse segments of the society. Bonding can provide significant social and psychological support within dense networks like ethnic enclaves, while bridging networks are more useful for establishing link with external assets and spreading information (ibid. 23). On the other hand, many groups might both bond along and bridge across various social dimensions, so these two should not be perceived as “either-or” categories (ibid.). It is also noteworthy that bridging social capital is believed to promote tolerance and acceptance of differences (Hooghe and Stolle, 2003: 5).
**Human Capital**

Human capital embodies skills, education and knowledge (Hooghe and Stolle, 2003: 4). A definition by the OECD calls it competencies, knowledge and attributes that facilitate personal, social and economic well-being (Keeley, 2007: 29). This concept is extensively used in literature when discussing migrants’ economic integration. For Schultz (1961: 1, 8), human capital equals to skills and knowledge that affect one’s capabilities to do productive work. His use of human capital mostly focuses on the concept’s effect on maximizing earnings and economic growth (ibid. 1, 3, 7). The scholar believes people are an important part of a nation’s wealth and human capital not only benefits individuals, but it can enhance the general welfare, production and economy (ibid. 2, 7). Schultz lists the major categories which enable investment in human capital as access to health services, vocational trainings, formal education and study programs that transmit knowledge and develop skills (ibid. 9). According to the scholar, one’s productivity is enhanced when his/her skills and knowledge are improved (ibid. 1).

Becker (1962: 9) believes investing in human capital means improving physical and mental abilities. The author’s focus is again mostly on the economic outcomes of such investments. In his opinion, the development of certain types of knowledge and skills requires time and specialization, therefore, investments in human capital extend over a long period (ibid. 25, 30). The scholar also notes that younger people tend to be more interested in learning and training opportunities, thus, they display a greater incentive to invest as it is possible for them to collect the return over a longer time (ibid. 38). Becker (1975: 17, 19-20) further comments that productivity can be increased by learning new skills and perfecting previous ones through on-the-job trainings, while trainings can increase an individual’s marginal productivity both for their current and prospective workplaces. Moreover, Becker underscores the positive outcomes of schooling and enhancing specific knowledge such as information about political and social system or new job opportunities (ibid. 37, 39).

We can also briefly touch on Weisbord’s work (1962) emphasizing how investment in both human and non-human capital can contribute to economic growth and welfare. In his opinion, particularly schooling and education can make a difference not only in terms of economic gains but in other aspects of life. Weisbord notes that education benefits many people other than the student only, as educated and informed people can contribute to the improvement of their family members and the society at large (ibid. 107). The author underscores that education helps not only one’s current family, but his/her future family (ibid. 116-117).
The Interconnection

As seen from the review of literature and relevant theories, the three key concepts used in this study are connected to one another, they affect and complement each other. As some put it; “social capital resides in relationships” and is a valuable explanatory concept to study integration (Hooghe and Stolle, 2003: 4; Diaz, 1993: 124; Ager and Strang 2008:186). According to Diaz (1993: 124, 164), social integration can be achieved as immigrants participate in social relations in the host society, obtain social capital and instrumentally use these resources for various purposes. When we look at the link between civil society, social capital and social integration, research reveals that civil society organizations facilitate native-immigrant interaction and raise the chances of social integration for immigrants (ibid. 154, 162). Social capital is linked to social interactions and relationships, and voluntary associations, acting as generators of such social capital, can contribute to social integration (Hooghe and Stolle, 2003: 3, 10, 12-13). Collective groups are based on cooperative social interaction and collective values, moreover, civil society is an expression of the human desire to socialize through voluntary association (Sardinha, 2009: 71).

As mentioned earlier in this section, social capital, especially networks, can provide access to human capital such as occupational attainment. Previous research confirms that the opposite might also happen. Immigrants can improve their status in social life thanks to learning and training opportunities, and social capital can function on the foundations of skills and knowledge to build relationships through social networks (Diaz, 1993: 2; Sardinha, 2009: 73-74). There are studies showing that human capital, in connection with social capital, can play a role in integration. Empirical data reveal that human capital can facilitate integration into both social and economic life and mastering the language of the host country is considered a key factor for integration, especially for social adjustment in the society (Pfeffer and Parra, 2009: 256, 265-267; Mahmood, 2016: 16, 165). It is also underscored that proper integration of immigrants can help the host society benefit from their human capital stock (Mahmood, 2016: 17). That said, there are studies showing that social capital might not always be beneficial. For instance, a social environment that is defined dominantly on ethnic features might result in fewer social contacts with members of the mainstream society and thus lead to less social integration (Diaz, 1993: 161).
8. Methodology

This study is based on qualitative methods, designed as a case study and has an inductive approach. Empirical data were collected via semi-structured interviews and observations. Data collection took place as part of the researcher’s volunteering work between February and May 2018. The following sections provide detailed information about the methodological approach:

**Philosophy of the Research**

This study is based on a relativist and social-constructivist standpoint. Such stance comes with no surprise as case studies are very much considered within the social-constructivist perspective in social sciences, and observations, by their nature, require constructing meanings from our experiences (Stark and Torrance, 2004: 33; Jones and Somekh, 2004: 141). In an attempt to avoid bias and preserve impartiality, I questioned my position through a reflexive approach, being aware of my insider/outsider roles, the context and the effects of interactions (Somekh and Lewin, 2004: 113).

**Qualitative & Inductive Approach**

Qualitative methods allow for the development of an understanding of the informants’ viewpoints, social processes and context (May, 2011: 126). They explain human phenomena through “words” and support the interpretive and value-laden nature of social knowledge (Greene, Kraider and Mayer, 2004: 32-33). Qualitative approach enables the researcher to collect data in the field and to capture close-up information about participants’ experiences of a particular issue (Creswell, 2014: 185). This makes it possible to gather information through face-to-face interaction, by seeing people’s behaviors within a certain context and in a natural setting (ibid.). In this study, qualitative approach enabled me to conduct an in-depth exploration of the experiences of refugees who are members of a civil society organization. Such approach allowed me to collect as much data as possible in the field through interviews and observations. I preferred not to use quantitative methods such as questionnaires both due to time limitations and as I specifically wanted to have face-to-face interactions with informants in order to capture a better and closer picture of their perceptions and behaviors.

Moreover, this study has an inductive approach, is highly material-driven and conclusions were drawn from the data collected. Previous studies provided me a guideline and theory was used to explain the study’s findings. Inductive research typically starts with a question and the
researcher’s goal is not verifying or falsifying a hypothesis, so without a firm idea about the result, the study begins with empirical material and is conducted to find out how the process works (6 and Bellamy, 2012: 76-77, 264). In inductive approach, researchers build their categories and themes from bottom up by organizing the data gradually into more abstract forms of information and focus on capturing the meanings attached by participants to the issue in question (Creswell, 2014: 186). Accordingly, themes in this study appeared throughout the research process and my main goal was to capture the informants’ viewpoints about the topic.

**Case Study**

Case study is concerned with understanding what life and experiences mean for individuals, and it enables the researcher to examine actors in a certain setting and the meanings they attach to social phenomena (Stark and Torrance, 2004: 15, 33). It helps us explore an example via various methods and create a “rich description” from the participants’ standpoints (ibid.). It is considered to be inductive and the researcher’s knowledge and understandings are believed to have a part in the research process (May and Perry, 2011: 230). Case study might not primarily possess a specific theoretical framework or propositions and the study might unravel over time (ibid.). Once participants’ perspectives are obtained, the study can move towards theoretical explanations of the findings (Stark and Torrance, 2004: 34). As much of the work is about getting the insider perspective, observing participants in their natural setting, interviews and informal conversations play an important role in case study (ibid.). In this study, interviews and observations were used to collect data and informal conversations helped me better understand the context. Although I had an understanding of which concepts might apply to the study at the beginning of the research, the theoretical framework was eventually shaped in accordance with the data collected, allowing me to make several changes and additions along the way.

