

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF CHANGING INTEGRATION POLICIES: *Immigrant Narratives of Institutional Support and Labour Market Inclusion/Exclusion in Sweden*

Abstract

This study aims to map, locate and make visible the everyday experiences of newly arrived immigrants in government-sponsored integration activities and to trace how these experiences are linked to changes in policy. The study pays particular attention to the dynamic nature of integration and draws links between personal, organisational and policy domains while analysing shifting integration policies from the standpoint of immigrants. Swedish integration policy has undergone vast changes during recent years as the government implements one of the largest changes in Swedish history, beginning in 2010. With this came an emphasis on employment and workfare over welfare. Consequently, the rhetoric of integration in Sweden also changed from what in municipalities was called an introduction to a sense of establishment. By examining the subjective views of immigrants, we discuss the lived experiences of individuals who are subjected to and employed in different occupations due to various integration regimes.

Keywords

Immigrant biography • Integration policy • Sweden • Policy • Labour market

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Introduction

The politics of Swedish integration has undergone vast changes in recent years. In 2010, one of the largest reforms in this area was implemented (Proposition 2009/10: 60; Svensk författningssamling [SFS] 2010: 197). The reform involved four characteristic trademarks: centralisation, activation, marketisation and freedom of choice. The responsibility for the introduction of new immigrants into society was centralised when authority was transferred from municipalities to the Public Employment Service (PES). The reform not only changed the administrative placement of integration within the political system, it also narrowed the focus of the policy down to employment, workfare and responsibilities for immigrants (Lidén, Nyhlén & Nyhlén 2015; Qvist 2016). The reform also allowed for private organisations to be responsible for carrying out integration policy, and these so-called “Introduction guides” were chosen by the newly arrived. As a consequence, the rhetoric of integration in Sweden also changed from a focus on the introduction of immigrants into municipalities to a focus on their reception and establishment in society.

Integration activities are shaped through such policy reforms, which mean governing and steering through networks. Previous studies have shown that integration policies, as well as the general practices of the state, influence the experiences of immigrants to a great extent (e.g. Castles & Miller 1998). Changes in integration

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policies raise questions about whether – and, if so, how – these are manifested in the experiences of immigrants and whether these can be studied by specifically looking at the experiences of those arriving before and after the reform was implemented. Do these policies, for instance, change the relationships with local institutions in areas where immigrants are situated? In accordance with the study by Ager and Strang (2008), we believe that it is necessary to bridge the gap between individuals and policies, in addition to developing a “two-way” understanding of the sphere of integration activities to improve integration. Such a process involves examining not only the changes in policy but also the experiences of immigrants in relation to these changes.

To better understand the connection between lived experiences and changing integration policies, we believe that it is important to start by considering the everyday lives and experiences of those who are directly affected by integration practices. Through the collection of narratives of immigration histories as well as experiences in dealing with Swedish integration policy, this study draws its unique material from 28 interviewees of foreign backgrounds. Of particular importance is the time frame (Carling 2012) of this material, which covers experiences both prior to and during the current integration policies. In collecting real-life stories, valuable insights can be gleaned, which help to understand the consequences of policy incentives from the perspective of the lived experiences of immigrants. Moreover, such

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insights also help to develop an understanding of how integration policies can be changed and improved.

The overall aim of this study is to map, locate and make visible immigrants' experiences of institutional integration activities and how these experiences are linked to changes in policy. With this goal, we give specific attention to the potential differences in experience that relate to the changes in policy in place when the interviewees entered Swedish society. Inspired by Dorothy Smith's (1987, 2005) work on institutional ethnography and ruling relations that direct institutional administration, we also pay particular attention to the links between personal and policy domains in analysing changes in occupations and employment over time from the immigrant perspective.

This article begins with a description of the research context, which provides a picture of how the field of Swedish integration policies has changed since it was made its own branch of the Swedish political system at the end of the 1990s. Following this, an outline of the study's analytical points of departure is presented, inspired by an institutional ethnography approach to examine the ruling relations from the immigrant standpoint. Finally, conclusions are made in relation to the aim of the study.

