



# The Role of the Voluntary Sector for the Integration of Immigrant Women

A Case Study of the Volunteer Central in Vennesla, Norway

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*This Master's Degree Thesis is carried out as a part of the education at the University of Agder and is therefore approved as a part of this education. However, this does not imply that the University answers for the methods that are used or the conclusions that are drawn*

**University of Agder, 2017**

Faculty of Social Sciences

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Master's Degree Thesis, Development Management

Faculty of Social Sciences

University of Agder

For my beloved husband,  
the wind under my wings

## Abstract

This thesis explores the role of the Volunteer Central in integration work of immigrant women in Vennesla in Norway, according to subjective experiences of immigrant women and impressions of Norwegian women connected to the organization. The findings are based on a six weeks long field work from February and March 2017. Qualitative methods were employed in the study: ten semi-structured interviews and participant observation in multiple activities. This research is important due to the increased immigration to Norway in recent years, and the challenges it brings with it in terms of integration. Since the voluntary sector has become important in the integration processes of immigrants, it is beneficial and relevant to look at a specific voluntary organization. The thesis show that Volunteer Central in Vennesla contributes positively and significantly to immigrant women's well-being, social needs and positive experiences in daily life. In Vennesla, the organization does many good and right things. Although they have some challenges – i.e. language barrier, transportation and distance issues, limitations of the volunteers – and they do not target immigrant women as a group, my informants experience numerous benefits from their offers.

The activities arranged by this organization are open to Norwegians and immigrants alike. My immigrant informants are highly satisfied with the activities they attend. Their main motivations for and benefits from attending are: learning the language better, meeting people and getting friends, having fun, and understanding Norwegians and Norwegian culture better. There are different understandings of integration both in the literature and from my material, but in the discussion of the thesis three aspects of integration are in focus: shared arenas (meeting places), social capital (bridging and bonding), and 'the right to be different' and 'the right to be same'. These are interrelated to each other, and the Volunteer Central facilitates well for each of them. Some central persons in the organization are analyzed according to the concept of gate-keepers, and are clearly important to several immigrant women. Lastly, the expressions of Norwegian women and immigrant women are linked to the concept of culturalization. This refers to a process where one (unconsciously) emphasize cultural aspects at the expense of other factors, and as such has a one-dimensional, reductionist view of an issue, problem, social group or individual. It is easy to fall into such a trap when we belong to the majority and are in contact with minority women. However, it can be beneficial to avoid seeing individuals as representations of their culture.

I have not discovered the best understanding of integration. However, I find that in an increasing multicultural society like Norway – and Vennesla – it is valuable and beneficial to have and accept several different understandings. Moreover, it is healthy and good to see that integration is a process happening between the majority and the minorities where all parties have a responsibility.

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*Bismillah ir-Rahman ir-Raheem*

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Tonje Marie Djupevik Hagen

Kristiansand, Norway

31<sup>st</sup> May, 2017

## Declaration by Candidate

I hereby declare that this thesis: *The Role of the Voluntary Sector for the Integration of Immigrant Women: A Case Study of the Volunteer Central in Vennesla, Norway* is my original work and has not been previously submitted either as a whole or in part to any institution of higher learning for any kind of award.

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**Place:** Kristiansand, Norway

**Date:** 31.05.2017

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## Abbreviations and Acronyms

BUFdir - The Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs (Barne-, ungdoms-, og familiedirektoratet)

BUF – shorter abbreviation for BUFdir

DM – Development Management

ECRE – European Council on Refugees and Exiles

FDGs – Focus Group Discussions

IMDi – the Directorate of Integration and Diversity (Integrerings- og Mangfoldsdirektoratet)

KIA – Christian Intercultural Work (Kristelig Inter-kulturelt Arbeid)

NAV – the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (Arbeids- og velferdsforvaltninga, originally: Ny Arbeids- og Velferdsforvaltning)

NOK – Norwegian kroner

SSB – Statistics Norway (Statistisk Sentralbyrå)

UDI – The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (Utlendingsdirektoratet)

USD – United States Dollar, American dollar

VT – Vennesla Tidende (local newspaper in Vennesla)

# 1 Introduction

This chapter presents the background for the research, outlines the objective and research questions, argues for the thesis's relevance to development management, describes the methodology, clarifies concepts and outlines the thesis.

## 1.1 Background

*Imagine this: there is a young mother crossing the Mediterranean in a small boat together with her husband and two young sons. She is holding the youngest one on her lap, while the elder son sits by his father. There is sea in all directions and the sun is hot. The mother is thinking about the complicated and dangerous travel they have already laid behind, and praying in her heart that they will reach land safely again and be able to start a decent life somewhere. The smuggler is in front of the boat and starts yelling as soon as anyone asks for water or a baby cries.*

*Ten months later, the family is living in a Norwegian asylum center in a town completely different from where they came from. It is a difficult situation with waiting, uncertainty and little to do. The family is grateful for a more peaceful and stable situation. However, they feel excluded from the locals and social life outside the building. The days are grey. A turning point comes when they are invited to a café where Norwegians and immigrants of different ages and genders meet. They start getting a routine and they develop friendships with new people. Additionally, the mother starts going to a gathering once a month where she meets many other women from different nationalities – including Norwegians. She comes back to their temporary home happy and energetic. Life has colors again.*  
(Fictional story)

The recent years there has been a significant increase in the immigration of refugees to Europe and Norway. The numerous stories of boat refugees have reached the Norwegian TV screens. The tragedy of deaths and the desperation which leads anyone to set out on such a dangerous journey made many people think. How unfair and tragic! Why does it happen? What's a possible solution? How can we help? How can I contribute? These tragic events and the difficulties for refugees to come to Europe and Norway have also affected me personally. That is one of the reasons why the theme of integration of immigrant women in Norway is of great interest to me, and is the topic of this thesis.

In 2015, Norway received a record high number of asylum seekers, around 31,000 (UDI, 2016). How we deal with the high number of new immigrants to our country is a great political challenge.

Nevertheless, research and media show that the voluntary sector has an increasingly important role in handling this challenge. Many Norwegians become engaged and wish to do something for refugees, and many voluntary organizations do important efforts in helping immigrants to integrate into the society. Although, immigration to Norway is nothing new, as we received many guest workers in the 1960s and 1970s (Stokke, 2012), and big numbers of refugees from time to time (Hagelund, 2002), the

immigration in the recent years has certainly put extra pressure on politicians and the population in general to integrate the newcomers. Thus, it is very interesting to look into one voluntary organization and how it potentially benefits immigrant women in particular.

## **1.2 Main Objective**

To explore the role of the Volunteer Central in the integration work of immigrant women in Vennesla in Norway, with a focus on their aims and activities, both from the subjective experiences of immigrant women and the impressions of Norwegian women connected to this organization

## **1.3 Research Questions**

1. What activities do the Volunteer Central arrange partly for immigrants and what are the aims of the Volunteer Central with their activities?
2. Why do immigrant women participate in activities of the Volunteer Central and in what ways do they experience benefits from these activities?
3. What significance do so-called gatekeepers in the Volunteer Central have for immigrant women and a mutual integration process, which promotes cross-cultural understanding between the minority women and the majority population?
4. What challenges do the Volunteer Central face in regards to offering better support and help to immigrant women?
5. What is integration and everyday integration, and what role does the Volunteer Central play in the integration of immigrants in Vennesla, according to Norwegian women and immigrant women connected to this organization?

## **1.4 Relevance for Development Management**

The topic is “integration of immigrant women”. However, there is no easy definition of integration. Therefore, this concept is discussed in the literature review, findings- and the discussion chapter. For this thesis, the researcher is interested in the subjective experiences of immigrant women in terms of how they feel integrated and included in daily life, in connection to the Volunteer Central. With this focus, several topics are combined: migration, minority-majority, women and integration. These are all relevant in development studies. The immigrants in my material are both refugees and migrants for other reasons. This is appropriate due to the variety of immigrants in Norway. Although, there has been a significant increase in asylum seekers to the country in recent years, there are immigrants of different kinds in local communities, including Vennesla.

Most DM-students travel abroad to developing countries for their research and thesis. This is useful and important because there are many development issues in the Global South which need attention and solutions. Therefore, by using our education, expertise and interest to focus on specific themes and issues in the South, we can contribute positively in certain areas. Nevertheless, there are also issues

and challenges in the Global North which need to be addressed and understood. The increased immigration to Europe and Norway poses important questions on how to deal with newcomers, how to benefit from their resources and how to integrate them into their host society. The efforts and responsibility in the integration process of immigrants are shared by both the public, private and voluntary sectors. The challenge of managing immigrants in our country can be considered a South-in-North problem. As such, it is relevant to development studies and -management.

Refugees are a special group of immigrants who have fled their countries and cannot choose where to settle. Thus, they face a number of challenges especially in terms of their socio-economic integration: “lack of knowledge initially of the language of the host country; isolation and separation from family members resulting in limited social networks; and frequently physical and mental health problems relating to past trauma” (ECER, 2005, p. 29). Other immigrants can experience similar challenges, especially with regards to language, isolation, separation from family members and limited social networks. They can also face discrimination and meet obstacles when trying to enter the labor market (Gullestad, 2002; Fosslund & Aure, 2011). Therefore, it is appropriate and important to focus on such people – both individually and in groups.

*“The concept of development management refers to the various measures that are applied in the process of enabling long-lasting improvements for social groups” (Øyhus, 2011)*

The voluntary sector has gotten an increased role in integration work in Norway the last years (White Paper no. 39, 2006-2007, pp. 58-60). Immigrant women is a special concern since they often face greater challenges to become integrated in the society than their male counterparts (Andersen Younis, 2010; Hylland-Eriksen & Sajjad, 2015; Stokke, 2012; Rugkåsa, 2010). Some political discourses also portray these women as victims of oppression, female circumcision, forced marriages and honor killing (see chapter 3.1.5). I find such poor images of immigrant women unfair and simplistic. People are people no matter where they are from, with different personalities, needs, abilities and ambitions. However, in the Norwegian context these women belong to minorities, and can therefore face other challenges than Norwegian women. As such, it is useful to implement measurements (partly) aimed at immigrant women, to improve their situation and how they experience their everyday lives in their new context. Therefore, the activities and offers of the Volunteer Central are interesting to look into in terms of how they might benefit immigrant women and their daily lives in Vennesla.

## **1.5 Methodology in Brief**

The field work was conducted over six weeks in Vennesla in Norway: 6<sup>th</sup> February until March 24<sup>th</sup> 2017. The research design is a case study. Ten women were interviewed: five Norwegians and five women with immigrant backgrounds (from different countries in Africa, Asia and Europe). The informants were connected to the Volunteer Central in some way (employees, volunteers and participants). Additionally, the researcher participated in several activities of the organization and got

a good impression about how they function and who interacts with who. As such, the data collection methods employed for this research are semi-structured interviews and participant observation. Due to restricted time-limit and unpredictability, the researcher did not manage to arrange FGDs as planned. Nevertheless, the researcher gained rich material from the methods that were used. Qualitative methods were appropriate because the researcher wanted to explore subjective experiences, impressions, opinions and perceptions of different individuals.

## **1.6 Clarification of Terminology**

This list is not in alphabetic order, but rather according to the importance or frequency of the terms.

**The Volunteer Central:** This is the voluntary organization which is placed in Vennesla in Norway and is the case study for this research and thesis.

**The central, the (voluntary) organization:** This is the short form of the Volunteer Central in Vennesla, whenever the author found it more appropriate to write it this way.

**The Volunteer Centrals:** There are multiple Volunteer Centrals all over Norway, in many different municipalities. So, whenever they are mentioned in plural, the author is referring to those Volunteer Centrals in general (see chapter 2.3).

**The centrals:** Short form of the Volunteer Centrals, for the same reason as explained above.

**The Women's Club, the Girl's Group and the KIA Café:** These are the activities which the researcher has attended and which attracts good numbers of immigrant women and girls. Thus, they are mentioned multiple times throughout the thesis. They are short forms of the Multicultural Women's Club and the Multicultural Girl's Group and the Christian Intercultural Work Café (see chapter 5.1.2)

**Immigrant women:** Women who have immigrated to Norway for different reasons and in different ways. Throughout chapter 5 and 6, the term refers (mainly) to those women I have interviewed or observed myself during the field work. For the lack of a better term to refer to this diverse group of women, I mostly use 'immigrant women' (and immigrant woman).

**Migrant women:** Short form of immigrant women

**Informants:** The women I have interviewed. I refer to them as migrant informants when I only talk about the immigrant women I have interviewed, and Norwegian informants when it is only the Norwegian women I refer to. For this thesis, I only have female informants.

**Respondents:** Same as informants.

**The Adult Training:** The teaching institute for adults in Vennesla, where refugees learn the Norwegian language among other things.

## 1.7 Thesis Outline

**Chapter 1** presents the background for the research, outlines the objective and research questions, argues for the thesis's relevance to development management, describes the methodology and clarifies concepts.

**Chapter 2** presents the national and local context of the field work. It also gives an overview of history and development of the Volunteer Centrals in Norway, and the Volunteer Central in Vennesla.

**Chapter 3** provides a literature review and clarifies the theoretical framework for the thesis. It explores contrasting opinions, views and ideas regarding integration, the voluntary sector's role in integration, social capital and gate-keepers. Further, it presents the development of public discourses on integration in Norway, with a focus on the rhetoric about immigrant women. Moreover, it discusses the concept of culturalization.

**Chapter 4** explains the methodology employed in this research project and the research process. It justifies the choice of research strategy, design, sample, data collection methods and limitations. It also discusses the effects of the researcher's roles as a local Norwegian and a visible Muslim woman.

**Chapter 5** presents the empirical findings and connects them to the research questions. It gives an overview of the activities offered by the Volunteer Central in Vennesla; their aims; immigrant women's motivations for and benefits from attending; the significance of gate-keepers; the challenges of the organization; and different understandings of integration and the Volunteer Central's role in the integration of immigrants in Vennesla.

**Chapter 6** connects the theoretical framework with the empirical findings, and discusses these. It focuses on integration as meeting places, social capital, and the rights to be different and same – and how the Volunteer Central in Vennesla facilitates for these aspects of integration. Further, it discusses the concepts of culturalization and gate-keepers.

**Chapter 7** gives a summary and some concluding remarks regarding the thesis. Moreover, it suggests further research on relevant and similar themes and focus areas.