On the other hand, some scholars think case study has a weakness as it does not allow for generalizing from a single case to the whole population, while others criticize it in terms of subjectivity and the value of focusing on the “one” (Stark and Torrance, 2004: 33; May and Perry, 2011: 220). However, some suggest that the success of research actually depends on the quality of the data collected and evidence presented, so a good case study enables readers relate to their own experiences and conduct a “naturalistic generalization” (Stark and Torrance, 2004: 34). There are efforts in contemporary research to find a middle ground
which underscore that as much as a single case has value on its own, theory development and a level of generalization can be achieved if there are multiple cases that provide fruitful insights (May and Perry, 2011: 241-242). In that respect, this study focuses on a particular case and explores the activities of a specific community center, but through the multiple methods used, it aims at collecting various data about different human experiences. Therefore, this study looks at various cases within a case and picks the themes, similarities or differences that prevail, thus provides the chance to see patterns within a case. Besides, data collected in this study can both provide rich insights about a civil society organization’s contribution to refugee life and make us wonder if similar effects might be traced in other organizations.

**Access to Research Field and Sample**

Regarding access to the research field, there are factors to be considered such as location, travelling and allocating time for research (May and Perry, 2011: 233). Meanwhile, access does not only mean physical location, but it refers to social access in terms of networks (ibid.). As participant observation means joining a group, it is important that the researcher is accepted by relevant people and getting such access might require a certain negotiation (May, 2011: 173-174). In this research, I approached the Danish community center in Copenhagen through my own social contacts. Upon getting the administrative staff’s approval for the research proposal, I volunteered at this center for three months. By establishing relationships with the members, I had the chance to meet interviewees who would like to participate in the research. I reached the interviewees through snowball sampling, as such technique enables the researcher identify people with knowledge of information-rich cases, by asking initial respondents to nominate potential participants (Creswell, 2013: 158; May, 2011: 131).

**Semi-Structured Interviews**

Interviews offer insights into people’s memories, feelings, opinions and aspirations (Stark and Torrance, 2004: 35; May, 2011: 131). In semi-structured interviews, questions can be specified based on a list of themes, while the interviewer has the freedom to investigate what is beyond the answers and establish a dialogue with the interviewee (May, 2011: 134; Barbour and Schostak, 2004: 42). A review of relevant literature helps the researcher frame the interview questions which can also be tested beforehand to achieve clarity (Barbour and Schostak, 2004: 42). On the other hand, there is the opinion that a single interview, however revealing it is, can only offer limited insights about social phenomena (May, 2011: 136). According to this view, comparing a number of interviews would help us see the significant
points, while each interview can individually contribute to the bigger story the researcher would like to reach (ibid.).

In line with such approach, I conducted semi-structured interviews with seven refugees in this study. The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. Semi-structured interview design gave me the freedom to discuss not only the issues related to the main themes of this study, but it showed me the contingent side of qualitative research as every participant had a different perspective to bring in and I could go more in-depth through follow-up questions. To ensure clarity, I tested the interview questions beforehand with a few people and made the necessary improvements. Besides, face-to-face interaction provided me the chance to correct any misunderstandings on the spot. In line with my primary goal to achieve a gender balance, I interviewed four men and three women. All interviews were conducted in the same setting which was a spacious activity room providing a familiar and comfortable atmosphere for the interviewees who also decided on the timing and duration of the interviews. I conducted five interviews on my own in English and Turkish, while two interviews were conducted in Danish and Arabic with the assistance of translators from the community center. The challenge of using translation in research is that the translator talks for the interviewees and the original meaning might get lost (Maclean, 2007: 784). I tried to overcome such challenge by asking follow-up questions whenever I felt like not getting sufficient information. Another point that needs to be ensured is establishing an understanding between the interviewer and interviewee regarding the goal of the study and mutual expectations (May, 2011: 140). To avoid potential effects, I paid utmost attention to be clear, impartial and non-judgmental during the interviews.

**Observations**

In order to understand social phenomena, one needs to understand how people manage and perceive their daily lives; thus, observation is one of the best ways to collect data as it enables the researcher to be present in a particular situation and make a record of impressions about what is happening (May, 2011: 173; Jones and Somekh, 2004: 138). Every researcher looks at life through his/her lens, socially-constructed views and background, therefore, observation is ontologically and epistemologically shaped (Jones and Somekh, 2004: 138, 140-141). Researchers can make use of unstructured and/or participant observations to understand a social scene. During qualitative observations, field notes are taken on the behavior of individuals at the research site (Creswell, 2014: 190). In unstructured observations, the
researcher can simply sit at the back of a room and take notes without any involvement, while in participant observations, observers can gain insights about behaviors of individuals by immersing themselves in the activities of the group that is being observed (Jones and Somekh, 2004: 140). The process requires attention as observers might easily have an impact on the people under observation who might feel like they need to perform, therefore, the researcher needs to provide informants with a feeling of equal status (ibid.).

In this research, I conducted both unstructured and participant observations. Through my volunteer work, I got the chance to observe people and their interactions both as an outsider and as a participant joining their daily lives. In line with Gold’s description, I assumed an overt role and informed the group about my presence and the intentions of the research (May, 2011: 172). In an effort to diminish my potential impact on participants as a researcher, I explained to them how I collect and use the data. I also tried to create a feeling of equality and comfort by paying attention to my behavior, speech, gestures and clothing. In order not to disrupt the natural setting, note-taking process took place right after my visits to the community center. Timely writing of the notes helped me not to miss the essence of the behaviors. Observations are complementary tools that strengthen the data collected by interviews and they provide a comprehensive understanding by witnessing the context of the circumstances informants refer to (ibid. 158). Through observations, we can make sure that data from different sources can ultimately support the same findings (May and Perry, 2011: 235). I complemented the interview data with observations in this study in an effort to achieve triangulation. Such integral approach helped me gain a better understanding of people’s behaviors and make comparisons with the findings from interviews to see overlapping or diverging points. In this study, I have used two terms to describe my sample: interviewees with whom I conducted the interviews, and informants that I observed who refer to the mixed group of refugees and asylum-seekers jointly attending the activities of the community center.

Analyzing the Data
Researchers review all the data collected in a study, make sense out of such data and organize it into categories and themes (Creswell, 2014: 186). A text data can be dense, some of it might be winnowed and gathered into small number of themes (ibid. 195). Case study design particularly requires detailed descriptions, accompanied by the analysis of the data under certain themes (ibid.196). Coding is conceptualizing data and codes help us assess products of an analysis in terms of categories and their relations; in other words, if outcomes are similar,
they can be categorized under certain headings (May, 2011: 152-153). In this study, relevant themes and headings were determined based on the data collected from different sources and detailed descriptions were used to give the reader an accurate view of the community center. In accordance with Creswell’s (2014: 196-200) steps for data analysis, I organized the raw data from interviews, observations and informal conversations for analysis; read all the data in order to get a general sense and overall meaning; hand-coded the data by using words representing certain categories and determined the themes that prevailed as major findings. In the meantime, I provided descriptions of the setting and the people; and presented such themes and descriptions in a narrative form conveying the findings. Finally, I reached certain interpretations and compared the findings with the literature and relevant theories.