Research Background – Swedish Integration Policies

In the history of Swedish integration policy, 1975 is an important year. In this year, a specific policy area focussing on immigrants, their rights and responsibilities, as well as their paths to inclusion in Swedish society, was created. In addition to a number of immigrant rights, the reform focusses on the fact that immigrants would enjoy the same rights as native workers (Bengtsson & Borevi 2016). While the current policy programmes may appear to treat the issue of employment status as something new to integration policy, previous research has shown this not to be the case. The 1975 reform shows that labour market integration was important from the beginning of Swedish integration policy, with the 1980s as the only exception, when general responsibility for policy-making and implementation was placed on the Immigration Board, and the focus on workfare was downplayed (Borevi 2012). Since the end of the 1990s, labour market integration has again been the focus of Swedish integration policies, though with a movement towards responsibilities rather than the right to work.

Integration as a policy area

In 1998, integration became its own policy area in Sweden as a solution to what was seen as the increasing marginalisation of immigrants. A government proposition stressed that integration policy should aim to support individuals and make it easier for newcomers to achieve self-sufficiency and participate in Swedish society. This proposition also underscores the support for democratic values and for combating discrimination (Proposition 1997/98: 16). All of this demanded a shift from what had been called "immigrant policy" to "integration policy", which not only focussed on individuals' positions in society and enhanced their rights but also emphasised their responsibilities within society (Lidén, Nyhlén & Nyhlén 2015; Schierup, Hansen & Castles 2006).

When Swedish integration politics was established as a separate policy field, gradually, integration again became predominantly a

labour market issue. Although the ideology underpinning the policy of integration had already begun to change before the control of the Swedish government shifted from the Social Democrats to a right-leaning alliance in 2006, this change marked an explicit shift in Swedish integration policy. In order to highlight this policy shift in practice, the government moved the questions about integration from the Ministry of Integration and Equality to the Ministry of Labour. The first spring budget presented by the right-centre government after winning the election in the autumn of 2006 contained an integration package with specific measures to increase integration success and overcome exclusion (i.e. remaining outside the labour market). In Sweden, as in the European Union (EU) in general, integration policies were (and still are) closely linked to the European employment strategy (Hansen 2008; Larsson 2015). Paid work is seen as the (only) path to inclusion in society, and the concepts of social inclusion and exclusion are constantly repeated in the EU's social and employment policy to explain an individual's status, e.g. as in the Europe 2020-strategy (European Commission 2010). After this re-focus on labour market integration in 2006, emphasis was placed on the workfare programme, which proposed that if newly arrived immigrants were given the opportunity to quickly enter the labour market, the risk of exclusion would be lessened. The government stressed that workfare should be aimed at new arrivals (Dahlstedt 2009: 31).

Re-centralisation and marketisation of integration policy

As a way to strengthen the focus on labour market integration, the establishment reform was introduced in 2010. The reform was designed to enable immigrants to more quickly establish themselves in society.

The introduction of the establishment reform meant that the responsibility for immigrants and the integration policy was transferred from municipalities to the central government, more specifically, the national employment agency (Proposition 2009/10: 60). The reform also involved a rhetorical shift: The former purpose of "introduction" was replaced with the "reception" and "establishment" of new arrivals, the responsibilities of immigrants were increasingly stressed (Ugland 2014). The shift in policy also meant that more agencies and actors than ever before would be involved in establishing newly arrived immigrants in Sweden, including the employment agency, the Swedish social insurance agency, county administrative boards, local municipalities and additional organisations offering job qualification and portfolio training. Different projects and activities to help immigrants establish themselves in their new lives are part of an introduction plan, which is to be created together by a newly arrived immigrant and an employment agency officer (Larsson 2015). In an introduction plan, specific measures and activities to help the immigrant become more employable are formulated, such as instruction in Swedish language, preparatory studies, vocational training and other employment-oriented measures that relate to introduction initiatives (Proposition 2009/10: 60).

The establishment reform also brought the responsibility of implementing the integration policy in the marketplace and added an element of freedom of choice. The reform marked the rise of "introduction guides" or companies chosen by newly arrived immigrants to aid them in their job searches (SFS 2010: 197, paragraphs 11 and 12). Private companies developed prominent

roles in the integration process as financial support for newly arrived immigrants was linked to participation in various activities that could help to make new arrivals more employable. Larsson (2015) has shown how the introduction guides' reliance on results-based forms of compensation forced them to encourage newly arrived migrants to work instead of study, even though this is not considered to be beneficial for new arrivals. Moreover, Larsson (2015) discusses how quasi-markets created in connection with the establishment reform have led to insecure employment and income. Overall, the introduction guide system has been much criticised (Riksdagen 2014a). Companies operating in the integration market were not closely monitored, and thus, an ineffective governing system that could even work against the stated aims was created (Lidén, Nyhlén & Nyhlén 2015). Unsurprisingly, the introduction guides were discontinued by the government in 2015.