## 2 Study Context

In this chapter, I will present the context of my field work. Firstly, there is a small section about Norway and immigration generally. Secondly, the local context, the municipality Vennesla, is presented. Thirdly, there is an overview the history and development of the Volunteer Centrals in Norway. Fourthly, the Volunteer Central in Vennesla will be presented.

### 2.1 The National Context: Norway and Immigration

In the beginning of 2017, the population in Norway was about 5.2 million (SSB, 2017a). Among these were almost 725,000 immigrants (SSB, 2017a). The immigrants count for 13.8 % of the population. When we include Norwegian-born with immigrant parents, they count for 16.8 % (SSB, 2017b). Migrants come to Norway for different reasons, like family reunification, work, studies and asylum (SSB, 2017b; SSB, 2016a). In 2016, 22 % of all immigrants to Norway came for the purpose of getting asylum (SSB, 2017b). This means around 14,600 people, which is a clear downfall from the more than 31,000 asylum seekers who entered the Norwegian borders in 2015 (SSB, 2016a).

The biggest immigrant groups in Norway come from Poland, Lithuania, Sweden, Somalia and Germany (SSB, 2017b). In 2016, 66,800 immigrants entered Norway, and the clearly biggest group was from Syria, with 11,208 people (SSB, 2017c). The following groups of immigrants (according to their size) which came to Norway last year were from Poland, Eritrea, Lithuania and Sweden (SSB, 2017c).



*Map 1: Norway's placement in Europe (CIA Factbook, 2016)*





Map 2: Vennesla's placement in Norway (CIA Factbook, 2016)

## 2.2 The Local Context: Vennesla

Vennesla is a municipality in Vest-Agder county, south in Norway.

**Location:** Vennesla is only 17 km north from a bigger city, Kristiansand, which is by the coastline (see map 2). It is the third biggest municipality in Vest-Agder county, with increasing number of inhabitants and business establishments (Vennesla Kommune, 2016a).

**Population:** The population is estimated to be around 14,400 inhabitants (SSB, 2016b)

**Immigration:** Vennesla notices the influx of asylum seekers to Norway, and has therefore established one asylum center for minors (13-15 years old) in September 2015 and started receiving minor refugees (15-18 years old) in two new asylum centers from the end of 2016 (Vennesla Kommune, 2016b). The majority of immigrants in this municipality comes from Poland, Germany and Cambodia (VT, 2016). The immigration is still increasing, with a significant number of Syrian refugees (VT, 2017a)

**Integration actors:** The municipality, the Adult Training, NAV (Vennesla Kommune, 2011), voluntary organizations, individuals

### Voluntarism:

Voluntarism is strong in the village (Vennesla Kommune, 2016a). Especially, people spend their spare time in churches and leisure organizations. Many kids, youth and adults are active in sports, i.e. soccer, swimming, motor cross, handball, skiing, athletics, orientation (Vennesla Kommune, 2016c; Vindbjart IL, 2016). There are also voluntary organizations which are engaged and occupied with immigrants and integration. Among them are Frivilligsentralen, KIA Vennesla, Vennesla Red Cross and Mulighetenes Hus (the House of Possibilities).

**History – industrial town:** Vennesla has more than a 100-year-old industrial history. This is connected to the utilization of the hydropower from the river Otra, which runs through the municipality. Even today, Vennesla is a significant industrial municipality, with 13 % of the work places in the industry. When construction activities, and electricity- and water supply is also included, this counts for 26 %. In agriculture, milk production is especially central. Forestry is also important, partly because a lot of timber goes to the industry in the village (the information from this paragraph: Thorsnæs, 2016).



*Photo 1: Overview-picture of Vennesla, with the river Otra and the dense population in the central areas.*

## **2.3 The Volunteer Centrals in Norway – A measure from the government**

According to the Norwegian government, “Frivilligsentralene are local meeting places which connect individuals and organizations together in order to create a good, voluntary environment, good activity offers and a good collaboration with the local public” (Regjeringen, 2017).

### **2.3.1 The beginning phase, and the vision and aims of the Volunteer Centrals**

The first Norwegian Frivilligsentralene were established in the early 1990s (Lorentzen, 2010, p. 7). It was originally a concept taken from an American context in the 1980s (Lorentzen, 2012, p. 12). In big American cities, there was something called *clearing houses*, which were local arrangements, where volunteers and “users” could come, and then be directed to the appropriate voluntary organization in

the local community to volunteer in or which could fulfil their needs and wishes (Lorentzen, 2012, p. 12). It was a coordinating link between big numbers of volunteers and organizations. The Volunteer Centrals in Norway have adopted a similar role, although there are also differences between them.

“There were no specific target groups, problem areas or challenges which inspired the idea, rather it was a vague wish to mobilize to more voluntary activity. The thought was that local powers should get the chance to unfold with funds from the state (...). The result was a big diversity to run and organize the centrals” (Lorentzen, 2010, p. 7)

Initially, the Frivilligsentralene was a trial project funded by the Norwegian government. From around 1995, they were also financed by the municipalities, which saw an opportunity to connect voluntary work to different tasks in their municipality, like care of elder, integration of immigrants, activation of unemployed people (Lorentzen, 2010, p. 8). In their report about voluntarism, the Norwegian Parliament stated that the Frivilligsentralene should have a coordinating role between voluntary associations, and between the voluntary and the public sectors (White Paper no. 39, 2006-2007, p. 204). With this role, the centrals are supposed to be “a driving force and a collaborator for local voluntary involvement and interaction between voluntary and public work” (White Paper no. 39, 2006-2007, p. 204). The vision of the Parliament was that the centrals should create “good, living local communities” across sectors (White Paper no. 39, 2006-2007, p. 204). However, the report contains no concrete guidelines or approaches of how to achieve this vision (Lorentzen, 2010, p. 9). The benefit of the vague vision is that “the element of force is weak from the state’s side” and the centrals can develop and organize themselves rather freely (Lorentzen, 2010, p. 9).

### 2.3.2 Changes and developments in the Volunteer Centrals

Naturally, the Frivilligsentralene have developed much from the beginning stage. Even the number of centrals have changed a lot, and is still increasing. In 1991, 91 centrals received state funding to start up for a trial period of two years. In 2012, the number had reached 266 (Lorentzen, 2012, p. 14). In 2013, 2014 and 2015, respectively nine, eleven and 18 new Volunteer Centrals were established in Norway (Regjeringen, 2014; Regjeringen, 2015).

The centrals have received funds from the government from the beginning. After 1995, several municipalities also started supporting the centrals financially. In 2005, the public funding was transferred from the Department of Health and Social Affairs to the Department of Culture (Lorentzen, 2012, p. 22). With this change, many municipalities changed the responsibility of the centrals from the health and care management, to the culture and leisure management (Lorentzen, 2012, p. 66). Around this time, people also became concerned that the Volunteer Centrals were more competitors of other voluntary organizations, rather than the catalysts for voluntary work and collaboration across organizations and sectors in their municipality (Lorentzen, 2012, p. 23). This is still a challenge today. From 1<sup>st</sup> January 2017, all the responsibility of allocation of grants for the Volunteer Centrals were put

on the different municipalities where the centrals are based (Regjeringen, 2017). The municipalities receive funds from the state according to the number of established Volunteer Centrals they have (Regjeringen, 2017).

### 2.3.3 The aim of integrating immigrants

Integration of immigrants with different faith and cultural background have been – and still is – an important concern for many Volunteer Centrals (Lorentzen, 2012, p. 55). The Parliament also highlight voluntary organizations opportunity to help integrating immigrants (White Paper no. 39, 2006-2007). The Volunteer Centrals across the country have a special chance to achieve – or work with this – since they have a coordinating role and often many collaboration organizations. The meeting places the centrals creates can gather people of various backgrounds with regards to culture, nationality and religion. Nevertheless, it is important to promote neutrality, respect and openness in order to attract immigrants and Norwegians alike. One general manager has stated that: “In order to make the central a natural gathering point for everyone, regardless of background, it is important that the central appears neutral (with respect to life vision, values, religion)” (Lorentzen, 2012, p. 55).

## 2.4 The Volunteer Central in Vennesla

The information in this chapter is mainly based on the information I received from the general manager of Frivilligsentralen in Vennesla, Jorunn Sagen Olsen, by email in October 2016 and in the interview with her in February 2017.

### 2.4.1 Introduction

The Volunteer Central (in Norwegian: Frivilligsentralen) is an organization, with 23 different collaboration organizations in Vennesla, including the municipality. It arranges various activities and events for different groups of people, like immigrants, youth, elders and (former) drug addicts. However, the activities are mainly built around interests and needs of people, and are open to all. So, there are mixed groups of people who attend the different activities and benefit from various offers. The leadership of the organization wants to give hope and help people in need.

The five values of the Volunteer Central are:

- 1) See
- 2) Be Seen
- 3) Safety
- 4) Participation
- 5) Mastery

According to the homepage, the aim of the Volunteer Central is to “motivate to volunteer work, create cooperation between organizations, municipality and individuals” and the organization “is conscious



in its efforts with creating meeting places in collaboration with the municipality and voluntary organizations” and wants these platforms to “build bridges between generations and different cultures and communities” (VenneslaFrivilligsentral, n. d).

#### 2.4.2 History: November 2008 – Early 2017

Jorunn Sagen Olsen has been involved with the Volunteer Central in Vennesla from the very beginning, even before it was officially established. In November 2008, they started a preliminary project in order to map the voluntary activity in the municipality and what the needs were. Jorunn herself visited many individuals and organizations in that period. Her starting point was: What can we do for the organization and what can the organization do for us, or what can we do together? “It is most fun when we can do something together. If I can get 2-3 organizations to collaborate on a project (...), then it is very fun. And in addition, get individuals who are not connected to an organization, to join the project. Then, I’m thinking that we have succeeded” (Interview with Jorunn).

After the mapping-project, the Volunteer Central in Vennesla became an approved Volunteer Central by the government from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2009, and thus received a grant from the Department of Culture to operate a full-time position. Because the municipality financed 40 % of the needed amount, the Department of Culture gave 60 %. The official opening of the central was in March 2009. Jorunn Sagen Olsen has been the general leader of the organization from the beginning, and still has this full-time position today. There are currently five paid positions in the Volunteer Central, but the other positions are part-time (30-70 %). This is needed due to the number of volunteers the organization coordinates. More than 240 volunteers are engaged through the Volunteer Central (Interview with Jorunn). Additionally, there are numerous volunteers engaged in the partner organizations, who are also crucial for the overall offer by the central.

From January 2017, the Volunteer Central receives all its public funding from the municipality. This includes funding from the Department of Culture, although the amount is sent to the municipality rather than the central itself. The total amount of financial support exceeds 1 million NOK, and goes to the paid positions, the operation of the organization and expertise building (Interview with Jorunn).

#### 2.4.3 The importance of meeting places for integration

The general leader is very occupied with creating meeting places for people, since they are very important for integration, for getting to know each other and understand each other. Thus, the fear of the unknown can be countered, because people of different backgrounds know, understand and respect each other (Interview with Jorunn). The meeting places are also where people can get friends and learn Norwegian (Interview with Jorunn). Additionally, they can lead to new offers and measures.

One meeting place is not the solution for integration, but it is a small piece in a big puzzle (Interview with Norwegian volunteer woman). Nevertheless, the number and variety of activities and meeting

places arranged and facilitated by the Volunteer Central, and its collaboration partners, add up to a significant contribution to the integration of immigrants.

### 3 Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This chapter provides a literature review and clarifies the theoretical framework for the thesis.

#### 3.1 Literature Review

This section explores contrasting opinions, views and ideas regarding integration, the voluntary sector's role in integration, social capital and gate-keepers. Further, it presents the development of public discourses on integration in Norway, with a focus on the rhetoric about immigrant women. Moreover, it discusses the concept of culturalization.

##### 3.1.1 Definitions and understandings of integration

There is no clearly defined definition of integration which everyone agrees to. Rather, there are different definitions and understandings of what integration – and everyday integration – really means. According to Rugkåsa (2010, p. 82), it is difficult to define individuals or groups as integrated or not, because “the boundaries for integration are not absolute”. Furthermore, “in some situations it will be considered sufficient to attend school, education and labor market (...), while in other contexts participation in social and cultural activities can also be required” (Rugkåsa, 2010, p. 82)

According to Friberg (2005, p. 8), one key to integration is that there exist arenas for shared positive experiences between different groups of people. He further explains that “Participation on all of the society's arenas is a goal in itself and the definition of integration” (Friberg, 2005, p. 8). Nevertheless, he understands that some organizations in Norway are focused on typical Norwegian values and norms, which we cannot expect that all immigrants identify with or find enjoyable in the same way as many Norwegians, i.e. walking around in nature without a specific goal (Friberg, 2005, p. 9). However, his definition of integration is a strict one. He demands broad participation of immigrants in most kinds of organizations, as the organizations can “offer a sense of belonging and meaning for those who participate” and are important for “a democratic socialization process” (Friberg, 2005, p. 7).

Østberg (2003) has another understanding of integration. In order to succeed with integration, there is a need for both the majority and the minorities to give space for each other, and “some arenas, such as school, work life, living environments, sports, art and politics must be developed as shared arenas. Other arenas, such as family life, church, mosque and certain cultural activities, we must have for ourselves” (Østberg, 2003, p. 197). Similarly, Hylland-Eriksen and Sørheim (1994, p. 79) understand integration as “participation in the society's shared institutions, combined with maintenance of group identity and cultural distinctiveness”. These definitions try to balance immigrants' different needs –

and demands – of being treated the same way as the majority and of being treated differently (Hylland-Eriksen & Sajjad, 2015, p. 87). Weaker minority groups often need to demand the ‘right to be same’, while stronger minority groups can focus on their ‘right to different’ (Hylland-Eriksen & Sajjad, 2015, p. 87). However, minority groups must at least “become so similar that [they] are capable of putting forward their demands within a political system where [they] will be taken into account” (Hylland-Eriksen & Sajjad, 2015, p. 87). If they wish to get their interests and political demands fulfilled, they need to learn the Norwegian way of doing things and follow the political rules of the game in the society (Hylland-Eriksen & Sajjad, 2015, p. 88).