Validity and Reliability
Reliability is about how we measure things and achieve consistency (6 and Bellamy, 2012: 21). Qualitative reliability indicates that our approach in a research is consistent across different researchers, enabling others to use our tools in an effort to reach similar results (Creswell, 2014: 201, 203; 6 and Bellamy 2013: 21). To achieve reliability, it is recommended that the researcher documents the steps of the study, checks transcripts to avoid mistakes, pays attention to the definitions of themes and makes sure there is no drift while coding them (Creswell, 2014: 203). In this study, all the research process was documented transparently, interviews were taped and transcribed, and field notes were taken in order to ensure reliability. As the present research is a case study, replication of the exact same research is doubtful, and although repetition might be possible within the same case, there is no guarantee that informants will respond the same way to a different researcher and outcomes might differ. As replicability means getting the same results with the same methods and samples, it is easier to achieve in quantitative research (6 and Bellamy 2013: 94). Therefore, this study aimed for reliability by maintaining transparency.

Validity is related to accuracy and to capturing what we intend to find out (6 and Bellamy, 2012: 21; Creswell, 2014: 201). Validity is a strength of qualitative research and helps us determine whether the findings are accurate from the researcher’s, participants’ and readers’ standpoints (Creswell, 2014: 201). Also, spending time and having interactions in the field help the researcher develop an in-depth understanding of the topic and this improves the accuracy of how the case is presented (ibid.). To ensure validity in this study, the conceptual framework was defined and operationalized clearly. I used multiple research methods to
utilize different sources of data so as to check the accuracy of the findings. Additionally, testing the interview questions in advance helped me ensure that the study measures what I intend to learn and the same set of questions asked to all interviewees brought a certain standardization. Moreover, by providing first-hand information from the field and using excerpts from talks with informants, the study gives readers the chance to draw their own conclusions and such openness provides inter-subjectivity. Spending three months as a volunteer provided me a deeper understanding of the environment and contributed to accuracy. That said, observing a small setting such as the proposed case might lead to low external validity as findings might be mostly not generalizable, however, the way to overcome this challenge is to triangulate variety of sources for data collection (May, 2011: 187). Such approach was adopted in this study, moreover, the possibility of seeing certain patterns within the case provided a level of internal validity.

**Ethical Aspects**

In the research process, key ethical concepts such as consent, confidentiality, anonymity and access to publication should be taken into consideration (Piper and Simons, 2004: 56). In this study, participants’ consent was ensured through voluntary participation and the possibility of withdrawal at any time. I sought permissions of participants and informed them clearly about the research purposes, as I also kept the community informed about my position as a researcher throughout the research process. In that sense, there was not any kind of deception about the intentions and the scope of the research. Confidentiality enables participants both to share their opinions privately and to request exclusion of certain information from the research (ibid. 57). Accordingly, I preserved the confidentiality and privacy of the informants and the community center in this study, ensuring the anonymity of the interviewees by assigning them aliases and not using the actual name of the community center. Furthermore, I avoided sensitive questions in order not to cause harm and did not ask interviewees about their personal journeys, asylum processes or families and let them talk about such topics to the extent they preferred. Besides, I informed participants about their right to refuse the publication of any data they might deem harmful. In the name of transparency, this study will be shared with members of the studied community center upon publication.

**Role of the Researcher**

As qualitative research is interpretive work and the researcher is typically involved in experiences with participants, it is of great importance for the inquirer to reflect about his/her
specific features such as personal background, culture, occupation and socioeconomic status that might shape the interpretations made and the meanings ascribed to data during the research process (Creswell, 2014: 186-187). In an effort to achieve self-reflexivity, I need to mention my journalistic background which has provided me an investigative and critical view of the world. As I had done journalistic research and written articles about migration and humanitarian issues prior to this study, I unavoidably had a certain viewpoint when I started this research. Additionally, the current refugee crisis in my origin country, Turkey, has affected my understanding of this social phenomenon. Another point could be my nationality as it might have affected interviewees’ approaches to me, although my overall experience has been positive. Nevertheless, I believe such personal background was beneficial for this research as it provided a more comprehensive approach to this very problematic issue and enabled me to establish a fruitful dialogue with the informants. Despite the fact that such personal background might leave room for potential subjectivity, I attached utmost attention to focusing on participants’ experiences, designing the research clearly, presenting the findings as accurate and transparent as possible and discussing the issue objectively.

**Interviewee Profiles**

Below is an outlook of the refugees interviewed in this study. Apart from one interviewee who has been in Denmark for over five years, the rest have been granted asylum recently:

**Abdo** is a 38-year-old refugee from Sudan. He has had technical education in Denmark and is employed.

**Dadvar** is a 35-year-old Afghan refugee. He has been in Denmark for three years and currently attends university. He is a frequent visitor of the community center.

**Farida** is 36 years old. She came to Denmark from Morocco four years ago. She is employed and comes to the community center mostly at the weekends.

**Hani** is a 40-year-old refugee from Somalia. She arrived in Denmark two years ago. She attends the daily language classes at the community center.

**Massawa** is a 25-year-old Eritrean refugee. He is unemployed and spends most of his free time at the community center.

**Reza** is a 26-year-old Iranian refugee who came to Denmark two years ago. He is a university student. He has been regularly attending the community center for five months.

**Yelda** is a Kurdish refugee and 26 years old. She arrived in Denmark slightly over a year ago. She comes to the community center frequently and attends almost all activities.
9. Results & Analysis

9.1 Refugees’ Motivations and Gains in Civil Society Participation

Interviewees talked about their motivations to participate in civil society activities and whether such participation provided them with any gains. They mentioned socialization and emotional support as primary motivations related to social capital, while they listed language skills and information as main motivations linked to human capital. Such themes overlapped with the reported gains, demonstrating that interviewees eventually obtained what they had expected. As additional themes, civic values were mentioned as a social capital gain and professional skills were reported as a human capital benefit.

Themes related to social capital:

Communication and socialization

The need for communication and social networks was a primary motivation for coming to a community center:

“I come here, because I am new in Copenhagen. I need to meet new people and find friends, and I need a place to just communicate with people. Otherwise, I have to sit at home all alone, watching a movie or YouTube. It is fun, but not every day.” (Reza)

Reza noted that meeting new people provided him a social benefit by helping him step out of his daily routines which did not offer many socialization opportunities. This statement reinforces the theoretical viewpoint that social relations enhance social capital and people establish relations for a purpose and for benefits (Coleman, 1998: 169). Parallel to previous research, the finding also demonstrates that participation in voluntary associations expands social networks and introduces new friends (Wollebaek and Selle, 2002: 46). Similar to Reza, Abdo said he wanted to socialize, but he was interested in establishing relationships with both his co-ethnics and members of the mainstream society:

“I come here to be among my people and to be with those sharing the same problems with me […] Also, I moved here and to understand the culture, the mentality, I need to find a way to know as much as I can about Danish people and create a big group, socialize with them.”
Abdo perceives socialization as relations with people both from one’s inner circle and the host society, therefore, his remarks can be linked to bonding and bridging social capital. His statement supports Putnam’s (2000: 22) view which considers bonding as interactions between similar identities or ethnicities and bridging as ties with people from diverse segments of the society. As the scholar explains, bonding creates social support among co-ethnics, while bridging provides access to external assets and information (ibid. 23). In line with such approach, socialization enables Abdo to be with “his people” on one hand, and to have interactions and exchanges with Danish people on the other. Thus, this finding demonstrates that bonding and bridging can take place at the same time. What Abdo hopes to get from socialization with the native population is linked to his goal to understand the society better, therefore, his perception of networks as an investment strategy reflects Bourdieu’s (1986: 22) approach to network membership. Reza and Dadvar further mentioned the multicultural environment and the opportunity to expand social networks as major social capital gains:

“This is what I really like about this place. I meet people who talk Danish and people from different countries […] During my first month in Copenhagen, I was all alone and my network was only Iranian guys, but after I found this place, it is not that boring anymore. It is boring to visit the same guy every day even though he is your best friend. You need to find new people and talk with them. This is how this place has helped me.” (Reza)

“This is a multicultural place. I can see so many different cultures and talk to different people […] I found many friends here; Danish, Iranian, Afghan and from all around the world.” (Dadvar)

Both Reza and Dadvar mentioned that they not only met and made friends with people from different ethnicities, they also interact and socialize with Danish people. My observations supported what interviewees mentioned about the diverse atmosphere and there was a very mixed group in terms of ethnicity, gender, age and religion. Visitors of the community center mostly included refugees and asylum seekers from the Middle East and Africa, while volunteers, interns and staff were from Denmark, other Western European countries, the U.S., and a few from the Far-East. As one asylum seeker described it during a chat, “the atmosphere resembles the United Nations”. Young, middle-aged and older people visited the center and children were always there. Both men and women were frequent members, while
women were generally accompanied by their children, had vocational training in the kitchen, attended language classes or got counselling. It was mostly the male asylum seekers and refugees hanging out with other members or volunteers in the common areas. Locals from the neighborhood and long-time migrants in Denmark also came to the house occasionally. These findings reflect what Portes (1998: 2-3) says about social capital’s power and benefits coming from sociability and group participation. Expanded social networks demonstrate Bourdieu’s (1986: 21) argument that the volume of social capital depends on the size of network connections. They also support the views that social capital provides networks and interactions with people from different segments of the society (Putnam 2000: 22; Portes, 1998: 12; Hooghe and Stolle, 2003: 2). As seen from the atmosphere, these networks can bring together migrants, former migrants and non-migrants through friendship and shared community ties (Massey et al, 2005: 42-43; Hollifield and Wong, 2015: 241).

It is also noteworthy that these findings indicate “social relationships are for everybody”. In that sense, they support Putnam’s (2000: 94-95) argument that informal social connections can be formed at all levels in social hierarchy, while they diverge from Bourdieu’s (1986: 28) opinion that opportunities for socialization and relationships are distributed unequally among groups of different origins. Interviews demonstrated that members of the community center, regardless of their ethnicity, could enjoy the opportunities to interact with people from different backgrounds. My observations reinforced this, as I could see people talking in different languages, interacting and having joint activities with their co-ethnics, Danish people and international volunteers. Especially young members seemed to enjoy interaction with Danish and international people, and volunteers invited them to activities outside the community center. I was also invited to such an activity together with a few young refugees where we were introduced to new people from volunteers’ networks. These findings further indicate Granovetter’s (1973: 1371, 1376) view that people we are weakly tied to can have access to contacts different than us and such weak ties can connect members of different groups.

Meanwhile, there were a few exceptions like Hani from Somalia, who was mostly interested in communicating with co-ethnics:

“I only speak Somali and Arabic languages. So, I talk to people from Somalia or to Arabic speakers and make friends with them.”
Abdo’s comments confirmed some people tended to limit communication with co-ethnics only:

“When I come here I see some people speak with everyone, but some sit in groups with just those coming from Asia or Africa.”

Hani and Abdo’s remarks reflect not everybody might benefit from the multicultural atmosphere to the same extent. I also observed that some African and Kurdish refugees remained in their ethnic circles most of the time and did not interact much with other people. There are a few factors we can speculate on such as the lack of language skills mentioned by Hani, cultural, ethnical and/or religious sensitivities, or simply personal factors like shyness and low self-confidence. Regardless of the reasons for such tendency, these statements are in line with Diaz’s (1993: 161) argument that a social environment based on ethnic features might lead to fewer social contacts with members of the mainstream society.

**Mental and emotional support**

Interviewees described mental and emotional needs as a major motivation for participating in civil society activities. Farida and Dadvar explained how their psychological states drew them to this community center:

“When I was in the asylum center, a bus came from this community center and they told us we can come to this place to relieve the stress, we can do yoga and such kind of activities […] I came here to deal with my problems like stress and sickness.” (Farida)

“I did not have much good feelings when I first came to Denmark. I did not have so many Danish friends and I was not that good mentally. Then I started to come here to gain trust, because I am here as a refugee, I could not trust anybody. After I have been here some time, I felt so good and I am so happy. I feel this is my home.” (Dadvar)

Yelda, Farida and Massawa further explained how they actually got rid of loneliness and stress through their participation:

“The biggest contribution of this place is that I feel I am not alone. I stayed in an asylum center for 8 months and I wish I had known this place at the beginning. If I
had known about it, I might not have felt that lonely. Now, I know they will be with me.” (Yelda)

“This place helped me with my stress problems, when I came here I forgot about the stress. When I was sick, or my son was ill, we could come here and get help. It felt like family when I did not have my family with me.” (Farida)

“It is a nice place. I enjoy everything, parties, the food, English class, everything.” (Massawa)

These remarks demonstrate that social relations can provide emotional support, and through such reinforcement, they enhance mental health (Lin, 2001: 7, 19-20). The statements also reinforce previous studies suggesting that there is a relation between mental and physical health and possession of social networks (Hooghe and Stolle, 2003: 4; Diaz, 1993: 123). Similar to the interviewees, it was mentioned in informal conversations that overcoming loneliness and isolation were main motivations and the community center provides “the feeling of home”. Yelda and Farida implied that the center provided them a feeling of support and family. Those comments confirm Wollebaek and Selle’s (2002: 56-57) study which reveals that participation in associations can bring a sense of identification and commitment. During my observations, I could see how refugees enjoyed activities like the community dinners, monthly parties, movie screenings, musical performances, yoga sessions, art workshops or just simply playing ping pong, chilling out in the garden and chatting over coffee and tea. My impression was that all those activities lifted up people’s moods, helped them socialize and provided opportunities for self-development. These findings demonstrate Portes’ (1998: 2-3) emphasis of social capital gaining its strength from sociability and benefits of participation in groups. Meanwhile, Dadvar said the environment provided him a feeling of trust:

“I feel so close to the people here, because I have been here for 2-3 years and I am very comfortable with the people who work here. I feel safer with them”.

Dadvar’s remarks reflect Putnam’s view about face-to-face interactions within voluntary associations enabling the creation and generalization of trust, and how such trust enhances social exchange (Hooghe and Stolle, 2003: 8; Putnam, 1993: 172). There is also empirical data on voluntary associations’ contribution to social trust (Wollebaek and Selle, 2002: 46).
As informants talked about the “feeling of home”, we can link their comments to previous research indicating that refugees think bridges established with host communities make them feel at home and secure (Ager and Strang, 2008:178-181). I also observed how relationships led to trust in time, as the more I had one-on-one relationships with people, the more they trusted me, resulting in more communication and sharing. How members and staff organized a birthday party for a single mom’s son or the way people took care of a hospitalized refugee showed the feeling of “one big family” which was frequently expressed by informants.

**Civic values**

Another significant finding was that interviewees explained how they learned and experienced civic values through their civil society participation. They specifically talked about equality, respect for diversity, tolerance and collaboration. Here is what Reza said:

“I learned here that all people are the same without any background, hair color or anything else, without any judgements. Outside, we have seen some judgements, racist treatment and behavior. But, we do not see it here. They say here: ‘All people are the same, women and men are equal, and all religions are respected’. It is really nice, and you can get it every moment here.”