In sum, the direction and organisation of integration policies in Sweden have undergone many changes over the past 10 years, particularly in the aftermath of the establishment reform. While introduction guides have been discontinued, it is still unclear as to how policy will continue to develop. Newly arrived immigrants have to navigate a context that has been described as difficult to understand, raising many questions and problems for individuals.

Theoretical Points of Departure – Integration from the Immigrant's Standpoint

Theoretically, we are inspired by the work of Dorothy Smith (2005), who argues that research on ruling relations should start from the perspective of lived experiences, including the examination of how situations in everyday life, professional practice and policymaking are connected. Smith argues for the need, when researching governance relationships, to start with voices that have been historically excluded from professional discourses, which form a kind of conceptual currency of ruling (i.e. in terms of managing, organising, administering, etc.). Smith (2005) argues that the discovery of excluded perspectives provides a point of departure for investigating how institutional processes shape the everyday worlds in which people live and act. When it comes to integration policies, the experiences of immigrants could be understood as such a departure as these voices have not been in focus historically when making policy decisions. In adopting a similar approach, we use the ways in which immigrants themselves describe their experiences of the integration systems as our point of departure. More specifically, we want to explore the social organisation of changing integration approaches from outside institutionalised discourses. By this, we refer to the perspective of outside ruling positions of both policymaking and policy enactment and how the implications of policies will influence integration. Research that has focussed on immigrants' positions in the labour market from a more critical perspective has highlighted the various forms of exclusion, such as discrimination and beliefs about "the other", which also exist within institutions such as the PES and affect how immigrants are positioned in the labour market (e.g. Larsson 2015). The classification system inherent in the Swedish integration policy is very specific in that it identifies immigrants as a pre-defined group based entirely on what they are not, i.e. "Swedes" (see also Kamali 2005). This creates certain preconditions for the institutional relationships between immigrants and officials: PES officials and private actors meet individuals labelled "immigrants" who are supposed to be integrated into society, and the PES officials

and private actors – not the immigrants themselves – are supposed to decide on how to integrate them (Larsson 2015). The experiences of immigrants can thus be viewed as taking place on a terrain full of generalisations, though these generalisations never fully represent them. The experiences of an individual represent not merely "a case" but an entry point into the workings of institutions that produce the generalised and abstract characteristics of contemporary societies (Smith 1987: 157-158). Such generalised and abstract characteristics are produced by, e.g. policy, administration, production and managerial control, which together constitute the institutional order. Different integration policy initiatives usually result in a large number of initiatives that aim to increase integration. However, it is often the case that such initiatives take the meaning of integration for granted, particularly the relationship between employment and integration, though the relationship is not that simple. Different forms of segregation and discrimination, living conditions and influence are other important dimensions to consider when studying and understanding integration projects (Dahlstedt 2009; Kamali 2005; Schierup 2006). Many immigrants suffer under the broader changes in the labour market such as transformations of the industrial and business structure and employers' general weakened positions. Previous research has also showed how a labour market that includes a high proportion of immigrants could be seen as a "buffer" labour market that has poor employment conditions, low wages and a high level of uncertainty regarding gaining employment (Mulinari 2006). Local differences in the labour market, business structure, access to finance and the willingness to include foreigners also affect the possibility for foreign-born workers to get jobs or start businesses and be included in society (Andersson 2016, Behtoui & Neergard 2010). In addition to such conditions, variations in preconditions and established policies at the local level also influence how administrators enforce policy (Lipsky 1980). Structural inequalities are produced when these inequalities are incorporated into the organisation and formation of work. For example, previous studies have shown that entrepreneurship among people with foreign backgrounds is often established within the context of what has come to be described as ethnic enclave economies (Slavnic 2007).

Immigrants' experiences of coming to Sweden and their various interactions with the integration system, as well as their different occupations, speak about the ruling relations within the field of integration. In Smith's account, integration as a social relationship is not only an abstraction, it is also always concrete activities and experiences. The aim of this study is thus to map out the actual linking and coordinating of activities and work processes in different locations and at different levels of the governments in order to capture the activities in which the ruling relations are grounded. Therefore, our point of departure is that the changing policies in integration should be investigated in the everyday lives of immigrants.

Method, Material and Analytical Strategy

The empirical material of our study was gathered as part of the "Migration to Work" research project, which was funded by the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth and the County Administrative Board of Västernorrland (Brännström *et al.* 2016). The research project began in 2015 with the aim of exploring immigrants' experiences of reception, institutional support and work life in the county of Västernorrland in Sweden.