Furthermore, we can talk about integration taking place at different levels: the national level or local levels (Rugkåsa, 2010, p. 82). One can be integrated at one level without being integrated at another level. A person who work, pays taxes and votes in elections is well-integrated at the national level. However, when the same person knows no one in the local community nor participates in any local organization, he is not integrated at the local level. On the other hand, a person can be well-integrated in an ethnical or religious community without being connected to the national community. Naturally, one can also “have a different ethnical and religious belonging and participate in the labor- and organization life of the majority society, while at the same time safeguard and uphold different cultural and religious traditions at local levels” (Rugkåsa, 2010, p. 82). In other words, one can be integrated at the national and the local level simultaneously (Rugkåsa, 2010, p. 82). Moreover, one can be integrated on some arenas of the society without being integrated on other arenas, i.e. integrated in the education system but excluded from the labor market (Rugkåsa, 2010, p. 82). From my material, there are immigrant women who are well-integrated in the Volunteer Central’s activities – a voluntary organization – while they are left out of the labor market, although they have tried long time to enter it. However, I have not focused on these women’s chances for or efforts towards getting work.

Rugkåsa (2010, p. 82) argues that in the Norwegian context,

*“Integration seems to be connected to the idea about sameness; the more similar [you are], and the more [you] participate in the same types of activities or in the same arenas, the better integrated [you are]. In the Norwegian welfare state, integration is an ideal and a measure for a well-functioning society, and for each individual’s prosperity and happiness”*

With this understanding, there is little space for immigrants’ cultural distinctiveness and their ‘right to be different’. Andersen Younis (2010, p. 142) has a similar understanding of integration, since she warns about the idea of Østberg (2003), about having some group arenas for ourselves (Norwegians and immigrants, divided from each other). She states that the consequence can be that allowing such group arenas can legitimize oppressive structures against women (Andersen Younis, 2010, p. 142). Naturally, there can be risks with letting immigrant groups have their own arenas, without the influence or presence of Norwegians. However, in this context we are talking about adults and in

Norway we have the freedoms of religion and speech, and claim to uphold all the human rights. Then, it is necessary to allow individuals to uphold and maintain their own individual and group identity, although we might not agree to it ourselves. Many things are dependent upon the eyes which see and what background one has.

Personally, I find the expectation or requirement of immigrants becoming like ‘normal Norwegians’ is closer to assimilation than integration. Integration should be a two-way process (ECRE, 2005, p. 5), where the immigrants need to adapt to the Norwegian society but can keep their cultural and religious identity – even out in public space. The concept “implies a mutual process of adjustment through dialogue between majority and minority, which is open to discuss how to interpret different values” (Stokke, 2012, p. 159). As Hylland-Eriksen and Sajjad (2015) also argues, there needs to be a balance between the right of sameness and the right of difference for the immigrants. Both rights should be facilitated. Immigrants should not need to become like Norwegians in order to be accepted and lead a good life in Norway, although there needs to be a common ground with Norwegians, so that the immigrants can manage and function well in the society. During my field work, I heard a school nurse responsible for refugees in Vennesla talk about the difficulties with the language barrier if they fall sick or something happens with their child (Participant participation). Without sufficient Norwegian skills, it is a real struggle to get urgent medical help whenever needed. It does not help to have the phone number for the emergency room or ambulance, if one cannot communicate one’s problem and need. ECRE (2005a, p. 32) also highlight the difficulties for refugees to access health services without proper language skills. Thus, it is good that the Norwegian government considers Norwegian training a right and a duty for the newly arrived immigrants (White Paper no. 39, 2006-2007, p. 59).

Integration can also be understood as a middle path between assimilation and segregation, which “balances the consideration of a separate cultural identity and openness to others” (Segaard, 2011, p. 30). The concept is also dependent on different types of people. As Andersen Younis (2010, p. 143) points out, it is “the process which happens between the minority and the majority, where the minorities gets its place in the center of the majority”. The interaction between minorities and the majority is surely an important aspect of integration. However, Andersen Younis (2010) fails to mention that in most societies there are several minorities. Additionally, there can be one group of people which is a minority on the national basis, although they are a majority in a specific area of the country (Hylland-Eriksen & Sajjad, 2015).

Nevertheless, when one includes the majority in the understanding of integration, there is an expectation that the majority also has some tasks to do and a responsibility to fulfil, for the minorities to become integrated in the society. I find this a healthy and good understanding of the concept. In my material, the immigrant women also understood integration as a two-way process, where the focus should not only be on them, but where the majority population also needs to respect them and give



them chances. The Norwegian women in my material also highlighted “us”, “our responsibility” and “respecting each other” when trying to define and explain what integration is about.

### 3.1.2 The voluntary sector and integration in Norway

Volunteerism is very strong in Norway, despite the fact that the voluntary sector has weakened little bit the last few years (Wollebæk & Sivesind, 2010; Seggaard, 2011, p. 9). In 1997, 52 % of the population had been active in voluntary work during the last year, and in 2004 the share was even higher with 58 % (Wollebæk & Sivesind, 2010, p. 22). Thus, the 48 % in 2009 is a reduction compared to the calculations or estimations from recent years. Nevertheless, Norway shared the first place with Sweden in an international comparison of the percentage of the population who were active in voluntary work, with these 48 % (Wollebæk & Sivesind, 2010, p. 23). There is a high level of organized spare time in Nordic countries (Loga, 2010, p. 56). In fact, together with Nederland, the Nordic countries are considered “world champions in voluntary work” (Dekker & van den Broek, 1998; Sivesind, 2007, Wollebæk, 2009). When looking at the immigrant population who has lived at least 5 years in Norway, 36 % of them have participated in voluntary work during the last year (Seggaard, 2011, p. 13). According to Wollebæk and Sivesind (2010, p. 16), the voluntary sector in Norway is mainly financed by its own members and activities, while only one third of their income is from the government (public funding), and even a smaller part is from gifts.

“Participation in voluntary organizations (...) can be an important step towards integration in the society, because voluntary participation under certain conditions contribute to promote trust between humans” (Seggaard, 2011, p. 9). Trust comes under the concept of social capital which will be further discussed below (see chapter 3.1.3). Both politicians and researchers state that voluntary organizations are suitable arenas for integration and social inclusion (Eimhjellen & Seggaard, 2010, p. 11). The reasons for this is that voluntary organizations can foster trust and understanding between humans, as well as give the members a democratic skills and attitudes (Eimhjellen & Seggaard, 2010, p. 11). Further, they can give room for friendships, shared experiences, identity and belonging (Eimhjellen & Seggaard, 2010, p. 11).

In my material, it is also apparent that immigrant women’s participation in the Volunteer Central create friendships and feelings of belonging. Naturally, there are also shared experiences for the Norwegian women and immigrant women in the different activities they participate in together. Several immigrant women also seemed to like themselves more when they had something fun and useful to do outside their home, like the activities of the Volunteer Central, than when they previously knew ‘no one’ and just stayed at home. This can be a way that the voluntary organization has shaped the women’s identity in a way. However, it was not part of my research to investigate changes and improvements over time with either the Volunteer Central or the women connected to it. The field

work lasted only for six weeks and was concerned with the current situation and the benefits immigrant women experience from their participation in that specific voluntary organization.

Not all voluntary organizations create the kinds of benefits described above. According to Loga (2010, p. 55), some organizations produce distrust rather than trust. This is also connected to social capital, where the trust can be strong within a specific social group, while they distrust outsiders. The examples of Fukuyama (2011) and Putnam and Helliwell (2004) are of the worst kind, with Ku Klux Klan and terrorism. Nevertheless, this can be an effect of organizations which are not extreme also. What happens is that the bonding is strong within the group, while there is little or no attempt to bridge with other human beings or groups in the society (Putnam, 2000; Loga, 2010, p. 55, see chapter 3.1.3).

Research on voluntary work in Norway is mainly conducted by the Center for Research on Civil Society and Voluntary Sector. The elements of their studies of the voluntary sector are: members, organization, volunteer work contribution, economical incomes and outcomes, and attitudes associated to volunteer organization and social capital (Wollebæk & Sivesind, 2010). However, “there is little knowledge of the effect on engagement in volunteer organizations and few qualitative studies on the subjective experiences of participating in volunteer work (Näsholm, 2014, p. 24). Näsholm (2014) herself has documented and highlighted how undocumented – or irregular – immigrants benefit from volunteering. Among the benefits her respondents experience is more stability in their everyday life because of something to look forward to and a mark in the calendar (Näsholm, 2014, p. 67). They also expressed that the voluntary work helps them to forget their own situation and worries, because when they sit at home, they think too much (Näsholm, 2014, p. 65). My respondents did not have the same insecure, troublesome life situation as undocumented immigrants, because all of them had valid residence permits in Norway. Nevertheless, most of them appreciated to have something to do outside home, similarly to Rugkåsa’s respondent who liked to come out instead of getting bored at home (Rugkåsa, 2010, p. 109). Two of my migrant respondents also said that they are thinking too much at home, and often get tired and sleep. Thus, meeting people in different settings is meaningful and important to them. As it is difficult to get a good job when one has immigrant background and only poor Norwegian skills, the voluntary sector offers a valuable contribution to such women. My informants appreciated and benefited from the activities they attended in the Volunteer Central (see chapter 5.2).

### 3.1.3 Different understandings of social capital

The concept of social capital is important and useful when looking into immigrants participating in voluntary organizations. It can be understood as “a collection of resources connected to social relations in the form of trust and network” (Eimhjellen & Segard, 2010, p. 43). There are two main sides in the social capital debate. On the so-called collective action-integration side are names like Putnam,

Coleman and Fukuyama. They highlight the integration aspect of social capital, when defining the concept “as norms of reciprocity, trust and co-operation, a kind of social glue that holds societies together creating a collective ‘we’ and collective goods in modern societies” (Adkins, 2005, p. 196). According to Putnam et al (1993, p. 2), social capital refers to “features of social organization, such as networks, norms, and trust, that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit”. Further, he considers social capital to have both a collective and an individual aspect (Putnam et al, 1993). It can be both a ‘public good’ and a ‘private good’ (Putnam, 2000, p. 20).

On the other side, social justice and inequality is highlighted, with Pierre Bourdieu in front. Thus, the name of that side is “Bourdieuian” (Adkins, 2005, p. 197). Bourdieu (1986) looks at social capital as one of three forms of capital: economic, cultural and social. He argues that “social capital is a person’s aggregate of resources linked to his network of more or less institutionalized relationships” (in Øyhus, 2016). This side also considers social capital as “the glue that holds groups and societies together” (Narayan, 1999, p. 1), as they describe it as a network of local relationships, norms, values and institutions which bind the society together.

In contrast to Putnam (2000), Bourdieu (1986) only highlights the individual aspect of social capital, when he describes it as “networks of relationships which individuals may mobilize as a resource in the process of class distinction” (in Walseth, 2007, p. 4). Fukuyama (2001) also consider social capital to be only a private good. Thus, there are overlapping arguments from social capital theorists on either end of the integration-social inequality axis. Both sides are criticized by feminist theorists and scientists due to the overall lack of attention given to gender and ethnicity issues (Adkins, 2005, p. 198). Another great weakness of the concept of social capital is the lack of consensus on how to measure it (Fukuyama, 2001, p. 12). The fact that it is not tangible, but rather abstract and dependent on human interactions, naturally makes it very difficult to measure. Thus, it is hard to find one method of measuring the concept which all agree to.

Fukuyama (2001, p.7) defines social capital as “an instantiated informal norm that promotes co-operation between two or more individuals”. He argues that what is often associated with the concept: trust, networks, civil society, and the like are results of social capital, “but not constituting social capital itself” (Fukuyama, 2001, p.7). Further, he explains the ‘radius of trust’ as “the circle of people among whom co-operative norms are operative” (Fukuyama, 2001, p. 8). In modern societies, there can be several and overlapping ‘radiuses of trust’ because the social capital of different groups produce “positive externalities” (Fukuyama, 2001, p. 8). In traditional societies, the radius of trust is often little, as it is limited to the family, while strangers are hard to trust (Fukuyama, 2001, p. 9). Nevertheless, social capital within traditional social groups, tribes and religious sects is strong, because they “are based on shared norms and use these norms to achieve co-operative ends” (Fukuyama, 2001, p. 9).

In other words, the benefit of social capital can either spread to larger parts of a society, or it can be limited to a specific social group. When a religious sect encourages and demands honesty and reliability of its members in their dealings with people, whether they are in their group or not, “there will be a positive spillover effect into the larger society” (Fukuyama, 2001, p. 14). In contrast, Ku Klux Klan have strong social capital within the group itself, but they spread hatred and harm people outside their group. Putnam and Helliwell (2004, p. 1437) also point out that social capital – as physical and human capital – can be used for bad purposes, i.e. organizing terrorism. As Fukuyama (2001, p. 8) puts it: “[they] achieve co-operative ends on the basis of shared norms, and therefore have social capital, but they also produce abundant negative externalities for the larger society in which they are embedded”. Nevertheless, sufficient social capital is essential for formal public institutions to function properly (Fukuyama, 2001, p. 12). Additionally, it is important for economic development as well as the development of modern Western societies (Putnam et al, 1993, p. 5).

In his later work, Putnam emphasized the centrality of social network within his definition of social capital, and played down the other elements (Putnam, 2000; Putnam et al., 2004). He divided social capital into two different forms. Bridging is the process of getting to know people who might be different from oneself, e.g. people with another religion or ethnicity. Bonding, on the other side, aims to maintain “already-established relationships with people who are similar to one’s self” (in Walseth, 2007, p. 4). Nevertheless, these two different forms are not mutually exclusive. It is also possible for one group to bridge across some social dimensions and bond along others (Putnam, 2000; Putnam et al, 2004). Other authors describe the distinction between bonding and bridging somewhat differently. Bonds are used to describe the interpersonal ties on the micro level while bridges describe the cross-community ties at the macro level (Granovetter, 1973; Nayaran, 1999; Newman & Dale, 2005). In other words, bonding happens inside a social group, while bridging happens between groups at the community level or even broader.