While assessing this statement, we can compare the views of Bourdieu and Putnam, two scholars who have extensively written about social capital. Reza’s comments support Putnam (2000: 19, 94-95) who considers social connections as structures that people from all levels in social hierarchy can possess and benefit from. This community center provides an atmosphere where people from all segments of the society can come together. Therefore, Reza’s response diverges from Bourdieu’s (1986: 28) emphasis on the unequal distribution of social relations and socialization opportunities among social classes. In that sense, we can assume that repeated messages on equality and respect expressed among members and staff of the community center might have had an effect on Reza’s opinion and are likely to have an impact on other refugees. Thus, such finding supports Putnam’s (2000: 20) argument that social capital has the capacity to do both “private and public good”, providing benefits for the individual and the wider community. Dadvar talked more about the relation between social capital and civic virtues:
“At first, I did not have any information about Danish people. I thought they are very cold and racist. But when I came to this place, I changed my mind and now I think maybe there are some racist people, but there are good people too.”

These comments reflect Blau’s (1980: 786) opinion that interaction with diverse people reduces prejudice. Previous research shows civil society provides a venue for socialization and collective groups such as voluntary organizations are constructed on social interactions and collective values (Sardinha, 2009: 71). There is also the view that bridging social capital can promote tolerance and acceptance of differences (Hooghe and Stolle, 2003: 5). Dadvar’s view reflects these previous studies and shows that opinions might change in a positive direction thanks to social interactions. Abdo and Dadvar mentioned cooperation as another motivation and gain:

“I need to be with my people. When they come here, I need to advise them. People from Africa do not know many things about the Danish, the mentality or the social and work life. So, I need to advise those who are new to Denmark as a refugee.” (Abdo)

“I would like to help people who are new here, to give them comfort and trust. Because everybody comes here for the first time, they do not feel comfortable, they might be afraid. That is the best part; to help people and tell them this is the right place and they will get help here.” (Dadvar)

Both Abdo and Dadvar point out how this community center makes it possible to help newcomers navigate in a new country. As much as Abdo’s emphasis is on bonds with “his people”, his comment brings to mind previous research revealing that associations, in general, teach their members ways of cooperation and solidarity (Wollebaek and Selle, 2002: 35). Dadvar’s remarks point to a social structure where there is continuous exchange of support. In that sense, his remarks demonstrate that interacting members keep social structures alive and enable the reproduction of social capital (Lin, 2001: 8). The findings confirm Putnam’s (1993: 167, 169) views about social capital facilitating cooperation and mutual help strengthening solidarity. Yelda and Farida gave more examples of the civic values they experienced:

“I felt happy when I saw women who come from different cultures but think like me, especially about women’s positions and rights in society, like women who fought against the hijab in Iran […] Also, a communal life exists here. We benefit from this
place, so we need to contribute in return. This way, I can feel myself as a part of collective living.” (Yelda)

“I learned here to collaborate with people, to help each other. I really like that.” (Farida)

These statements show social capital is related to civic virtues and networks of civic engagement provide collaboration, as Putnam (2000: 19; 1993: 173) said. They also reaffirm networks provide collective support and solidarity, as Bourdieu (1986: 21-22) mentioned. The remarks reinforce previous research showing participation in voluntary associations makes people more civically engaged (Wollebaek and Selle, 2002: 51). Civic virtues like solidarity and collectivity were visible in day-to-day life at the community center. Members did the grocery shopping, prepared the meals, set the dining area and ate together. They fulfilled their tasks timely, especially the cleaning duty after dinners and parties. I observed specific civic values introduced by the community center through lectures on democracy and feminism, film screenings and exhibitions about social issues such as migration, staff’s constant messages about equality and respect for women in joint activities, and the weekly house meetings providing a democratic platform where everyone had a voice.

**Themes related to human capital:**

**Information and knowledge**

Interviewees emphasized the community center’s role as a channel of information exchange. Farida, Reza and Abdo explained how they gained knowledge about the Danish society:

“I learned a lot about Denmark, the Danish system, how to do things right. Most of the information and knowledge I have about Denmark comes from this place […] I got here legal advice, too. They helped me with the lawyer, and eventually, the Job Center found me a job.” (Farida)

“I am helping people with translation, information about education and how they can socialize in Danish society, because they have been here less than me.” (Reza)

“I want to tell who are new how things work here and what they should do to start with […] Also, I speak to everyone, take their opinions and experience on life and use what I can.” (Abdo)
Development of knowledge is a human capital gain (Becker, 1962: 9; Keeley, 2007: 29; Hooghe and Stolle, 2003: 4). These statements reflect how social relationships and networks provide such benefit. During observations, I witnessed several occasions of information exchange, the most important one being the weekly house meetings where staff shared the latest news and members were encouraged to talk about any topic of their interest. Danish staff helped members with their questions all the time and NGOs frequently paid visits to hold public lectures or to respond to inquiries. People were ready to cooperate on various matters, as they offered each other help for accommodation or translation issues. These findings demonstrate how social capital leads to human capital, supporting Bourdieu’s view (1986: 24-25) about different forms of capital affecting each other’s accumulation. Becker (1975: 37, 39) also describes gaining knowledge about political and social system as a positive outcome of social capital. Lin’s (2001: 8-9) view on social capital’s relational use and function as human capital, and Coleman’s (1998: 168) perception of social relations as a form of social capital that provides information facilitating people’s actions align with these findings. Additionally, the findings support previous research confirming that participation in associations provides a flow of information (Wollebaek and Selle’s, 2002: 57). Dadvar, Massawa and Reza also talked about the link between information exchange and employment opportunities:

“Here, they help people to find jobs. They helped me with preparing a CV and they are doing their best to make a network for me and to find a job.” (Dadvar)

“This place helped me 100 percent to get the positive answer (for the asylum application) and I think they will help with a job too.” (Massawa)

“Two days ago, a Danish friend from here asked me ‘Do you want a job?’ I said ‘Yes’ and she said ‘I will help you next week, because where I work they need people who can speak both English and Farsi’.” (Reza)

These statements demonstrate Burt’s (1997: 340) emphasis on social capital’s role in providing information benefits in terms of access and referrals. The interviewees explained the guidance they get from the community center on how to do things. As much as such gain of knowledge was visible, the interviewees did not talk about actually getting a job through the social connections provided by the center. The closest thing to that was Reza’s
expectation for a job opportunity. In Farida’s case, she learned about the steps to follow thanks to the staff and finally got a job through the official agency. These comments indicate that the community center can provide the channels towards the goal of finding employment. On the other hand, I was told that The Women’s Kitchen initiative of the center, which started as a vocational training, has evolved into a catering service and provided employment opportunities for some female refugees. Accordingly, we can conclude that information and knowledge exchange take place thanks to social networks, and in some occasions, such exchange can lead to concrete outcomes and social capital can be converted into economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986: 25; Massey et al 2005: 43). All in all, these findings reinforce Granovetter’s (1973:1364-1376) focus on the strength of weak ties which enable channels of information and influence between people and provide them with more contacts and opportunities.