The study participants were partly approached through recommendations from various municipalities in the county and

partly through private networks and non-profit associations. In the initial phase (autumn 2015), the municipalities of the county were informed of the project and were asked to nominate candidates for the study. Giving that information, we particularly stressed that we wanted the participants nominated to reflect the different conditions that immigrants might meet depending on their individual situations. This meant achieving a gender balance, reaching a balanced distribution between county municipalities and between urban or rural environments, balancing of differences in age, education and occupation, as well as differences in the length of time since the person received a residence permit. Since the municipality channels mainly provided male participants, special women's networks assisted in the project. In addition to this, we used our own private networks to nominate participants to our study. Prospective interviewees were initially contacted by telephone, and a presentation of the project was given. Subsequently, written information about the project was distributed, mainly via email, but also via traditional mail when requested. The interviews were conducted in between November of 2015 and May of 2016 in private conversation rooms at an easily accessible location for the participants. Before the meeting, the interviewees were informed about the project and their rights to decline participation and withdraw from it at any time during or after the interview.

Altogether, we interviewed 28 individuals from foreign backgrounds. We recorded and transcribed approximately 20–80 minutes of conversation with each participant. The project does not aim to reflect some form of representativeness. However, since we wanted to be sensitive to the complexity of integration, our goal was to include people with different backgrounds. Table 1 describes the diversity of our informants based on a number of different categories.

All participants had permanent residency when the interview was completed, and they were residents of Sweden for a minimum of 2½ years and a maximum of 18 years. The length of residency in Sweden differed quite a lot among the interviewees, which has consequences for how they, from the lens of the present day, talk about the barriers or facilitators they came across when they arrived. We also already know that immigrants tend to become more critical of policies after a longer period of residence. Our analysis is consequently, based on narratives of both ongoing and past events from multiple standpoints, but because of different arrival times, their narratives illustrate both localised and centralised forms of integration assistance. As Table 1 shows, 15 of our informants came to Sweden after the establishment reform was implemented, while 13 of them arrived before. Their narration of the integration practices they experienced reveals important knowledge about the ways in which new policies are implemented locally, from the point of view of those who have lived through the shift.

As mentioned earlier, our study focussed on the immigrants' lives in Sweden. The research participants gave their own accounts of their experiences within their own frames of reference (Rosenthal 2004). The interviews were conducted in Swedish, which required language adjustments and reflections as to the meanings and connotations of different words for both the participants and the researchers. Although this process somewhat limited the project, the advantage to not using an interpreter was that the interviews represent direct conversations between two people.

The first phase of the interview focussed on the participant's background, including his or her country of origin, prior education or

Table 1. Information on participants

Characteristics	Categories	Number of participants
Gender	Female	13
	Male	15
Education	Less than upper secondary school	15
	Upper secondary school or more	13
Age	18–30 years	11
	30–50 years	15
	>50 years	2
Country of origin	Countries in Africa (Sudan, Eritrea, Somalia, etc.)	12
	Countries in Asia (Syria, Kurdistan, Iran, Afghanistan, etc.)	15
	Other	1
Length of residence in Sweden	2–5 years (arrived after the reform)	15
	6–18 years (arrived before the reform)	13

occupation and year of arrival in Sweden. The next phase focussed on how the informant experienced living conditions in Sweden, including both opportunities and challenges. Thereafter, questions as to the labour market and education were raised concerning job opportunities and possibilities for education in Sweden, as well as experiences with government organisations, including both the PES and municipalities. Finally, the conversation transitioned to the immigrants' viewpoints on their local communities.

Apart from the types of institutional support the informants had received, we were also interested in the activities that they participated in during their initial arrivals in Sweden. The narrative interview method we used was based on a thematic framework that focussed on work life and labour market issues, contact with the government and agencies, opportunities, education, obstacles and challenges, living conditions and places of residence (see e.g. Squire 2013). We sought to learn the details of the participants' work and activity-related experiences, including their knowledge and particular interests. The selection of interviewees mentioned or quoted in the results section of this article was mainly based on how clearly their answers spoke to the themes of the study.