*“What differentiates social capital from other forms of capital (human, economic, natural) is that social capital is relational, i.e. social capital can only exist and grow among humans sharing a common structure and acting in a network of relationships” (Øyhus, 2016, p. 2)*

#### 3.1.4 The concept of gate-keepers

One can talk about gate-keepers in different context. For instance, the social services authorities can be considered case officers, gate-keepers, and verifiers (Hagelund, 2014). Their gate-keeper function is for those who applies and need social support of different kinds. On the other hand, researchers who want to secure access to a specific research field and get relevant informants for their project need to use gate-keepers of some kind (Fangen, 2010). They might use the professionals or employees in an organization to get access to it and the beneficiaries. According to Redalen et al (2013), different factors affected the attitudes and methods of child welfare professionals, when recruiting users to a big

national research called “The New Child Welfare Service” (Det Nye Barnevernet) in Norway. Especially their personal relationship to the users and their perception of the users’ circumstances were significant (Redalen et al, 2013).

In term of doing research, a gate-keeper is “a person who is central for the society, the group or the environment which is the object of your study, and who can convey contact with the other members” (Fangen, 2010, p. 67; Fangen, 2004, p. 63) The benefits of gate-keepers are numerous. They can invite you for social gatherings, secure you access to information, and be good discussion partners in terms of your interpretations from the field (Fangen, 2010, p. 67). Further, Fangen (2010, p. 67) argues that the gate-keepers “guard the gate which opens for contact with the other participants and access to the field”.

The concept of gate-keepers can also be transferred to central and important persons in voluntary organizations which aim to support immigrants in their integration process. In such cases, the gate-keepers can either be Norwegians or other immigrants who has lived in Norway for several years. They can be the ones who invite new immigrant women to attend different activities or join a party, and they can introduce them to other women in social gatherings. Otherwise, they can be a good discussion partner for the women who is new in town. With their good knowledge and their broad network in the city or the town, they can give immigrant women access to information and help them in different ways. Those who are immigrants themselves can translate information and share advices based on their own experiences as newcomers to that place. The list can go on and on. However, the possible benefit of gate-keepers in a voluntary organization can be many. Not least, the gate-keeper(s) can contribute to increased contact and understanding between immigrants and the society that they are supposed to be integrated into. From my material, the general manager and the mentors in the Volunteer Central are important gate-keepers for several immigrant women (see chapters 5.3 and 6.2).

### 3.1.5 Public discourses on immigration in Norway, with a focus on immigrant women

Hagelund (2002) describes the political discourses of integration in Norway from the 1970s and onwards, to understand how the country debated issues of immigration and multiculturalism, particularly in relation to women. To understand the difficulties of integration, it is imperative to know that Norway’s population has always considered itself fairly homogenous and egalitarian in its values, culture and identity (Hagelund, 2002), despite the presence of indigenous people and national minorities on Norwegian territory (Stokke, 2012, p. 42). Hence, the nation has been at odds with redefining itself as multicultural that celebrates pluralism, while at the same time upholding egalitarianism. When comparing the Scandinavian countries, “Norway is often characterized as somewhere in between nationalistic Denmark and more multiculturalist Sweden” (Stokke, 2012, p. 44).

Many immigrants – both refugees and those who came for other reasons – carried with them cultural practices that may not be agreeable to Norwegians (Stokke, 2012; Hagelund, 2002). For this reason, pluralism challenges some of the fundamental values of the society (Hagelund, 2002). Nevertheless, Norway had to (and still needs to) adapt and integrate the immigrants to hold the fabrics of society together. In the 1970s, immigrants were given the right to choose what kind of relationships they wished to have with the Norwegian society. However, in 1980s, this alternative was removed and adapting to Norwegian society was made mandatory, but the right to protection against forced assimilation was mandated (Hagelund, 2002). In this decade, there was also a clear terminology shift in political discourse: “Politicians stopped referring to Norway as a homogeneous society and began to speak about Multicultural Norway” (Hagelund, 2002, p. 402). Integration then meant that the minorities had the right to live according to their own culture, but within certain vaguely defined limits, which often emphasized the importance of them also joining shared arena with Norwegians, especially in language and work (Hagelund, 2002, p. 405).

In the late 1980s there was a strong increase in asylum seekers, to the extent that it “immigration was politicized, in the sense that it started to matter for how people voted” (Bjorklund, 1999 in Hagelund, 2002, p. 405). The Progress Party took on its shoulder to warn and instill fear of immigrants in the population, with its anti-immigration propaganda (Akkerman & Hagelund, 2007; Hagelund, 2002). It normally received 12 % – 15 % of votes in that period (Hagelund, 2002, p. 405), indicating that a good number of Norwegians were also immigration skeptical and had prejudices against immigrants.

The Progress Party in Norway had been critical to immigration all along, from the 1970s. However, their rhetoric took a new turn from the 1990s, where they focused more on women in minority communities in Norway. The minority women were considered weak and pitiful because they belonged to cultures which oppresses them, i.e. because they had to wear hijab and were not allowed to work outside the home. Violence in near family relations was also a pressing issue among many minority groups (Akkerman & Hagelund, 2007). In this period, there were much hatred and skepticism among Norwegians towards immigrants, and Pakistanis in particular (Gullestad, 2002b). This was especially visible in the negative, aggressive and threatening letters sent to a Pakistani-Norwegian politician named Rubina Rana in 1999 (Gullestad, 2002b, pp. 48-49). Certain Norwegians feared the establishment of a Muslim state on Norwegian ground due to the huge number of Pakistanis, and their “little ability and desire to adapt to our country” (Gullestad, 2002b, p. 49).

Nowadays, there is still a growing debate regarding the extent to which Islam is reconcilable with Western and democratic ideals (Akkerman&Hagelund, 2007, p. 198). Many refugees are from Arab and Muslim countries (UDI, 2016). Stokke (2012) has analyzed and discussed several public debates regarding Muslims in his PhD thesis “A Multicultural Society in the Making: How Norwegian Muslims challenge a white nation”. Among the debates are the Cartoon debate, and multiple hijab debates in the period 2004-2010 (Stokke, 2012, p. 161).

One incident that caused widespread media attention and public debates was the honor killing of a Kurdish girl, Fadime Sahindal in Sweden in January 2002 (Stokke, 2012, p. 162; Hagelund, 2002, p. 411; Gullestad, 2002a, p. 170). In Norwegian media, the murder was placed in the context of girls who had escaped female circumcision and forced marriages (Jacobsen, 2005, p. 168, in Stokke, 2012, p. 162), although the Kurdish family was not Muslim. The Prime Minister, Kjell Magne Bondevik, condemned the act in *Dagbladet* by contrasting minority communities that “presumably justify such criminal acts in the name of culture” to Norwegian culture which considers it a crime and a shame (Stokke, 2012, p. 162). Thereafter followed two big demonstrations in February 2002, both with about one thousand participants (Stokke, 2012, p. 163). The first one was led by Shabana Rehman and dominated by white Norwegians. They protested against parents in minority communities who tried to restrict their children’s freedom (Stokke, 2012, p. 163). The next week,

*“the Islamic Council, representing 26 mosques, held its own demonstration led by Abid Raja from the World Islamic Mission. The demonstrators condemned oppression of women, honor killings and forced marriages, but pointed out that these acts of violence had nothing to do with the Islamic religion, and denounced the generalizations, harassment and hatred against Muslims”* (Jacobsen, 2005, p. 155 in Stokke, 2012, p. 163).

This example illustrates the clashes and disagreements between the majority and the Muslim minorities in Norway. It is unfortunate that the evil acts of certain immigrants or Muslims are so easily portrayed as Islamic or supported by all Muslims. As a Muslim, I have often perceived that people expect me to take distance from all new terrorist attacks in the world, simply because I am Muslim and they consider there to be a connection between me and Islamic terrorism or radicalism, unless I state otherwise. This experience has been shared by Muslims in Norway for multiple years already (Stokke, 2012), especially after the 9/11-attacks (Rugkåsa, 2010, p. 172). Hege Storhaug is one of the leading voices to promote this view and anti-Muslim rhetoric in Norway (Stokke, 2012, p. 169). Among other things, she has claimed that “if you wear the hijab, you directly or indirectly sympathize with violent Islamists (...): Al Qaeda, the Muslim Brotherhood, Mullah Krekar” (Dagsavisen, 2004, in Stokke, 2012, p. 170). Several feminist scholars have similar views, as they interpret the wearing of headscarves as “a sign of male domination over women’s bodies and lives” and “a tool of oppression” (Bennoune, 2007, pp. 390-391; see also Fair, 2003, p. 17). They also argue that, “the headscarf is a terrible symbol of submission” (Freedman, 2007, p. 37). Therefore, they wish to combat it “in the name of defense of women’s rights” (Freedman, 2008, p. 38). Also in Norway, the media attention regarding the headscarf has been mainly negative, portraying it a symbol of female oppression and “a threat to the majority society” (Rugkåsa, 2010, p. 172). Thus, many immigrant women experience that Norwegian employers do not like the hijab (Rugkåsa, 2010, p. 109), and that they even lose their social support when refusing to leave the hijab for a work which demands less clothing (Rugkåsa, 2010, pp. 151-161).

Another public debate has highlighted how immigrant culture was perceived to limit the social mobility of female immigrants (Hagelund, 2002). Their low-income status, social security and welfare dependence became a concern in Norwegian politics and public life (Hagelund, 2002). Norwegian women are known to be independent and highly educated. However, the strong emphasis of equality and gender equality in Norway became a barrier to integration of immigrants (Hagelund, 2002, p. 409). Migrant culture was seen to contribute to *underclassness*. Immigrant women (mainly Muslim) were portrayed as victims of their own culture and practices such as forced and arranged marriages, female genital mutilation, honour killings, and even veiling (Hagelund, 2002, p. 410). These are seen as barriers to the value of social and gender equality in Norway. Hagelund (2002) asserted that her impression of what is considered success stories of integration include outspoken women without veils, and those with good education and careers. The public debates certainly exude moralism and national chauvinism. Does the notion of equal rights mean sameness/assimilation, then? The meaning of integration needs to be reworked. Hagelund (2002, p. 413) concluded by stating that policy discourses and debates about multicultural Norway may be seen to be as much about containing diversity as it is about cherishing it. However, there are contrasts between the political discourses celebrating multiculturalism and the practical implementation of these ideas. The openness to minorities' differences seem to be bigger in speech than in actions.

Although this subchapter has not highlighted the differences between political parties, it has shown some of the negative ideas and prejudices of immigrants in public debates from the 1970s with a focus on immigrant women. Since the Progress Party has taken the most immigrant hostile position in the debates (Akkeman & Hagelund, 2007), it was natural to focus on it.

### 3.1.6 The concept of culturalization

Culturalization is a “process where certain situations or problems is interpreted, explained and treated on the basis of a generalized understanding of culture” (Rugkåsa, Eide & Ylvisaker, 2015, p. 3). It is a “one-dimensional, reductionist approach”, where “cultural aspects are given excessive meaning on at the expense of other factors” (Rugkåsa *et al*, 2015, p. 3). Normally, this is not a conscious process, but rather a result of focusing on cultural differences and what kind of meaning they are given (Rugkåsa, *et al*, 2015, p. 3).

In the context of child welfare work, culturalization can often become the way for child welfare professionals to interpret the issues or problems of children with minority backgrounds (Rugkåsa *et al*, 2015, p. 5). Visible phenomena like swine, alcohol and headscarves are more prone to culturalization than others. Since they are visible, people often automatically and unconsciously gives these phenomena meaning, and defines and categorizes them. Thus, what the phenomenon represents becomes more important and central than the phenomenon itself (Rugkåsa *et al*, 2015, p. 5). Rugkåsa (2010, p. 140) notes that often conditions which are not linked to culture are linked to culture. From



her research on a public work qualifying organization shows that Norwegian teachers easily connect bad hygiene and low social competence to the minority women's cultures. However, when asked if these behaviors or weaknesses of immigrant women is a result of cultural or social factors, they admitted that they had not thought about it, but that it probably had complex explanations (Rugkåsa, 2010, p. 140). This example illustrates that culturalization, where one gives excessive importance to culture over other factors, is not a conscious choice or process. When one is in a context with Norwegians and immigrants it can become natural and easy to focus on the differences, and explain them culturally, rather than interpreting them as individual, social or personal factors.

Another example shows how a child welfare professional describes the problem of a 13 years old Somali boy who lives in a child welfare institute rather than with his mother (Rugkåsa *et al*, 2015, pp. 5-6). In the description, the attention is given to the fact that his mother does not want her son to eat swine meat or be out late, while the boy talks Norwegian fluently and wish to be like other youths. The conflict between mother and son regarding pork becomes the main focus of the boy's issues, although he also has behavior problems, migrated as a 6-year-old and needs to adopt to a new context (Rugkåsa *et al*, 2015, p. 6). The issue of eating or not eating swine is interpreted as a majority-minority issue, because it is an important Somali/Muslim principle not to eat it, while in Norway it is natural and common. When simply focusing on culture, complexity is reduced and "the attention can be turned away from conditions which can be of greater significance" (Rugkåsa *et al*, 2015, p. 10). The simplicity of culturalization makes complex cases seem understandable, straightforward and practically manageable (Rugkåsa, 2015, p. 12). However, a more complex understanding of an individual's situation and issues will be better in terms of offering appropriate support and help.

*"Through a contextual approach where the cultural aspect is one of several dimensions which have a significance in the individual's life and everyday life, the child welfare can get a more nuanced understanding for the individual child and its family, and likewise for evaluation of the care situation and necessary measures"* (Rugkåsa *et al*, 2015, pp. 12-13)

### **3.2 Theoretical Framework**

Here I will present the theoretical framework of this master's thesis.

Firstly, I will focus on the Volunteer Central's contribution to the integration of immigrant women by focusing on integration as 'shared arenas' (Østberg, 2003), as 'social capital' (Putnam, 2000), and as a balance between 'the right to be different' and 'the right to be same' (Hylland-Eriksen & Sajjad, 2015). It is clear that the meeting places arranged by the Volunteer Central are good platforms for Norwegians and immigrant women to meet and get to know each other. Their interaction and relationships in these shared arenas can further translate to social capital. In this regards, the researcher is mainly concerned with the ways in which the immigrant women create and maintain bridges with Norwegians and bonds with other immigrant women from their countries, when attending different

activities. Finally, in the integration-part, there will be a discussion with regards to how the Volunteer Central facilitates for both 'the right to be different' and 'the right to be same' through their activities partly aimed at immigrants.

Secondly, the concept of gate-keepers in the Volunteer Central will be described and discussed. From my material, the general manager and mentors in the Volunteer Central has this function in their initial meeting with immigrant women, and their ongoing efforts to support them. Much of this is described in chapter 5.3. However, in chapter 6.2, their roles and significance will be discussed further.