**Language and communication skills**

Learning languages, particularly the language of the receiving society, was another factor motivating the interviewees to attend a community center. Yelda, Massawa and Hani said they learned languages through courses and socialization opportunities:

“This place helps me with my language skills. Earlier, I did not know English much, but after coming here, I started to communicate with people actually out of necessity. My English improved a lot.” (Yelda)

“I talk to people from different cultures and I learn languages here. I go to English and Danish classes.” (Massawa)

“I came from Somalia. My biggest problem is the language. I went to the Kommune and they told me that I could come here. There are a lot of people here learning and practicing the language, so they can teach me how to speak Danish.” (Hani)

As the interviewees benefit both from courses and social relations provided by the community center, their comments demonstrate Bourdieu’s (1986: 24-25) point; a form of capital can lead to the accumulation of the other. Here we see both human capital in the form of academic training and social capital in the form or relations leading to an improvement in human capital. Such finding can also be backed by Schultz’s (1961: 9) view, who said access to study programs that improve knowledge and skills is an important way of investing in human
capital. According to my observations, language classes took place every day and were attended by numerous refugees. It was visible that refugees had the chance to practice their Danish and English skills through conversations with Danish people, international volunteers and other foreigners. By demonstrating civil society organizations can provide an environment to learn languages, the findings support previous studies revealing that associations help their members gain skills and competencies (Wollebaek and Selle, 2002: 35). Interviewees further mentioned their communication skills improved thanks to interactions at the community center:

“I learned many things from this place. I learned how to better communicate with people.” (Dadvar)

“What I improved here is language, skills with making a conversation and making friends, communication skills.” (Reza)

Dadvar and Reza’s comments indicate the connection between different forms of capital. The community center provides language competence which improves members’ communication skills and leads to social relationships, so in a way, a human capital gain brings more human capital, and eventually, results in social capital again. This chain effect can be backed by theory, as it demonstrates not only Bourdieu’s (1986, 24-25) view about the accumulative and convertible power of capital, but Becker’s (1962: 1, 9) view about human capital investments improving physical and mental abilities. The remarks about communication skills are also in line with Diaz’s (1993: 2) approach that immigrants can improve their status in social life through learning opportunities.

**Professional skills**

Interviewees talked about the professional skills they gained at the community center through vocational training programs. Refugees can attend cooking, cleaning, gardening and childcare activities, the help desk or administrative work, as well as services for all members such as the tailor’s or hairdresser’s corners.

Dadvar said he offers tailoring services: “I learned it in my home country, afterwards I worked elsewhere in the same profession and here I am doing it as a volunteer.”

Massawa said, “I have training as a hairdresser. I learned it here.”
Farida talked about her kitchen work: “I did my training at the Women’s Kitchen initiative. I learned how to do different types of cooking from Afghanistan, Congo, Iran, Morocco.”

I observed refugees’ trainings in the kitchen and at the hairdresser’s corner. All looked very interested in the activities, actively communicated and socialized with other refugees, Danish staff and international volunteers while doing their work. These findings support Schultz’ approach (1961: 9) underscoring that vocational trainings, through developing skills, enable investment in human capital. Both Schultz (1961: 1) and Becker (1975: 17, 19-20) emphasize that an individual’s productivity can be increased by learning or improving skills. Becker further mentions trainings can increase people’s marginal productivity both for their current and prospective workplaces (ibid.). On that point, executives of the community center said vocational trainings both give refugees a purpose and teach them professional skills for their potential future jobs. These findings not only support the human capital theory, but they reinforce previous research showing associations can teach their members skills (Wollebaek and Selle, 2002: 35).

9.2 Refugees’ experiences of social integration

Integration as a mutual process

As a significant finding, interviewees underscored that integration needs to be a mutual process between refugees and members of the host society. There was an emphasis on both the need for Danish people to be open to diversity and refugees to fulfill their parts by adapting to the society. Abdo shared his expectation from Danish people:

“Danish actually need to come here to talk to people, and when they come here, they need to come and talk to us. This is the best way for them to understand other cultures […] They have to be more flexible and open with us […] Today, when a Danish person or family goes on a holiday, they go to Greece, Thailand or Spain and they go there every year. They do not think of going to Mauritius, Zanzibar, Kenya, Ecuador, Chile or different countries. This means they do not want to know more, they close themselves.”

Abdo underlines the importance of socialization and knowledge about different cultures. He believes social capital in the form of interactions and human capital in the form of knowledge can support integration. His call to Danish people for openness supports Berry’s (1997: 10)
argument that minorities can achieve integration if the dominant society is positive towards diversity. Abdo’s further remarks were about newcomers’ responsibilities for better integration:

“When someone comes to Denmark, he has to equalize between positive things from the Danish and positive things that he brings from his own country […] I respect the way the Danish are, and I keep the African things for myself. I do not take everything from Africa with me, I take the things that work here.”

Abdo’s statement corresponds to Berry’s (1997: 7, 9) description of acculturation as a process which involves immigrants changing their original culture and adapting to a new context while keeping some part of their cultural identity and participating in larger society. For Berry (1997: 9), one of the possible outcomes of such acculturation is integration and that is echoed by Abdo as well. Yelda agreed with Abdo on the need for adaptation, as she also focused on the importance of knowledge and tolerance:

“We were all brought up in different cultures and I think integration is our adaptation to a new culture. I come from an Islamic society, but here, it is a society that is closer to atheism. I am an atheist myself and people here were surprised that I do not fast during Ramadan. When you talk about LGBT rights, they are again surprised thinking ‘How on earth do you know about this issue? Because you are coming from the Middle East’. Then they see people from there can also have such knowledge. Rather than my integration, they could not integrate with me (laughs) […] Both parties need to be moderate. Those coming from Muslim societies should not see members of this society as ‘infidels’, while Danish people should leave aside their prejudices.”

Yelda’s comments support Blau’s (1980: 786-787) view that integration depends on relations between different segments of the society and getting to know people with different backgrounds reduces prejudice. As she thinks both social relationships and knowledge can enhance integration, her words are indicative of the interconnection between social capital, human capital and social integration. Abdo and Yelda’s views align with Ager and Strang’s (2008: 177) study emphasizing the necessity to see integration as a mutual process that enables social connection between refugees and the host communities. Similar to what the interviewees in this research said, Ager and Strang’s respondents perceived integration as a
mixing of diverse people and mentioned the importance of living in an integrated community with respect and shared values (ibid. 177-178). Reza elaborated on a different aspect:

“When you know the society, communication and people, when you can speak in their language, you do not feel so far apart from the society and this is about integration. So, you can go on and make a connection and it is by us actually. We should go, make the connection and communication.”

By saying “it is by us”, Reza reflects Coleman and Diaz’s approach which sees social integration as the immigrant’s “own decision” to invest in acquiring social resources via participation in social relations within the host society (Diaz, 1993: 124, 127). Reza supports Diaz’s argument that inter-ethnic contacts coming from civil society membership are a result of individual choices (ibid. 126-127). Such personal choice was visible among the refugees I observed as they spent the effort and time by coming to the community center and trying to establish social relations. In that sense, this finding also aligns with what Bourdieu (1986: 22) said; a network of social relationships is the outcome of intense efforts that create exchange, knowledge and recognition. As Reza links integration to communicating with people by learning language and gaining knowledge about the host society, he reflects the interconnection concerning human capital gains leading to social capital and contributing to social integration.

**Language and information’s role in integration**

Interviewees underscored the importance of language in fostering integration by helping refugees communicate and socialize, or simply partake in daily life in a new society:

“A big part of integration is about language. If you teach people language, they have less problems with integrating. Then they have to see people and how Danish communicate. Right now, how I communicate with a Danish person for the first time is so different than when I see an Iranian guy. It is all the things I have learnt by language. Without Danish, you cannot learn the society and when you learn society, you can integrate.” (Reza)

“I need to improve my Danish language skills, so I speak to Danish people and I have Danish friends here. It is very important, when someone comes to Denmark, the first step is language.” (Abdo)
“You cannot go any further without language in this country […] If I get sick, hungry or need anything at all, I need to speak Danish.” (Hani)

While discussing the human capital gains earlier in this study, Dadvar and Reza said mastering the language improved their communication skills and enabled them to socialize with more people. With their particular emphasis on communication here as well, Reza, Abdo and Hani reflect Diaz’s model of communicative integration which points to the contribution of competence in host language on social integration (Diaz, 1993: 18; Johnston, 2016: 12). These findings have similarities with previous studies confirming that human capital can facilitate integration into social life and learning the language of the host country is essential for integration, particularly for social adjustment (Pfeffer and Parra, 2009: 256, 265-267; Mahmood, 2016: 16, 165). The interviewees’ emphasis on language skills helping with both socialization and daily life in the host society, and thus, contributing to integration, constitutes another example of the interconnection between human capital, social capital and social integration. My observations were in line with the interviews, as I saw people eager to have conversations with foreigners, especially Danish volunteers and staff. It was significant that refugees and asylum seekers actively used Danish during their vocational trainings as it was the main language of communication.