The following section addresses the material collected from the immigrants' narratives, with particular attention given to the temporal dimensions of their comments. We divided Swedish integration policy into two phases, with the introduction of the 2010 establishment reform serving as the dividing line. In approaching the material, we looked specifically for potential changes in how their experiences were reported in relation to the different integration policies that were currently active at the time (i.e. before or after the establishment reform). This approach not only made comparisons possible but also allowed for the analysis of perceived changes in integration policies among those who had lived for a longer period of time in Sweden than others.

Changing Integration Policies as Lived Experiences

Integration policies create various introduction activities, such as entry recruitment incentives, new start jobs, training and other individual recruitment incentives. Different policies also create different positions for immigrants, as well as different definitions about the beginnings and the formal completion of the integration process. Depending on the period in which the participants in this study arrived in Sweden, different integration measures for work were in practice. Both before and after the establishment reform, there were jobs within the integration services industry open for new Swedes that some of our informants have had. However, the labels of these jobs and employment statuses have changed over time. The different names of these integration jobs also speak about the shifting focus of national integration regimes and their local implementations. With the introduction of the establishment reform, a completely new market was created, and many of the participants gained employment in the form of an introduction guide. However, in 2015, this possibility disappeared when the government abolished it. Such shifts in policy placed participants in periods of unemployment during the reorganisation of integration work, though some occupations disappeared or were reformulated.

A close reading of the participants' narratives also reveals differences in the categorisation and naming of actions and experiences between those who began their introduction before 2012 and those who began after the establishment reform. The participants who came to the country after the establishment reform was implemented make the policy shift visible by highlighting the significance of the PES and personal administrators. This differs from the narratives of those who came before the establishment reform, which do not describe the PES as significant. Instead, those who arrived earlier speak of repeated experiences of poor support from administrators. This group also highlighted the importance of the work done by the municipality. Since the reform shifted responsibilities from municipalities to PES, this was, of course, expected. Of greater interest is how this shift affects the relationship between immigrants and institutional actors. There are also different professional discourses that are activated at the PES and the municipality, and this study's analysis shows how our interviewees were positioned differently in relation to the PES and municipalities depending on the policy in place when they arrived. Those who were initially placed under the responsibility of a municipality do not speak of the same difficulties as other groups in areas such as how to handle issues of housing, childcare and school, but they discuss their trouble in receiving help from the PES. According to Smith (2005), this could be understood as a policy-shaped change of the actual workings of the institutions. For those entering the country after the reform, some participants reported that they were satisfied with the PES administrator's work. These specific participants arrived at the time of the establishment reform, when the PES held the main responsibilities of integration, and their narratives contradict reports of certain shortcomings found in previous studies of the reform (Riksrevisionen 2014b; Statskontoret 2012).

Valuable narratives concerning the transition from one policy to another can be collected from those participants who originally encountered the prior system but remained as clients in the subsequent one, as in the following interview:

When I initially came to Sweden, I was offered municipal introduction compensation for 1½ years. Then I received an

offer from the municipality, and first, I worked as a refugee guide, and after a while, I worked as an integration officer. After 2 years [...], they said, 'Sorry, [...] there is a shortage of work, and the public employment services have taken over [work with] all the refugees,' and since then, I have been unemployed... I got a job at an employment agency training for about 1 year to be a coach and give language support. After that, we had no newly arrived [immigrants and refugees], so I was unemployed for a while. Then I received an offer from an introduction guide company [...]. I worked there for 2 years and received permanent employment, but then the labour office cancelled the introduction guide service, and I am unemployed again. (Participant 4)

The foregoing passage speaks about the variety of changes experienced by a real person tied up in the complexities of changing integration policies. The person telling the story arrived in Sweden at a time when integration (or "introduction") was the municipalities' responsibility. After finishing the introduction, the participant was offered employment in the form of integration work. After the initiation of the reform, a new labour market sector was established with the focus of helping immigrants. Thereafter, this market was abolished. The way the participant explains the changing labels of the work reveals how different responsibilities for and understandings of integration are actualised in different policies.