Thirdly, the expressions of some of my informants will be analyzed according to the concept of culturalization. Although it is clear from my material that Norwegian volunteers and employees are open-minded and respectful of other cultures, life styles and behaviors, there are also a tendency of explaining differences and immigrants with a main focus on the culture. This will be further discussed in chapter 6.3.

The following figures illustrates the three focus areas for the discussion part of this thesis.

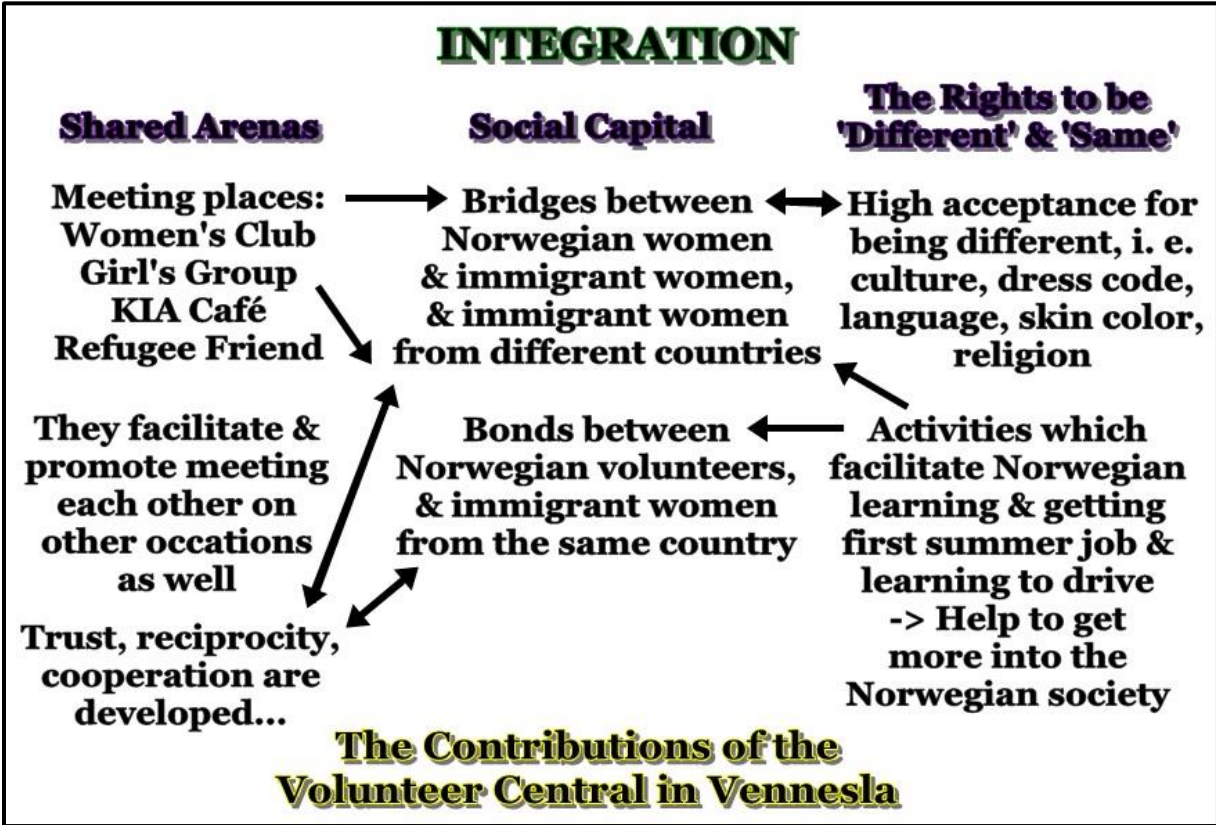


Figure 1: Theoretical framework 1 – Integration  
 Inspired by Østberg (2003), Putnam (2000), Hylland-Eriksen and Sajjad (2015)  
 Source: Author



Figure 2: Theoretical framework 2 - Gate-keepers  
 Inspired by Fangen (2010)  
 Source: Author

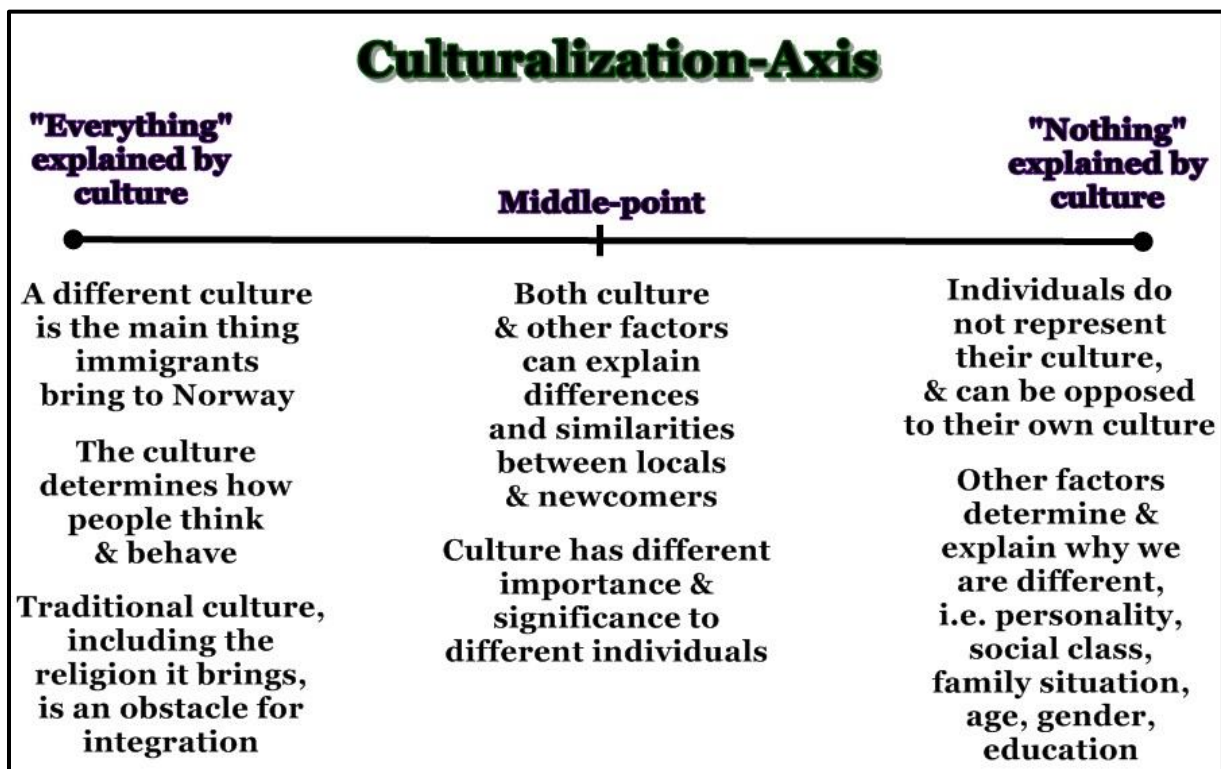


Figure 3: Theoretical framework 3 – Culturalization  
 Inspired by Rugkåsa (2010) and Rugkåsa et al (2015)  
 Source: Author

## 4 Qualitative Methods

This chapter will describe and justify the main methodological approach applied for this study, including; choice of research strategy and research design, the epistemological and ontological considerations, sampling, data collection methods. Further, I will discuss my roles as a local Norwegian and a visible Muslim woman, and limitations and ethical considerations of the field work and thesis.

### 4.1 Qualitative Methodology with a Case Study Design

#### 4.1.1 Relevance of qualitative methods

As previously stated, the key purpose of this study is to explore the role of the Volunteer Central in integration work of immigrant women in Vennesla, focusing on their aims and activities, and the experienced ways in which immigrant women are benefitting from these activities, as well as the impressions of Norwegian women connected to this voluntary organization. On a practical level, this means going into depth of understanding the relationships between these actors, how different activities function and what kind of subjective experiences immigrant women have with it. Due to the focus on subjective experiences and impressions, it is appropriate to employ qualitative methodology for this research. The researcher is not interested in mere numbers of participants or what countries they are coming from – where quantitative methods would be more beneficial. Rather, the aim is to understand how different individuals experience and benefit from different activities. The qualitative interview is valuable in this regard. As Thagaard (2013, p. 95) states: "The purpose of an interview is to get rich and comprehensive information about how other people perceive their situation and what views and perspectives they have on topics that are addressed in the interview situation".

Supplementing participant observation with interviews gives a broader overview and better understanding of the activities and how immigrant women experience them.

#### 4.1.2 Epistemological and ontological considerations

However, I agree with Guba and Lincoln (1994) who "are critical of the view that there are absolute truths about the social world that it is the job of the social scientist to reveal. Instead, they argue that there can be more than one and possibly several accounts" (in Bryman, 2012, p. 390). Thus, I place myself in the interpretivism side of epistemology, in contrast to positivism (Bryman, 2012, p. 28).

Moreover, I am convinced of the constructivism position of ontology. I consider that "social phenomena and categories are not only produced through social interaction but that they are in a constant state of revision" (Bryman, 2012, p. 33). Further, I believe that my findings and concluding remarks in this thesis are also constructions of the social world (Bryman, 2012, p. 33).

Nevertheless, social research is beneficial and important. As researchers, we just do not claim to have established or revealed a definite and static truth about the social world. What we find out is dependent

upon social actors, interactions between them and us, and our own prior knowledge, among other things. Nevertheless, the results can be trustworthy and credible (Bryman, 2012, p. 390). As Bryman (2012, p. 399) points out: “The social world must be interpreted from the perspective of the people being studied, rather than as though those subjects were incapable of their own reflections on the social world”. This is fundamentally different from the natural sciences, where the research objects “(atoms, molecules, gases, chemicals, metals, and so on) cannot attribute meaning to events and to their environment” (Bryman, 2012, p. 399).

#### 4.1.3 Research design

According to Bryman (2012, p. 50), there are five main types of research design: Experimental design, cross-sectional or survey design, longitudinal design, case study design, and comparative design. My research is a case study design that is concerned with the complexities and nature of a single organization (the Volunteer Central) and its operation (activities partly aimed at immigrant women) in Vennesla in Norway. The case study design is chosen, as it is particularly helpful in the “generation of an intensive, detailed examination of a case” (Bryman, 2012, p. 68). Moreover, it is less time-consuming than several of the other research designs. Thus, it is appropriate and suitable for a master’s thesis project.

### 4.2 Sampling and Data Collection Methods

In this section, I will describe the sampling process and the data collection methods of my field work.

#### 4.2.1 The sampling process

I have used purposive sampling. Ten respondents constitute the sample of this research and thesis. The sampling methods I have employed are my own network, a key informant and the snowballing method. Most of the interviews were recorded and transcribed. However, in some cases I only took notes during interviews. All of this will be described and discussed further in this section.

##### *4.2.1.1 Purposive sampling*

I used purposive sampling (Bryman, 2012, p. 418), since my methods are qualitative and I could not go for a random sample of informants. I searched out informants who had criteria and characteristics which were useful to highlight my main objective and research questions. The main criterion was that they were women connected to The Volunteer Central in some way, either as a volunteer or an immigrant woman. During my first interview with the general manager of this voluntary organization, I realized that I also need to include employees in the organization. The Volunteer Central have a few paid positions because it organizes such a big number of volunteers and gets financial support from the government and the municipal.

#### 4.2.1.2 The sample

I conducted ten interviews. My respondents were five Norwegian women (two employees and three volunteers in The Volunteer Central) and five immigrant women from different countries (Afghanistan, Poland, Syria, Somalia, Eritrea). The names and countries of the women used in the thesis are anonymous, in order to secure the informants' confidentiality and to uphold their trust (as all of them were told that the information from their interviews will be treated confidentially). Only Jorunn, the general manager, will be mentioned by her real name, as she has agreed to this due to her position in the Volunteer Central and important role in my field work.

#### 4.2.1.3 My own network, key informant and snowballing

Firstly, I contacted the general manager of the organization, Jorunn Sagen Olsen, who has worked in the organization from its early beginning until now. Since we already know each other from a pupil-teacher's assistant relationship when I was in high school (grade 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup>) in Vennesla, she was positive, optimistic and enthusiastic from the beginning. She quickly became my key informant during the field work, and helped me in the process of finding new informants by introducing me to people in activities and giving me other names and numbers to contact as well. Additionally, she invited me to the first activities of The Volunteer Central and secured me entrance to a meeting with different actors who work with immigrants in the municipality. Although we have had no contact for many years, I got a very good relationship with Jorunn and much help from her, because I found her in my own network of people I know in Vennesla.

When looking through the "Active program" of The Volunteer Central (available online), I found other names of people I already know to some extent, who are leaders of the most relevant activities for my research. Therefore, when I contacted them, we scheduled interview appointments pretty quickly. I was not an unknown, strange or suspicious researcher. Rather, I have a face they already know. Therefore, they could trust me without any great efforts from my side. It was especially two Norwegian women I gained access to in this way.

After this, I used my key informant – the general manager of The Volunteer Central – and the snowballing method. In this way, I got six other interviews (four migrant women and two Norwegian women). The first migrant women, I was introduced to by my key informant in an activity I attended. Thereafter, I met another migrant woman in another activity, and recognized her name from the interview with the general manager. I had to explain more to convince that woman to participate in my project, as she was more reluctant and skeptical in the beginning. But my role as a Muslim proved to be beneficial in this regard (see chapter 4.4.2), and she invited me to her home for the interview. I called one Norwegian woman to invite her to join my project by giving me an interview. Because the general manager had already pointed me out to her in an activity, she was very enthusiastic and happy to give me an interview. Another Norwegian woman I met during the same activity, who is already in

my network, was ready for giving me an interview already the next week (due to different reasons, we delayed the interview a few times). Another migrant woman I called had already met me in an activity several times, so she invited me to her home the next day for the interview. Actually, I gained access to all of the migrant women when participating in different activities. Two of the interviews, I conducted in the activity itself, because they were comfortable there and had time for it.