Diverging from other interviewees, Somali refugee Hani, who is illiterate and is currently learning how to read and write simultaneously with Danish, described language acquisition as a challenging process rather than a facilitator:

“It is especially difficult as I cannot read or write. When I first arrived here, they asked me to write down my name and I could only make some shapes. Now, after a year or so, I can write my name, but that is the only thing I know. I need to learn how to read and write […] I cannot go to just one person and start a conversation, because I do not know the language. It is difficult, but I feel patient. I can learn bit by bit, in time.”

This statement shows how adjustment might get more challenging for people with no education. It also demonstrates language acquisition is a long process, in line with Becker’s (1962: 25, 30) argument that development of certain skills requires time and investments in human capital extend over a long period. As Hani does not possess the competencies and knowledge; human capital cannot facilitate her social well-being (Keeley, 2007: 29). Taking
into consideration Mahmood’s (2016: 16, 165) argument that knowing the language of the host country has key importance for integration and social adjustment, Hani’s situation shows she cannot currently make use of such factor for better integration. Her words indicate that one’s limited human capital may limit his/her social capital, and eventually, affect social integration negatively. This reflects the interconnection between human capital, social capital and integration, this time showing how deficiencies in one of them might have negative impact on the others.

When it comes to information’s role in integration, Abdo mentioned that knowledge about the receiving society can support adaptation to social life, thus, enhance integration:

“The way you live in Africa is opposite the way you live here. Communication is completely different. So, one has to learn from zero. If he goes the wrong way, he will behave like he is walking around Africa […] It is important to understand Danish people and respect the way they are living, their culture, understand it and practice it. If he does not understand and practice it and he does not integrate, I think the best thing for him is to go back or to go somewhere else.”

Abdo points to the interconnection between human capital, social capital and integration as he explains knowledge can lead to communication and behaviors, thus lead to integration into social life. In that sense, this statement supports Becker’s (1975: 37, 39) consideration of acquisition of knowledge about the system as a positive outcome of social capital, as well as Putnam’s (2000: 19) focus on the positive effects of norms and civic virtues. Reza pointed to another outcome of gaining knowledge:

“Many people say Danish are racist, but what I have learned here is not the same, it is the opposite, Danish are not racist. I have seen here so many nice Danish people who helped me so much […] Now I have more information about Danish, I am not afraid to go and say ‘Hi’ to them and start a conversation.”

A similar statement about overcoming prejudice earlier came from Dadvar while discussing social capital gains, however, Reza’s comment here takes it a step forward, as he believes knowledge enhances communication skills and leads to social relationships, in other words, to social integration. This finding demonstrates the interconnection between human capital leading to social capital and enhancing social integration.
Social relationships and integration

Interviewees emphasized the importance of having social relationships in achieving social integration. Yelda, Dadvar and Abdo said relationships help them feel as part of society and understand members of the dominant culture:

“I am coming here to integrate into the society [...] Being a part of society, adapting and having social relations, I think integration is the sum of all these factors, like pieces of a puzzle, if one piece is missing, you cannot understand that society or internalize anything.” (Yelda)

“Having social relations is the most important part (of integration). I think everybody should learn how to make a connection and to treat others in this new society.” (Dadvar)

“Here, we communicate with Danish and spend nice time together. I visit them at home and we go out together. I try to break the cold weather and the cold people. Danish are not easy to communicate with, it is hard to go deep in them [...] I have to fight to get friends in Denmark, I need to socialize with them.” (Abdo)

These statements support Diaz’s (1993: 122, 16-17) description of social integration as integrating into various spheres of social relations in the host society and becoming a part of social life. Both Yelda and Abdo see adaptation as a part of the integration process. Abdo further underscores the need for interacting with the native population to get an understanding of the society one wants to adapt to. His comments like “fighting to get friends” and “breaking the cold people” indicate the effort he displays for social integration. Similar to Abdo, several refugees visiting the community center told me that “Denmark is tough in terms of relationships” and “refugees always feel like foreigners in Danish society”. These comments represent Bourdieu’s (1986: 22) opinion that socialization can be challenging and requires an intense effort of sociability and continuous exchanges. That said, the findings also support Diaz’s (1993:7) description of integration as a social process involving relations between immigrants and the majority society. They can also be related to Blau’s (1980: 787) assertion that the more differences penetrate into communities, the higher level of association and connection will take place between different segments of a society and social integration will be facilitated. The findings have similarities with previous research confirming that social
connections between refugees and communities within the host society facilitate integration, and voluntary associations, acting as generators of social capital, can contribute to such integration. (Ager and Strang, 2008: 177; Hooghe and Stolle, 2003: 3, 10, 12-13; Diaz, 1993: 154, 162). Meanwhile, findings demonstrate the interconnection between social capital, human capital and social integration, as Yelda, Abdo and Dadvar point out that social capital in the form of relationships and human capital in the form of knowledge can together foster integration.

Moral approach to integration

Interviewees also mentioned the moral responsibility of integration. Abdo was one of them:

“When I came to Denmark, they gave me a place to stay and education which cost a lot of money. They took care of me and I am safe here. They helped me a lot, so I have to pay back. […] You have to appreciate what you get here. Look back, how was your life 10 years ago? If you think this way, you will make a good life for your family and your kids will take care of you and Denmark […] Integration means to settle yourself and your family somewhere you will not leave. If you want to stay here, you have to build your life from now on […] For the long term, what you get out of this is for your family. If I have kids, they will be Danish, because they will speak Danish, live like them, go to school with them and understand the mentality. So, integration is something to do for your family.”

Abdo’s comments point to social capital and human capital elements contributing to integration. First, they reflect Putnam’s (2000:19) view of social capital being connected to civic virtues and norms of reciprocity. Abdo’s words about individual and collective meanings of integration align with Putnam’s argument that social capital has the capacity to do both private and public good (ibid. 20). On the other hand, he reflects the approach of Schultz (1961: 2, 7), who thinks people are an important part of a nation’s wealth and human capital not only benefits individuals but the general welfare. His remarks can also be linked to opinions about education and knowledge helping not only one’s current but future family; and proper integration of immigrants providing the host society with a benefit of human capital stock (Weisbord 1962: 116-117; Mahmood, 2016: 17). Meanwhile, Dadvar talked about contributing to the society:
“I am doing my best to be a part of society, to be useful for the society, to change opinions of people who think bad about immigrants and to say ‘we just want to be useful for society by working and paying our taxes’.”

Dadvar equates integration with fulfillment of moral and economic responsibilities towards the society. This way, he links integration to social and human capital, highlighting benefits both for the individual and society (Putnam, 2000: 20; Schultz, 1961: 2, 7). Moreover, his remarks reflect Putnam’s (2000: 19-21) view on the importance of civic values in social connections, particularly the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness which make the society more efficient.