The establishment reform required authorities and local municipalities to cooperate to establish migrants in the labour market faster and more efficiently than ever before. However, previous research suggests that such cooperation has, to a certain degree, been artificial (Lidén, Nyhlén & Nyhlén 2015), partly due to contradictory governing models between public and private actors (Qvist 2016). Although not explicitly expressed, the coordinating problems that have been pointed out elsewhere (e.g. Riksrevisionen 2014b; Statskontoret 2012) exist also in this material. Our analysis reveals that, from the perspective of immigrants, the degree of local organisation and the collaboration between authorities and the municipality vary significantly, and such collaboration has consequences for immigrants' everyday lives. One participant that belonged to the early group when the PES took responsibility for the establishment states this:

It was not that good during that time... For example, I believe that the PES did not have sufficient information about the establishment programme... (Informant 15)

This represents just one other example of how the transference of power and responsibility from one actor to another was far from seamless. Another challenge immigrants themselves relate to is understanding the policy sector and its varying responsibilities. In one interview, a participant expressed the following observation: The PES and the municipality are almost the same. (Participant 20)

If public officials themselves are not certain about how responsibilities are divided (e.g. Lidén, Nyhlén & Nyhlén 2015), of course, the clients, those who are greatly affected by this system, have a hard time understanding it.

Local context and institutional practices

Local political figures are important within the migration field (Caponio & Borkert 2010; Lidén & Nyhlén 2015). Recent research acknowledges the necessity of discretion at the local level in the

design of local policies, but local communities are also important in a different sense. The circumstances of a person's daily life are, of course, dependent on the aspects of civic life that one encounters. This study found certain location-specific differences between municipalities, which also can be related to the temporal dimension before and after the reform, whereas other aspects are not influenced by this factor.

One informant who arrived in Sweden roughly 1 decade ago and resided in one of the smaller municipalities within the county of Västernorrland stated that local integration policies were designed during the time when municipalities were responsible for integration activities. The interviewee describes a typical week:

We studied Swedish in the morning, and then we had activities three times a week. We were on visits to the church, to the local newspaper, to the rescue service, and to the museum. And we talked and practised Swedish [all the time]. (Participant 4)

Here, the participant expresses an almost idyllic sense of the local integration work. Other narratives from the introduction programmes during this time corroborate this feeling and refer to the ways in which networking with officials within a municipality helped to create opportunities for immigrants:

...everybody knows who I am here, politicians, the municipal Chief Executive. (Participant 2)

Another interviewee who came to Sweden and resided in a smaller municipality as a resettlement refugee roughly 6 years ago spoke of the support received when first entering the county:

They particularly helped me when I came [to the municipality]. They came with me to the Tax Agency to get an ID card and [helped me] with... a medical health check-up. (Participant 5).

Since several interviewees had lived through changing integration policies, their own reflections on the everyday practice constructed by local circumstances had shifted. One participant compared the previous system with the situation during the establishment reform, stating that during the phase with private enterprises operating within the establishment reform, it was impossible to receive help from private introduction guides:

Some [immigrants] just [sit at the introduction company] looking at the Internet and drinks coffee... we are not happy with the inactivity. (Participant 4)

The statement from another participant, also related to the more recent integration policy implementation, further explores this point:

PES is like an industry... It does not work and they are not helping... They divide people by who can speak Swedish and who cannot. (Participant 25)

The metaphor in which the PES process is compared to an industrial process could not be further away from the pastoral description of how introduction programmes were viewed in the smaller municipality. The idea of dividing clients into different groups based on their language skills in Swedish is efficient but also symptomatic of the larger PES organisation, which has a national and not local mission. However, this description can be contrasted with narratives from participants

who received help within the framework of the establishment reform. One participant refers to the PES as helpful but points to other problems of an administrative nature:

My previous administrators, three to four different people, have been really nice, they have helped me a lot. But the new administrator does not know Swedish law and cannot help me. (Participant 27)

Although an economy of scale creates greater economic efficiency, it engenders the risks that the specific needs of individuals can be harder to meet, and local adjustments might be more difficult to perform.

A few conclusions can be reached in relation to the local context and institutional practices. Almost idyllic descriptions from the local and small-scale introduction programme are visible in the material. Particularly in smaller municipalities, this appears to be one way for immigrants to both reach an understanding of the local civic life as well as make profound connections in the local society. Hence, this exemplifies how officials at municipalities take on a role that might be difficult to delimit, since they function more as community builders in a general sense (Nalbandian 1999; Paquet 2015). Even if optimistic narratives are visible among those arriving after the introduction of the establishment reform, others refer to much gloomier situations. This partly relates to large organisations that have limited discretion to make local adjustments (Larsson 2015).

The crucial and temporal role of institutional actors

The material from this study also speaks of the importance of the administrator's role in the immigrant establishment process, particularly in terms of how an administrator's actions and behaviours influence an immigrant's contact experiences with authorities (Lipsky 1980). The majority of the participants state that they received satisfactory support from concerned authorities, which stands out as the main reason for the immigrants' perceptions of such institutions. The administrators' support and their efforts to arrange a job, training and education are described as important. The visibility of collaboration between authorities and municipalities is another aspect mentioned in the material that may have had an influence on the individuals' images of authority.