#### 4.2.1.4 Recordings, transcriptions and notes of interviews

I recorded and transcribed all the interviews with Norwegian women, because then our talk and interview could go smoothly and quickly without me taking many breaks for writing notes. One migrant woman had relatively good Norwegian skills, so I recorded and transcribed her interview too. However, with two of the migrant women I used “free translators” (one was a mentor in The Volunteer Central, and is used to translating for other migrants, the other time, it was the teenage daughters of a migrant women who helped with translation). Then, it proved useful to simply take notes. Firstly, because the translator(s) only gave me the summary of what my informant explained. Secondly, because while the translator and my informant talked (question and answer) it did not disturb the interview too much to write down notes of what the translator had told me. When interviewing the other migrant women, I also found it most useful to take notes, because their Norwegian skills did not allow for too broad or long answers. Additionally, we needed to use some time just to understand each other. One woman even had a dictionary, so she checked a few words from her language to Norwegian. Records of such interviews would be rather difficult to transcribe, as there were many breaks and much talking which were not relevant to the interview. Therefore, I considered it more useful to extract the most important and relevant points by writing them down directly during the interviews.

#### 4.2.2 Data collection methods

I have employed semi-structured interviews and participant observation to find answers to my main objective and research questions. Here, I describe the methods and a few of my experiences when using them.

##### 4.2.2.1 Semi-structured interviews

I conducted semi-structured interviews with Norwegian women (employees and volunteers) and immigrant women (participants and volunteers) connected to the Volunteer Central. One benefit of qualitative interviews is that they are flexible, and can take a new direction depending on the interviewees, and even adjust the emphasis of the research if any significant issue emerges from the interviews (Bryman, 2012, p. 470).

In the scale of interview types (structured, semi-structured, relatively unstructured, open), I consider semi-structured the most appropriate type for my research. That is because I could be open to other

inputs and thoughts during the interviews, although I had prepared relevant and important questions for the respondents (Bryman, 2012, p. 471). Additionally, I could change the sequence of the questions, and ask any other question which came to mind, in the process of interviewing (Bryman, 2012, p. 471). I found follow-up questions to the informants' statements to be especially useful, as this gave me more explanation and better understanding of what they meant. In other words, I followed a script, but I was flexible (Bryman, 2012, p. 471). This flexibility was useful as I was not testing a specific hypothesis or have a completely clear idea about what I wanted to find out during the field work.

During the first interview, with the general manager of the Volunteer Central, it was highly important to be flexible and open to much more information than what I could prepare for in advance. This was because I was pretty ignorant of the organization and what they do for immigrant women – and other people. So, I needed as much insight and understanding as possible, to be able to pave my way forward and know who else to contact. Since my respondents had different positions, roles, responsibilities, experiences and backgrounds, I also needed to change the interview guides to suit the ones I would interview. Nevertheless, some questions were same, especially to Norwegian women as a group and immigrant women as another group. In all cases, it was useful with a flexible interview guide, so that I gained access to opinions and thoughts which I did not think of before-hand.

#### 4.2.2.2 Participant observation

I attended several of the activities of the Volunteer Central, which are partly aimed at immigrants, especially where many immigrant women participate. I attended the KIA Café five times, the Girl's Group two times and the Women's Club one time (see chapter 5.1 and appendix 1). My personal observations from these activities support my findings from interviews.

I took the role of a partially participant observer or a minimal participant observer (Bryman, 2012, p. 443), rather than a participating observer. That is because I wished to get additional and supporting data from my participant observation, rather than using it as my main source of data. One benefit of participant observation is that I could get close to people and gain a better understanding of their culture and values (Bryman, 2012, p. 445). I got good informal talks during these activities, especially in the KIA Café, and otherwise observed what happened, who was there and the interactions between people. My focus was naturally on the immigrant women and how they interacted with other immigrant women and Norwegian women. My observer role often changed during the activities, as I sometimes passively observed others around me and other times actively talked with people. In my nature, I am not a very talkative and outgoing person, which at times lead me to be more passive. However, in the end of the Girl's Group, I made sure to help little with cleaning. As Bryman (2012, p. 446) argues, in certain cases “a failure to participate actively might indicate to members of the social



setting a lack of commitment and lead to a loss of credibility”. So, in those cases I considered it better to get involved, rather than taking a passive role.

At times, I also got into conversations and got comments from Norwegian women, which were not relevant to my research, often due to my roles as a local and a Muslim woman (see chapter 4.4). Nevertheless, I got a kind of inside-perspective to these activities of the Volunteer Central, although my participation was highly limited (compared to immigrant women and volunteers, and compared to ethnographers who really spend time in social settings). When meeting immigrant women during activities by the Volunteer Central, some of them got a good impression of me and became more comfortable to give me an interview (Bryman, 2012, p. 446). Many were also curious about me due to my role as a visible Muslim woman (see chapter 4.4.2).

### **4.3 Why Other Methods Were Not Suitable?**

Since my aim was to understand how employees, voluntary workers and immigrant women connected to the Volunteer Central in Vennesla understand and define integration and ‘everyday integration’, instead of starting out with a specific definition and understanding of these concepts myself, I consider qualitative methods to be the most appropriate and suitable methods. Due to another aim of understanding certain activities arranged by the Volunteer Central, and the possible benefits of these for immigrant women, it has also been crucial to participate in these activities myself and get the personal views of some of the women involved. The opinions, perceptions and understandings of different respondents can only be captured by using qualitative methods, where I personally met the women, and could have a dialogue and observe.

#### **4.3.1 Why not document analysis?**

A document analysis would not be able to highlight different people’s understandings, opinions and experiences, the way my interviews and participant observation have done. The available documents from the Volunteer Central are mainly descriptions of their “Active-program” and other activities, as well as project descriptions and confidentiality declaration by volunteers. These are all useful for their purposes, but they say nothing about the people involved in activities, why they attend or how they benefit. As many immigrant women who participate in activities by the Volunteer Central have weak Norwegian skills, and there is no section on their webpage for “feedback” or “testimonials”, there is no information about these women’s opinions or experiences available (as I know of). During one of gatherings I attended in the KIA Café, one immigrant woman actually brought the local newspaper and showed us the article about her with a picture with herself smiling and throwing the snow up in the air. She is active in several activities of the Volunteer Central, and the article described her love for snow and appreciation of being in Norway, among other things. Surely, there are other newspaper articles available on the Volunteer Central and immigrant women, but these do not necessarily focus on any of my research questions, and would therefore be difficult to use as a basis for my thesis.

#### 4.3.2 Why not focus group discussions?

I actually planned to use focus group discussions as well, but due to starting my field work little late and the challenges with planning and conducting a focus group discussion with a number of women – who are busy in different ways – I did not manage to do it. Focus group discussion is “a form of group interview in which there are several participants (in addition to the moderator/facilitator)” (Bryman, 2012, p. 502). By using FGDs, the researcher is “interested in the ways in which individuals discuss a certain issue as members of a group, rather than simply as individuals” and “how people respond to each other’s views” (Bryman, 2012, p. 501). With this method I hoped to gain rich information about the concept of everyday integration and how immigrant women experience and benefit from the different activities of the Volunteer Central. I also imagined that FGDs on the topic of migrant’s women’s everyday challenges, would create a good atmosphere for the women to share different stories of what they have experienced. They could potentially also recognize themselves in the other women’s stories and opinions. I still think that this method would be useful and interesting, but due to my limited time, resources and experience, which Bryman (2012, p. xxxii; pp. 82-83) highlights for master students generally, I could not do it. It is much easier to schedule an interview appointment with one woman compared to four or any bigger number. Therefore, the semi-structured interviews with individuals got my attention.

#### 4.3.3 Why not quantitative methods?

Quantitative methods, like a survey or questionnaires, could be useful to some extent. I could have decided all the questions in advance and suggested different kinds of benefits which the immigrant women might find relevant to themselves, with regards to the activities of The Volunteer Central. At least, I would have good chances to make an overview of how many women attend the different activities and how often. However, they would be limited to answer according to my fixed questionnaire, from before I even went into the field to gain an understanding. I wished to be more open and flexible than that during my field work. I want my experiences and interpretations in the field to shape my findings and discussion, rather than the theory shaping what I find in the field. Naturally, I have started out with some amount of background knowledge and I am limited by my own prior knowledge, my position, my field of expertise, my opinions and so on. However, I find that quantitative methods would have limited me further, especially because I aimed to understand people’s perceptions and experiences – which are not quantifiable and very hard to discover through a fixed questionnaire. An additional limitation of this method, including structured interview, is that several immigrant women have limited Norwegian skills, and would therefore struggle even more to understand the questions and know how to answer, without the additional explanations and questions which semi-structured interviews allow.

#### **4.4 My Roles as a Local and a Visible Muslim Woman**

In this section, I will discuss how my roles as a Norwegian local and as a visible Muslim woman have been significant during the field work. There are both benefits and challenges connected to these roles.

##### **4.4.1 My role as a local Norwegian in Vennesla**

Because I started my field work pretty late, 6th February 2017, I consider my role as a Norwegian who has lived pretty much all my life in Vennesla highly important. I had already gained access to The Volunteer Central through the general manager by email from November 2016. I already know this woman from my high school years (8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> grade), because she was working as a teacher's assistant in that period. Since she also knew me, it was easy to get in touch with her and arrange the first interview. I did not need to spend much time getting to know her or prove my trustworthiness. This counts also for interviews with other Norwegian women I interviewed. Most times, it was a short call and we agreed to an interview appointment in a few days. I did not know all of them beforehand, but some of them I have met for different reasons previously. In the activities I participated in, like KIA Café and the Women's Club, I also found that my role as a Norwegian was important.

I experienced that it was useful in the sense that people felt comfortable with me and trusted me quickly. However, in certain cases it was also like an obstacle. Because in the KIA Café, there were several grown up and elder people who knows either my parents or my grandmother and her family. At the same time I met immigrant women who were curious on me as a Norwegian Muslim. At times I noticed that the presence of Norwegian women (who know my family) limited my speech and conversation with the immigrant women. Some of them also expressed their opinions and advices regarding me being Muslim, when the rest of my (Norwegian) family are not. However, many of the Norwegian women who did not know me were normally equally curious about me, my situation and my choice of religion as the immigrant women I met.

Regardless, my role as a Norwegian local was highly beneficial in gaining access to informants. Additionally, it made it easy for me to talk with women during different activities as we share the same language – even the dialect. Moreover, I understand and relate to several of the perspectives and opinions of the Norwegian women I interviewed. That might have had an effect on the interview answers and some broad explanations I received, although I am not aware of how much it mattered.

In meetings with immigrant women who know Norwegian to some extent, my role as Norwegian might have been important too. At least, I could talk with them (depending on their Norwegian skills). But mostly, I experienced that they were more curious about my Muslim identity – how and why – when I am Norwegian, after all. This curiosity was present in all of them, regardless of their own religion, if they were Muslim or Christian. That leads me to my next point.

#### 4.4.2 My role as a visible Muslim woman

My supervisors asked me in a meeting when I had almost finished my field work: How do they react to you as a visible Muslim woman? Is it difference between the Norwegians and the immigrant women? Actually, I noticed very little difference. All of them were very curious. Only those who already know me or my family (of Norwegians) did not ask about or find it interesting that I am a Norwegian Muslim. A few of them told me things like “You have to be patient with your family. You must understand that it is a sorrow for them”. Other Norwegians asked curiously “What have you experienced? How did it happen that you accepted Islam and became Muslim?” In such instances, I have explained well and long, and have gotten the impression that they understand my point of view and respect my choice of religion, although they believe differently themselves.

The most surprising thing for me, when meeting immigrant women, is that their first question often is “Is your husband Muslim?” This can partly be because of their limited Norwegian skills. So, it is one of the few things they can ask. However, I find it little sad that Muslim women with foreign backgrounds seem to believe that when an ethnic Norwegian woman is Muslim it must be because she is married with a Muslim man. Then, I explain, “Muslim first. Husband 2,5 years later”. None of the Norwegian women I encountered during my field work started off with this assumption. Perhaps this is due to their broad Norwegian skills, and also their fear of being rude or discriminating in any way.

Those Muslim immigrant women I interviewed did not have the attitude as described above. Rather, they were genuinely curious and interested in how it could be that I am Muslim and Norwegian. They were also concerned at how my relationships with my family members had been and changed with my change of religion (in 2011). So, I had some good conversations with these women, both before and after the interview itself.

One of them is around my age, so we developed a very good connection, and she explained many things about herself, her life and some difficult challenges she has passed. When talking with her, we used several Arabic phrases, like *Masha'Allah* (Whatever Allah/God wills), *Alhamdulillah* (All praise and all thanks belongs to Allah/God) and *In shaa Allah* (God Willing/If Allah wills). We talked about life from our Muslim viewpoints, and she advised me to always be patient during tests and difficulties, and to trust Allah and keep making *duaa* (supplication to God). Especially with this young woman, I connected with her due to our common religious conviction and she gained trust in me in this way. She was pretty skeptical to giving me an interview in the beginning, but as we talked and understood that we have many similarities, she became comfortable with the idea and even invited me to her home. I find this example telling of how my Muslim identity also was beneficial for my access to informants. However, another Muslim woman I met several times in the KIA Café (weekly) before she was ready for the interview. So, I also had to spend time with, and near, some informants before I gained their trust and was allowed to do the interview.

The negative side of being Muslim during the field work is perhaps that certain Norwegian women feel that the veil (hijab) is a sign of “I don’t want any contact with you” or even “suppression” or “I’m brainwashed”. Especially elder women in the KIA Café were more skeptical to me, and I could sense that they hoped that I would make a more “reasonable choice” – by returning to Christianity. Such women might hope that the meeting place between Muslims and Christians can also be a platform for Muslims to change their religion. However, this is out of the scope of my research. Even if those women I met had such assumptions, hopes or prejudices about me, I did not experience a problem with it. As I sat down with some of them and talked, they were happy to get some questions answered and also saw me as a nice, friendly woman, who was accessible to them.

## **4.5 Limitations**

The main limitations of the field work and writing process have been: the limited time frame, how my role as a Muslim affects my behavior with men and my perspective, the inside-perspective I have in Vennesla and the fact that I was quickly impressed by the Volunteer Central and what they do.