Civil society organizations and social integration

Interviewees expressed that civil society organizations, through the opportunities they provide for social relationships, interactions and exchanges, help refugees socially integrate into the host society:

“People here are so nice. There is a point when everybody says Danish are racist, but you see the opposite and understand that you cannot make generalizations just because of some people […] Places like this are helpful both for immigrants and Danish people, so that Danish can see we are also nice. Because, some of them do not have any experiences with foreigners, people from the Middle East and refugees. But here, there are many volunteers, so they can get experience with foreigners and they can see we are not that dangerous. We do not bite actually! (laughing)” (Reza)

“This place has a huge effect on feeling integrated. You attend the activities, you get to know the culture and the language more, it has been very helpful for me […] A simple example is from last week. It was my birthday, only a few people from my ethnic circle was there, all the others were my friends from this center. These are small but motivating factors, they keep your spirit up and make you more resistant. Therefore, there should be more of these places all around the world.” (Yelda)

Reza reaffirmed that he considers social integration as a mutual process. He linked integration to the interactions between refugees and the native population, as well as both sides’ level of knowledge and experience about each other. Yelda mentioned how civil society activities and acquiring knowledge helped her feel integrated. She also reiterated the mental gains of her
participation. Theoretically, both findings reinforce the view that social resources formed within inter-ethnic relations contribute to social integration, furthermore, the level of interaction between immigrants and natives is a way to assess such integration (Diaz, 1993: 125-126). Findings also confirm weak ties offered by associations enhance integration (Granovetter, 1973: 1378). Besides, they support previous studies demonstrating that civil society organizations expand social networks and shared activities between immigrants and members of the mainstream society provide opportunities for social interaction and knowledge, thus, enhance the feeling of integration (Wollebaek and Selle’s, 2002: 46; Ager and Strang, 2008: 178-181; Johnston, 2016: 10). Additionally, both remarks reflect the interconnection between social capital and human capital gains and social integration. Aside from these positive comments, Yelda pointed to a difficulty concerning social integration:

“Danish society and refugee community should do collective things together. Think about a refugee woman who leaves a society where men and women are not equal and comes to a society where there is gender equality. First of all, you should teach this woman that she has rights as a woman, and at that point, the responsibility lays on the host society. If you tell her, with a top-down attitude, ‘these are your rights’, that woman cannot understand it.”

Yelda criticized the absence of a bottom-up and collective approach that could help refugees absorb the civic values introduced in the receiving society. Her remarks can be linked to Sardinha’s (2009: 71) view that collective groups can provide cooperative social interaction and collective values. Furthermore, her statement putting the responsibility on the society reflects Berry’s (1997: 10) argument that the host society’s inclusiveness and mutual acceptance of rights are major requirements for successful integration of minorities. Meanwhile, Abdo advised refugees to socialize within different levels of the society:

“I also think of other places where refugees can be more with Danish people, like public spaces and sports activities. They have to be members of many other things.”

Diaz’s (1993: 11, 122) multi-level approach considers social integration as “integrating into various spheres of social relations” and “the level of inter-ethnic interactions in different layers of social life”. Reflecting such approach, Abdo suggests that variety of activities and networks could lead to more social interactions within the host society.
10. Conclusions

The aim of this study has been to investigate how refugees experience their participation in civil society organizations and how such participation affects their social integration. This has been done by exploring refugees’ motivations to attend civil society activities, what kind of resources they gain from such attendance and whether those gains affect their social relationships. As integration is a contextual concept implying different things for people, the focus has been on the personal experiences of refugees. The study aimed at revealing some of those viewpoints in order to show a fragment of a complex social phenomenon.

Socialization, mental needs, language and information prevailed as the primary motivations for refugees’ civil society participation. Parallel to that, interviewees reported their major social capital gains as social relationships and expanded social networks; feelings of companionship and empowerment; as well as positive outcomes of civic values such as diversity, tolerance and collaboration. In terms of human capital gains, learning languages, improved communication skills, acquiring knowledge about the host society, and to a certain extent, professional skills were significant benefits. The interrelation between social and human capital, or how one affects the other’s accumulation, was visible in this research. The study revealed that, being a relational concept, social capital corresponded to a combination of social, cultural and sometimes economic resources obtained through social relationships and networks. Therefore, social capital not only brought more social capital, it generated or functioned as human capital in several occasions. Vice versa, the study showed that human capital can lead to social capital or more human capital. The research showed not only the social atmosphere, but the language skills and knowledge provided by a civil society organization enhanced communication and social relationships. Findings demonstrated that especially language, a major human capital element, functioned as an essential communicative and social tool.

The same multi-faceted approach was applicable for integration, as findings demonstrated that people attached different meanings to the concept. Interviewees described social integration in many forms; as social relationships, language competence and knowledge, adaptation to the host society and a moral obligation. The emphasis that integration needs to be a mutual process between newcomers and the native population was noteworthy. Interviewees agreed that civil society organizations, with the resources they provide, contribute to social integration. In the study, social relationships appeared to be a significant social capital gain.
contributing to social integration. Other social resources obtained through civil society participation such as mental gains and civic values also facilitated and intensified social interactions, thus, supported social integration. Although human capital is extensively used in literature when discussing economic integration, this study demonstrated that human capital gains contributed to social integration. Findings demonstrated that language and communication skills are linked to both communicative and social integration, while knowledge fosters social integration. Furthermore, the study shed light on some boundaries in the integration process such as prejudices, cold attitudes, imposing civic values on people with different cultural backgrounds, refugees limiting their communication with co-ethnics and integration efforts of people without basic education. To sum up, this research demonstrated that the resources gained through civil society participation contribute to the social integration of refugees. The study also showed the versatility and the interconnection of the concepts of social capital, human capital and social integration, confirming that social and human capital affect each other’s accumulation and eventually enhance social integration.

11. Future research

This thesis has only been able to explore a small portion of a comprehensive phenomenon and there is room for future research on various themes revealed by this research. Considering the informants’ perception of integration as a two-way street, further research could be conducted by including the host society perspective, such as opinions of volunteers and staff of civil society organizations, in an effort to see how members of the mainstream society perceive integration and their interactions with refugees. Another focus could be on the social integration of female refugees in particular, as they might be facing multiple disadvantages in their new societies due to both gender roles and ethnicity. Furthermore, the knowledge provided by civil society organizations about universal values such as democracy and rights could be explored in depth so as to capture the potential effect of such knowledge on refugees’ way of understanding the world. Such an investigation might necessitate a longer-term study that might focus on refugees’ daily lives outside the civil society organizations in order to assess the impact more accurately.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX: Interview Questions

-Why do you come to this community center? What attracted you about this place?
-Do you meet and communicate with people from different backgrounds/cultures here?
-Do you feel like you can socialize here? Do you make new friends?
-What have you learned about Danish culture and society during your time here?
-Do you interact/communicate with Danish people here? Do you become friends with them?
-Do you have Danish friends/acquaintances outside of this center?
-Do you have friends/acquaintances of different ethnic backgrounds outside of this center?
-Did you make any of these friends/acquaintances after coming to this center?
-How do you think the relationships you establish here affect your social life in Denmark?
-Did this place have an effect on your skills to communicate with people with diverse backgrounds?
-What are your thoughts about social integration in terms of having social relationships in a new society?
-How do you think refugees can be socially included in a new society?
-Do you feel yourself as a part/member of the Danish society?
-Do you think this place helps you feel included and establish social relationships in the Danish society? If so, in what ways?
-What kind of skills or knowledge have you gained by coming here?
-Do you think what you learn here facilitates your daily life in Denmark? If so, in what ways?
-Do you feel like this place has helped or will help you with employment opportunities?
-Which activities do you enjoy the most here? Why?
-Have you benefited from coming here? How would you describe your participation?
-What is the biggest contribution of this place to your life in general?
-Would you recommend community centers to refugees who are new to the Danish society?