A close look at the material reveals the extent to which experiences of different administrators' support changed over time for the immigrants. Several interviewees spoke in a positive manner about their situation when the municipalities had the responsibility of implementing integration policies. Responding to a question about experiences with the people from the municipality, one participant stated the following:

I believed that they all were great, they were all committed. All tried their best; they really took their job seriously. (Participant 28)

In contrast, help from the PES is described more critically. One informant who had been in the country for roughly a decade emphasised that the PES had not been helpful at all, which was a sentiment shared by other participants as well. Several interviewees who had lived in Sweden for longer periods of time spoke to the notion that the system can be often perceived as restrictive, and that

a fear of making mistakes or losing the right to compensation as a result of not doing what is requested limits one's choices with regard to occupation or studies. These individuals expressed a conflict between what was required and what they personally wanted, as well as how a great respect for authorities and the rules concerning daily subsidies affect these choices. The following statement speaks on how such a situation might develop:

I don't know whose mistake or whose fault it is, but when I came to Sweden and the municipality offered me a job, I accepted. I quit high school and got this job [...], but the job had no future. (Participant 4)

Thus, since the work of local administrators is evaluated by the degree to which they can decrease unemployment and help people to get jobs, the objectives that influence the local administrators' work can lead to goal conflicts. One participant who arrived during the time of the new integration policy pointed out the following:

I had a supervisor at PES who helped me to start study and get activated (...) administrators, both at the Public Employment Service and the municipality, are really important. (Participant 12)

Even though the PES is generally described more positively by those who arrived later on, the role of the municipality is also emphasised as particularly important. Participants who came to Sweden after the reform highlight the municipalities' work as particularly integral in its focus on various kinds of education and courses. Swedish for immigrants (SFI) and the introductory language and culture course provided for all immigrants are often discussed in a positive manner, but other forms of courses and actions wherein municipalities were helpful were also mentioned. At the same time, the material of this study also suggests that the introduction system often did not seem to differentiate between the various immigrants and their previous experiences. That is, at least in certain narratives, the immigrants are considered more or less as a single group.

Several participants received support in the form of help from the municipalities, which they emphasise as helpful and important. Interestingly, this part is often described as a quite unproblematic process, even given the current situation of apartment shortages, particularly in cities. One young woman depicts the process of finding an apartment for her family:

We told them [the municipal housing company] that we are a family and that we could not be lodgers in someone else's apartment... and they got an apartment for us. It was a four-room apartment. (Participant 21)

In conclusion, although municipalities did not have the general responsibility of implementing integration policy, municipal support was regarded as crucial irrespective of how the political framework changed. The crucial role that local officials can take has been stressed elsewhere, and similar tendencies are found in this study. More concretely, such patterns are related to the fact that a municipality has a general responsibility for all its citizens. Despite the centralisation of integration policies, municipalities continue to function as the key actors for work training, social needs and assisting with housing issues for immigrants. To some extent, both municipalities and their officials take on the role of policy innovators by disregarding certain institutional constraints and developing practices concerning the evolution of integration policy (Paquet 2015).

The stabilisation of segregation and precarious labour market positions

A core activity that has been central to Swedish integration policy for a long time is work training. Many of the participants of our study have been directed to such activities, often on several occasions and at different places. The material shows work training to be a recurrent theme in Swedish integration, both before and after the establishment reform. Several participants describe how they have moved from internship to internship without it ever leading to employment. One interviewee, though now employed, criticised the system of work training because it seldom led to a job, arguing that for work training to have a purpose, "It must lead to something...". In addition, this participant states the following:

It's cheap, very cheap for them, because they do not have to pay that person. It gives them a free worker for a month, sometimes two months. Some work six months. And after that, you think you're going to get a job, but then they say 'unfortunately, we do not have jobs right now, but we'll be in touch as soon as the situation changes'. Then you will never hear from them again. It has happened several times. They make use of people, so I have not had an internship, that's why I refuse now. (Participant 24)

From the perspective of those who arrived in Sweden more recently, regarding the recommendations from the PES, one participant says the following:

They say that perhaps in the future you will get a job, but first I need to continue with work training... (Participant 16)

While many interviewees in the study voice opinions about work training, it is hard to identify any clear differences in perspective compared to when they came to Sweden. Some participants discussed work training as part of their everyday occupation to this day. Some of our interviewees expressed the belief that employers do not want to hire people from other countries, that immigrants are considered merely temporary workers or trainees. Following Smith (2005), this could be seen as another kind of ruling relation that produces work training as an institutional form or position that does not necessarily lead to future employment.