### **4.5.1 The limited time frame of the field work and the writing process**

I started my field work 6<sup>th</sup> of February and ended it 24<sup>th</sup> of March 2017. Under other circumstances, it would be better to conduct the field work during January until the middle of February, or even little earlier. However, due to personal reasons I was out of the country for a longer period. Although, I was planning to reach back to Norway in December or January, obstacles out of my hands hindered me. It was mainly the instability, the lack of functioning public institutions, the need for a visa and the civil war in that country which prevented me from leaving it easily. Nevertheless, I started my field work on the first Monday after reaching Norway a Friday. Due to the feeling of starting late, I was highly active, energetic, ongoing and hardworking from the beginning. I contacted several people and arranged interviews as quickly as I could. I also joined any relevant activity I could. Therefore, I gained lots of good material in those six weeks.

All my focus was on the field work while I was in that process. Therefore, I delayed the writing process until I finished it. I decided to conclude the field work after I had conducted ten interviews, although my supervisors were satisfied with eight interviews together with the rich material from my observations. After the last interview 24<sup>th</sup> of March, I firstly had to transcribe the last two interviews. Thereafter, I started coding interviews and writing on the thesis. This only gave me little more than two months for writing the thesis. At times, I have felt that I cannot successfully complete it with the quality I aim for. Nevertheless, limited time has also pushed me to work hard, effectively and focused.

### **4.5.2 My role as a Muslim woman: distance to men and it affects my perspective**

Although, there are many benefits with my role as a Muslim, there are also disadvantages connected to it. My religion is highly important to me and therefore I make many choices based on it. Islam is a

religion with rules and guidelines for every aspect of our lives. I am very satisfied with shaping my life according to what I consider correct and good in the religion. However, in the research process, it limits me in ways other researchers are not limited. For instance, I keep a distance to men outside my family. Therefore, it was natural for me to focus on immigrant women, and get in touch with Norwegian women, for the field work. This keeps men's views, experiences and opinions out from my findings. Thus, my thesis is based on interactions, experiences and interviews with women – Norwegian and foreign, Christian and Muslim.

Additionally, the lenses through which I see the world with – and interpret my observations and interviews with – are highly influenced by my Muslim identity and my religious conviction. This has surely affected me during the field work as well as in the writing process. At times, I argue for Muslim women's right to act as they wish, even though it goes against Norwegian norms and expectations. Although I am a social scientist, I feel a need to highlight certain Muslim practices and how they should be respected in this society. This comes natural because a good number of immigrant women are also Muslim women, although there are only two Muslims in my material. Moreover, I am not a passive observant of the clashes between Norwegian norms and certain Muslim practices or ways of doing things. Rather, I am personally affected by it. Thus, I get engaged in these topics, i.e. keeping a distance to the opposite gender and wearing hijab. My position and personal experiences as a Muslim woman therefore affects my writing too. It is not necessarily a bad thing, because many Norwegian researchers write about Muslims from an outside-perspective (i.e. Stokke, 2012; Rugkåsa, 2010; Rugkåsa et al, 2015). Therefore, my voice from an inside-perspective is rare and can be valuable. Nevertheless, the focus in this thesis is immigrant women generally and not Muslim women specifically. So, I have a somewhat distanced relationship to my material and findings.

#### 4.5.3 Inside-perspective as a local Norwegian

I have practically lived all my life in Vennesla. This has given me easy and quick access to the Volunteer Central and several Norwegian women. Nevertheless, it can be an obstacle too. I have not come to a new place with many curious questions. I did not have the perspective or curiosity of an outsider. However, the Volunteer Central was new to me. I had hardly heard about it and its activities when I contacted the general manager towards the end of 2016. So, I actually did find an aspect in my hometown which I was not familiar with. Therefore, I wished to find out how it works, what they aim for, what they do, and how immigrant women experience benefits from it – or not. Although the place was not new to me, the organization was. Thus, my curiosity as a researcher was high and helped me to find answers to my research questions.

#### 4.5.4 Quickly impressed: not critical enough?

I quickly became impressed by the Volunteer Central and what they do. This is partly because I did not know much about it before-hand. The amount they get in public support; the number and variety of

activities they arrange; the variety of people they help; the number of volunteers they coordinate; how long time they have operated; all of this was new to me. From both interviews and observation, I got very positive impression of the work they do and how people benefit from it – especially immigrant women and girls. This attitude or opinion have shaped me during the field work and in the writing process. I lack a critical perspective, although I have mentioned some limitations of the work and activities of the Volunteer Central and its volunteers. There are surely aspects of their offers which can still be improved, as the general manager is aware of (Interview with Jorunn).

Overall, I am impressed by what they do and achieve through the Volunteer Central. This thesis is certainly shaped by this. Actually, the weakness is perhaps that I only got informants who benefit from and are positive to the central's activities. It is worth noting that everyone I talked with informally before, during and after my field work also had positive impressions about the organization and what they do (i.e. people from the Adult Training, my family, other local women). So, it might be a fair and suitable impression, at least from my limited material and limited time with the central and different women connected to it. Nevertheless, having a more diverse group of immigrant women – including some critical voices and contrasting views – could have improved the quality of the thesis. Surely, there are women in Vennesla who either does not know about the Volunteer Central or consciously avoids its activities for reasons I am not aware of (since such women are not in my material).

#### **4.6 Ethical Considerations**

When conducting any type of social research, it is always important to consider ethical issues. We deal with humans and it is therefore highly important to use the material from the research in a constructive and good way, which will not harm any of the respondents. Confidentiality of the individuals is very important. The participants in the project must also sufficiently be aware of what they accept to be part of and that they can withdraw their consent at any time.

Normally, when I introduced myself and my project to women during different activities, I explained much orally and I gave them the information sheet (see appendix 2) so that they could read more about the details. Some of the women did not know Norwegian well enough to read it alone, but in some cases, another woman from her country could translate for her. One time, a woman wanted the information through email, so that she could figure it out by using Google translate. That time, I made sure to explain – in simpler words – the aim of my research, my position, some interview question, and how everything would be anonymous and that she could withdraw her consent at any time. Additionally, I sent her the document with all the details and information.

The Norwegian women who accepted to be interviewed by phone, did not get all the information before we met. However, all of them read the information sheet when we met and said something like “ok, this is ok” or “looks nice, this is interesting, I accept to do the interview”. Perhaps it would be better to send that information in advance by email, so that they could read it privately and consider if

this was something they wanted to participate in. For a possible future research, I consider this a better approach. Because I suppose that it would probably be very hard for those women to reject to do the interview when we had an appointment and I was already there – if they did not feel comfortable with it after all. Nevertheless, I made sure to inform all the participants properly about my research before we started the interview. I did this in order to have their informed consent, which is essential when doing research (Bryman, 2012).

The only challenge I experienced in this regard was the language barrier with certain immigrant women. It might be that a few of them (with minimum Norwegian skills) accepted to participate, without fully understanding the aim and purpose with the research. However, these women were informed by the “free translator” we used for the interview. So, in those cases, I needed to trust that the translator informed sufficiently and well. However, since I did not travel abroad to a developing country for my research, I do not think that any of my respondents felt deceived in any way. It was not like I came as ‘the one white person’ and was going to help with or support a project financially. The Volunteer Central already help and benefit those women through their meeting places and activities. I came as an outsider who wanted to understand how the activities work and how the immigrant women experience them and potentially benefit them.

Moreover, I did not invade anyone’s privacy. My research did not aim to go into any private or controversial topic. Already when deciding the topic and focus of my research, I decided to avoid something which will potentially be difficult to get information about and which might be uncomfortable for respondents to talk about. Nevertheless, I find my research interesting and beneficial. The voluntary sector’s role in integration is relevant and important to understand further, and I have been lucky to get insight into the Volunteer Central in Vennesla.

Overall, I think that I have done well to avoid breaking any of the ethical principles of social research, especially those four specified by Diener and Crandall (1978): “whether there is harm to participants; whether there is a lack of informed consent; whether there is an invasion of privacy; whether deception is involved” (in Bryman, 2012, p. 135). Because the topic is not controversial and I uphold the respondents’ confidentiality, I do not harm them and I do not invade their privacy. Because all the respondents have been given sufficient information about the project and their right to withdraw consent, both orally and in writing, I have their informed consent. Lastly, I have not deceived anyone, because I have specified my role as a master student who is just doing research on the Volunteer Central and how immigrant women experience and benefit from its activities. I have not promised anything in return for interviews, and I have not experienced that anyone has expressed any expectations from me due to their participation.





## 5 Empirical Findings

In this chapter, I will present the findings from the field work conducted in Vennesla in Norway in the period February 6<sup>th</sup> until March 24<sup>th</sup> 2017. The field work lasted for six weeks and consisted of ten personal interviews as well as participant observation in several activities of the Volunteer Central. To secure the confidentiality of the informants, the information is presented anonymously. However, the general manager of this voluntary organization has allowed me to use her name and position throughout the thesis. Since she has the most central and crucial role in the Volunteer Central, I find it beneficial to specify that I got the information from her – and about her – in certain cases. Her name is Jorunn Sagen Olsen, but I will refer to her as Jorunn hereafter. The other Norwegian women in my material, I have named: Marthe, Pernille, Trine and Monica. The anonymous names of the immigrant women I have interviewed are Huda, Julia, Minal, Tanisha and Sarah.

This chapter is divided into five main parts. It is a presentation of key findings (almost) without connecting it to literature and the theoretical framework. As such, I have used an inductive approach inspired by grounded theory. I find this most beneficial and appropriate for this chapter, since it puts the empirical findings in focus and allow them to speak for themselves. However, the presentation is highly connected to the research questions for this project, as each main part is a response to a research question. Nevertheless, I had to adjust my research questions to fit my material, instead of following all the pre-defined questions I used at the onset of the field work. Thus, the data has shaped both the research questions and the presentation of key findings. The overall aim of the research is to explore the role of the Volunteer Central in integration work of immigrant women in Vennesla.

The following research questions have guided the study and the presentation:

6. What activities do the Volunteer Central arrange partly for immigrants and what are the aims of the Volunteer Central with their activities?
7. Why do immigrant women participate in activities of the Volunteer Central and in what ways do they experience benefits from these activities?
8. What significance do so-called gatekeepers in the Volunteer Central have for immigrant women and a mutual integration process, which promotes cross-cultural understanding between the minority women and the majority population?
9. What challenges do the Volunteer Central face in regards to offering better support and help to immigrant women?
10. What is integration and everyday integration, and what role does the Volunteer Central play in the integration of immigrants in Vennesla, according to Norwegian women and immigrant women connected to this organization?

## 5.1 The Volunteer Central's Activities and Aims

This section will present the activities and aims of the Volunteer Central. It is mainly concerned with the explanations and viewpoints of Norwegian women, while the next section elaborates on migrant women's experiences, opinions and motivations.

Firstly, it will explain why the Volunteer Central does not arrange activities only aimed at immigrants. Thereafter, it will present an overview and description of the activities which is partly aimed at immigrants, especially where migrant women participate. Due to the wide range of activities, I will mainly focus on those activities where I have participated together with my informants (with immigrant backgrounds): the Multicultural Women's Club, the Multicultural Girl's Group, and the KIA Café. Other activities will be presented more briefly: the New Mother's Group, the Language Café, the summer job project, the yearly top-trip, the cheap driving lessons, the cheap clothing store, and the Refugee Friend. Lastly, this section will highlight the aims of this voluntary organization and its activities, as articulated by the Norwegian women that I have interviewed.

### 5.1.1 Introduction: Activities for all, not only immigrants

As explained by the general manager of the Volunteer Central, Jorunn Sagen Olsen, they are concerned with not creating offers or activities which are only for immigrants. The reasoning behind this is:

*"There are also ethnic Norwegians raised in Vennesla who has a crisis in life, (...) and suddenly they stand there, freezing cold. So, then, they also have a place to come to. It might be a single mother. Buying four pairs of shoes is very expensive, if she has four children. So, it is supposed to be for her also. (...) We are very strict, that the offers from us are for everybody. And I think that this also does something with the attitudes of local Norwegians in Vennesla. That it does not turn into: 'They get everything. Why do the immigrants get everything? I also need it'. You understand? We have to be careful in order to not develop such attitudes"*

- Jorunn Sagen Olsen, general manager of The Volunteer Central

This explanation was in the context of "Present" (Tilstede), which is a small clothing store with extremely cheap clothes (1 NOK for one piece of clothing, which equals 0.12 USD), for new refugees and others in need. However, the logic manifests itself in all the activities of The Volunteer Central. There is currently nothing which is aimed at migrants only. All the activities are open for immigrants and Norwegians alike, as well as refugees and immigrants on other grounds. The benefit of this is that there will always be mixed groups of people in the different activities. Additionally, the activities of The Volunteer Central is built on interests, like those 33 different activities in the Active program. "Then, it is not about who you are, but who (and what) you are interested in. And that is a much nicer focus when you meet people: what interest one has" (Interview with Jorunn, general manager in The Volunteer Central). In other words, people of different cultural and religious backgrounds can meet

based on similar interests. In that way, their differences will have less significance, and friendships and friendly interaction may develop.

### 5.1.2 Main activities where immigrant women participate

The researcher has also participated in these activities. Thus, the presentations are long and include first-hand knowledge from personal observations.

#### *5.1.2.1 The Multicultural Women's Club*

The Multicultural Women's Club (the Women's Club) was established in 2009 because of the engagement and wish of a group of immigrant women. They went together on the Adult Training (to learn the Norwegian language), and wished to meet in their spare time also. In the beginning, they met in the home of one of the women. After a while, they grew in number and needed more space.

Voluntary women in the Volunteer Central got connected to these women and they started using the room of the Volunteer Central in Vennesla centrum as their meeting place. Up to this date, they still use that room for their gatherings. They meet once a month for 2 hours, 6.00-8.00 pm.

According to Jorunn, Marthe and Sarah, the Women's Club has changed a lot throughout the years, because some women leave and other women join. The gatherings depend very much on the people who attend. Nowadays, there are many Syrian women who attend and they are very engaged with different ideas and wishes (Interview with Marthe). I attended the Women's Club in the beginning of March 2017, and noticed very clearly that Syrian and Arab women had an important role and strong presence that evening. There were at least five Norwegian women, one Somali woman, three Afghan women, a few Iraqi women, two Polish women and more than ten Arab women – mostly Syrians. In all, there were probably around 40-50 women. A Norwegian volunteer commented that they have probably never had a gathering with such a big number in the Women's Club before. A few of the women had also brought their young sons, who went around and played.