Nonetheless, work training remains, irrespective of the time frame, a central part of Swedish integration policy, and there are several reasons for this. First, work training has been an established part of Swedish integration policy for a long time and represents an essential phase that must be undertaken by immigrants, regardless of its potential to produce a stable job. Second, the material in this study speaks about such training as being organised by public actors, often within municipal organisations. Work training, from the experiences of the immigrants we interviewed, is a specific dimension of integration policy that was discussed in similar ways, regardless of when the informants arrived. The aim of the reform was to increase the focus of the labour market, but experiences from this interview study do not indicate any success. Stories of participants being hired out as cheap labour appear to have increased without a discussion on how this could lead to employment.

In relation to work training, the labour markets that participants encountered also differ. In the county's largest city, some immigrants operate within the catering and retail sectors or within more public-driven areas, such as the education sector. In general, working or receiving work training within the private service sector is not

uncommon. This situation varied slightly for interviewees who live in other municipalities within the county of Västernorrland. Among these, the most common jobs were in traditional public sectors such as education and caregiving, as well as municipally funded activities related to integration and cleaning. The participants also refer to how such circumstances, often mediated through ethnic networks, create specific labour markets for immigrants in the larger cities. However, such is not the case for the interviewees based in the smaller municipalities, where positions within the public sectors predominate.

Conclusions

In this article, we set out to clarify the factors that frame immigrants' experiences by relating interview materials to the evolution of how integration policies are implemented. The experiences and concepts expressed by the participants were mapped to make visible the social and governance relationships between people, institutions and practices within the field of Swedish integration. The governance relationships articulated by our interviewees showed their connections to the ruling relations of national policies, local arrangements and the key actors of local integration practices.

In collecting the lived experiences of immigrants, this study provides numerous examples of how the amended integration policy affects those it was intended for, with the changing policy objectives producing real and tangible consequences for these people. In examining different stories of institutional support as well as stories of inclusion and exclusion in the Swedish labour market, we identified a number of areas that produced specific governing and ruling relations. Although the changing integration policies are the backdrop of this analysis, the ruling relations are visible in a number of different areas: work training and the labour market, local policy contexts and institutional practices and, finally, the crucial role of institutional actors.

Our analysis shows that the implementation of the establishment reform appears to have had several effects on immigrants. First, in accordance with the initial objective of the policy change, the PES has become a central factor in immigrants' lives. Based on the ideologies underlying an activation policy (Dahlstedt 2009), this appears to be a reasonable approach. However, cooperation between the PES and other actors is not fully cohesive, creating confusion and uncertainty for the individual, as the interviews have indicated. That the new policy and its shared responsibilities and complex forms for cooperation are hard to understand even for those who work with the implementation of it (Lidén, Nyhlén & Nyhlén 2015) indicates how challenging it is for the recipients of the support to navigate through it.

It is also clear that the ruling relations between immigrants and municipalities are different from those the immigrants have with the PES. When the municipalities were in charge, they took responsibility to the point of making themselves appear as developers of policy practices, even seeming to involve considerations to the local community (Nalbandian 1999; Paquet 2015). By contrast, the immigrants' narratives in this study speak of how the PES is

oriented solely towards integration through work and not aspects of everyday living, such as childcare, housing, spare time and other aspects of life. The large-scale operation of the PES, compared by one interviewee to an industrial process, is quite far away from the charming depiction some informants gave of the previous system in which the municipality was in charge. A rapid turnover in personnel appears to add to the picture of the PES as a more impersonal agency following a strict protocol.

Moreover, narratives give life to how the field of integration policy area itself has served as an important foundation in aiding integration. The stories of immigrants concerning work as a social communicator and introduction guide show how newly arrived immigrants can be given tasks that not only help others but also provide an occupation. Different policies create different integration occupations, and it was common for those who arrived before 2010 to have a type of work profile framed by various introduction activities, such as refugee guide, integration officer, social communicator or introduction guide. Alternatively, this was not the case for those who arrived after the reform.

To conclude, this study has collected insightful narratives from those actually affected by policy reforms (Smith 2005). It contributes to filling a gap in the literature about the ways in which these transforming policies are implemented locally, from the point of view of those subjected to the shift.

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