The Syrian women had decided that the evening was going to be about celebrating the International Women's Day (8<sup>th</sup> of March). Therefore, all the women in the gathering received a red rose each, when sitting on sofas and around tables. Additionally, one Syrian woman read an Arabic poem aloud. It clearly had some strong and good points, because the other Arab women applauded and rejoiced several times during the reading. A few of them even made that special rejoicing sound which Arab women are famous to make, i.e. in wedding celebrations. There was also an elder Somali woman who made that sound, very happily and strongly. This made the Arab women increase their celebration, applause and laughter. Most of the other women – from different nationalities – sat quietly around other tables and in sofas, just smiling, listening and observing the Arab women and the poem reader. Some of us also laughed when the Arab women got very excited, impressed and happy from the poem – and their own way of celebrating.

During that gathering, there was also little contradiction between what the Norwegian volunteers and the Arab women tried or wished to do as a means of “celebrating the Women’s Day”. There was an attempt to create dialogue between all the women, cross-culturally, to learn about each other. A Norwegian woman asked “How do you celebrate the International Women’s Day in your country of origin? In Afghanistan? In Irak? In Syria? In Poland?” She got some answers, but the Arab women sat on their own table and discussed their own things. She also asked “What is good about being a woman?” Then one woman answered “We can do many tasks at once!” Another one added “Yes, hehehe, we can cook and watch after children and talk in telephone same time. Not like the men”. Everyone who listened to this laughed. But the Arabs were occupied with themselves. The Norwegian woman further asked “What is the difference between being a woman in Norway, and in other countries, where you come from? Is there a difference?”. Some women agreed that there is a difference: women in Norway are more free to do as they wish. However, there was noise from the table with Arab women. So, eventually, the Norwegian woman gave up on the dialogue-attempt and said: “You can just talk with each other, we are too many people today”. Nevertheless, it seemed like all the women enjoyed and had a good time that evening, and walked away from the gathering happy and energetic. Also, there seemed to be no hard feelings between Norwegian and Arab women due to their different ways of “celebrating” the day.

However, the Women’s Club is different from time to time, and there is more program for the gatherings nowadays, than previously:

*Earlier, it was only coffee, talking and dancing (...). Not too much program. Because many women just wished to have a social meeting place. After a while, there became more program in regards to have “hobby-stuff”, to make things, and that we also had more food (...). Lately, the women have wished for much more program, i.e. that we invite people to come talk about something, or that we’re supposed to do so-and-so, or that we should take a trip there-and-there (...). It seems like the volunteers also prefer this – to know what we’re supposed to do and what is expected. It has been little hard to improvise from an empty program.*

(Interview with Marthe)

### 5.1.2.2 The Multicultural Girl’s Group

The Multicultural Girl’s Group (the Girl’s Group) is a group of girls from different nationalities, around the ages 16 to 26, who gather every other Thursday for about 2 hours or more – depending upon what they choose to do for the evening. They plan what to do during the different gatherings for the following semester, but this plan is dynamic and can be changed according to the girls’ wishes and ideas (Interview with Trine). The Norwegian volunteers set the agenda, but normally try to ask the girls from other countries what they want to do next time or if they have special wishes or ideas

(Personal observation). The Norwegian girls are concerned with user involvement, but many of the young girls are shy and do not always answer or have any suggestion (Interview with Trine).

I participated in two gatherings with the Girl's Group. Clearly, the gatherings change a lot from time to time. Firstly, the number of girls attending can change very much, from just a few to nearly 20. But in February and March, about 10 girls attended each gathering. Secondly, they have a varied program. Sometimes they just meet to sit and talk, and eat some snacks. Other times, they have a "hobby-evening", where they make something. First time I attended the gathering, the girls sat around a table and made jewelry with different pearls and colors, particularly for hands and ears. It was a nice group of girls from countries as diverse as Norway, Ethiopia, Somalia, Poland and Eritrea. A few of them spoke hardly understood Norwegian, and therefore talked in their native language with the other one from their country of origin. However, most of the conversations were in Norwegian and most of the girls talked and commented on things. A few of them were more outgoing and talkative than others, but that seemed to be from their different personalities rather than a cultural thing. When the group became quiet, the Norwegian volunteers started asking questions to the group and to individuals, in order to have a dialogue and for people to feel comfortable.

In the second gathering I attended, it was a "make-up evening" where one Norwegian girl (volunteer) showed and taught the other girls about putting make-up with three colors. Because the room of the Volunteer Central was busy (double-booked) that evening, one of the Norwegian volunteers invited all the girls to her home, so that they could be together that evening as planned. The Norwegian girls had cars and there was space enough to bring all the girls to that home – although all of them first met by the building where they normally gather. Most of the girls who participated in that evening were also present on the first gathering I attended. A few Norwegians were new to me, while another Norwegian and a few foreign girls did not come. At times the group became silent. Then, the Norwegians tried to start up some conversations. One of the Norwegian volunteers commented that "they are normally not quiet like this". Perhaps my presence made them shyer than normal, because some girls are already shy, but they are comfortable with each other, as they have met more times. But some girls were engaged, happy, joking and even making funny faces. After putting her make-up, one girl commented that "It is like Halloween". Because she felt strange with all the color around her eyes. Besides, she opened her eyes widely when looking in the mirror, making her face look more fun and scary. She made several of us laugh.

One girl I interviewed said that she really likes the variety of activities they do in the Girl's Group. She is also very happy that they are not only one place every time, but they are changing location too (Interview with Minal). In the first gathering in April, the girls went together to the cinema in Kristiansand (nearest bigger city) to watch "Beauty and the Beast". Then, it was important that people informed in advance – on facebook – that they wanted to attend, because the Norwegian girls had to

order tickets and have enough cars and drivers to bring all the girls. This cinema-trip was not decided in December or January, but was a result of a dialogue between the girls in the last gathering I attended. It was a suggestion from a Norwegian girl, but other girls directly encouraged and supported the idea. Then, they had to decide the movie, and quickly agreed to “the Beauty and the Beast”. Perhaps it was easy to decide because it is a typical chick flick, and most of them had seen the trailer for it already. After four girls were positive and enthusiastic, the rest of them followed too.

These examples illustrate the fact that the gathering changes a lot depending upon who attends and what they do when they meet. Trine also mentioned that they have played Alias – a game where you describe words without mentioning that exact word and you compete in teams – which one girl really loved, although she could only speak little Norwegian. It was a fun way to learn more. Other times they have went together to restaurant to eat, and just met to talk, and played other games too. They keep in touch and inform about activities by facebook, where all the girls already have a user account (Interview with Trine). Although there are like 60 members in their facebook-group, not all of them attend every time. Some attend often. Others attend like twice a year. A few have also stopped coming for reasons unknown to the Norwegian volunteers and many other girls. The girl I interviewed was very satisfied with the fact that they meet only twice a month, because many of these girls go to school and have homework and tests. Therefore, this girl would not be able to attend a gathering every week. She needs to focus on school. In fact, the only thing she dislikes about the Girl’s Group is when they will do something fun and she cannot join them due to reading for her school test for the next day (Interview with Minal). When I commented, “ok, so it is not the Girl’s Group which is the problem, but when you are too busy to come”, she confirmed this and laughed happily.

### 5.1.2.3 The KIA Café

The KIA Café is open every Tuesday from 6 pm to 8 pm. It started up in May 2016 (Interview with Monica). It is a meeting place for people of all backgrounds, nationalities and ages. People can get free coffee, tea, sweet juice and waffles. There are four teams of voluntary workers who take turns in preparing the room for the evening and the free offers mentioned above. There are both Norwegians and people from other nationalities who works voluntarily with this responsibility. They normally meet 1 hour in advance and leaves 30-60 minutes after the other guests. Most of them come to the KIA Café also when they do not have a responsibility there, because it is nice and they enjoy it there (Interview with Monica). The meeting place is in the basement of the Protestant Church in Vennesla, which is very close to centrum. The number of people showing up changes little from time to time, but is often around 80. They are Norwegian, Syrian, Afghan, Eritrean, Somali and more. There are men and women. People often bring their children as well, who have good space to run around and play, or sit down with different games.

I attended the KIA Café five times during the field work. I noticed that there was a good diversity of people there, with regards to nationalities, gender and age. There was also much dialogue between people of different backgrounds. Rarely, there were tables where Norwegians sat alone and talked, although this happened in periods too. With regards to immigrants, Monica said, “It is probably more common that they sit together two-and-two (from the same country), than just one-and-one. But the [communication] often crosses nationalities, I have that impression” (Interview with Monica).

Young men played billiard or table football – sometimes young teenage girls too. Children happily left their parents, to play with other children. As one migrant woman commented: “They forget me for the evening. They enjoy here very much” (Personal observation). People sat around tables to talk, or sometimes greeted each other and talked by the bench with free waffles and coffee. Often men sat with men, and women with women. However, Norwegian women often talked with and shook hands with migrant men – young and adult. Very few migrant women had this kind of open, cheerful behavior towards men. Mostly, migrant women sat on tables with other women only, both Norwegian and other migrants. In most cases, I also sat with women only. Partly because my aim with the participant observation was to observe and get to know immigrant women, and partly because I also keep a distance to men outside my family because of religious conviction (see chapter 4.5.2).

From those five evenings in the KIA Café, I noticed that the same people showed up every time – or close to it. Monica was impressed especially by one migrant woman who comes to the Café every time, regardless of the weather, although she needs to take bus and bring her child (Interview with Monica). It seems to be an important and useful meeting place for many of the immigrants. The migrant women I talked with (informally and in interviews) were happy to come, especially because they learn more Norwegian and they get to know people there (see chapter 5.2). As Monica pointed out: “When people meet once a week, one actually *gets to know* each other. It is not all of our friends we meet every week” (Interview with Monica).

### 5.1.3 Other activities immigrant women benefit from

#### 5.1.3.1 The New Mother’s Group

The Mother’s Group was going to start up in the “House of Possibilities” (Mulighetenes Hus) in Vennesla in the beginning of March. This is an initiative by one of the Volunteer Central’s partner organizations, KIA Vennesla, which also arranges the KIA Café. This group is supposed to be small, with only 5-7 mothers from foreign cultures or nationalities (informal talk with Norwegian woman). There will also be a Norwegian woman who teaches the group about child upbringing, the school system, expectations, values, norms and culture in the Norwegian context. This is supposed to create dialogue and learning for the immigrant women, as well as the Norwegians. “There are a lot of things with Norwegians and what we do which is strange for the immigrants. So, it is important that they get



a good chance to learn, and that we can talk about aspects which are important for immigrant women” (Informal talk with Norwegian woman).

The group meet once a week, and always start with a small lunch where the participants can just relax and talk informally (Participant observation 23. February). Thereafter, they go to another room for learning and more focused dialogue or discussion about different themes. The themes can be: contact with the school, how the system is in Norway, things we find difficult (Participant information 23. February). The meaning of the group is that they are supposed to learn from each other. It is the participants who decide what theme to talk about. A requirement for participants is that they have relatively good Norwegian skills, because the communication happens in the Norwegian language (Participant information 23. February). Sarah joined this group when it started in the beginning of March, and really likes it. When I interviewed her, she had only attended the group twice, so it was still new to her. The difference from other activities in the Volunteer Central is that it is a small group of five women – including herself and the Norwegian woman who teach them – and that they talk more there about culture (Interview with Sarah).

*“It is fun and I learn more there”* (Interview with Sarah)

#### 5.1.3.2 The Language Café

The Language Café is also “an offer for integration of immigrants, because we saw that to know the Norwegian language is important to master the activity you want to attend” (Interview with Jorunn). Six voluntary teachers started this Language Café, which basically is free Norwegian training every Tuesday. Some of those volunteers are retired teachers (Interview with Jorunn). Julia has migrated from another European country, and can therefore not get free Norwegian training like refugees. She explained the dilemma and how she learns Norwegian:

*“...when we migrate from other countries in Europe we need to pay for the Adult Training. And in order to pay, we need work. But when we get work, we have no time for Norwegian course. It is very difficult. I have learnt at home, and in the language café, and then I go to the KIA Café as well, where I talk Norwegian more”* (Interview with Julia).

Therefore, the Language Café is a very beneficial offer for her. She further explained that they are different groups in the Language Café which cooperate and help each other, and that the teachers are nice, helpful and patient (Interview with Julia). Another benefit with this free Norwegian training is that anyone can come, regardless of their Norwegian skills. They are supposed to learn there.

#### 5.1.3.3 The summer job project

The Volunteer Central helps people – both Norwegian and multicultural – to get summer job (Interview with Jorunn). Last year, 24 people joined the project (Interview with Jorunn). The youth or those who gets work in a company or a voluntary organization earn 6000 NOK (720 USD) for three

weeks. The Volunteer Central pays the companies and organizations to accept those people who get summer job in their work place. For many immigrants, it can be difficult to get any summer job, because they lack network and contacts when they are new in Norway and in Vennesla. As such, the support from the Volunteer Central – to get work experience, earn little and perhaps get some contacts – can be very useful. It can also give a person chances to get further work with that company or organization:

*“I was one of those who got summer job (...). And it was fun. Because it is not easy to get work. But to get from the Volunteer Central, it can give possibilities for – on that work place – to get further work afterwards. It can give you a chance to get work”*

(Interview with Tanisha)

The Volunteer Central gets financial support from BUF, an organization which works to combat child poverty, for running the summer job project (Interview with Jorunn). A requirement for those who receive summer job in this project is that they must join the yearly Top-Trip of the Volunteer Central.

#### 5.1.3.4 The yearly Top-Trip

The yearly Top-Trip is collaboration between the Volunteer Central and NAV, now in their fifth year. Jorunn refers to it as a “highlight in the year” (in Norwegian: høydepunkt) and “an integration trip” (Interview with Jorunn). She clearly considers it a highlight, and practically speaking it is a high point – a mountain top. They change what mountain top they will go to from year to year, but it is always a good and famous hiking place in Norway (i.e. Galdhøpiggen, Galten, Gaustatoppen). “It is so wonderful to see... It becomes so apparent that we are here together to reach the goal of reaching the top. Regardless of who we are, we are humans who are here” (Interview with Jorunn).

Different types of people participate in the Top-Trip. People are recruited through NAV, some are refugees, others struggle with drug issues, but are on their way away from the drugs (Interview with Jorunn). Anyone who has participated in the Active Program by the Volunteer Central can sign up for this trip and join them, whether they are Norwegian, volunteers or immigrants from any country. It is people of all ages: children, youth, adults and old people (Interview with Jorunn). Tanisha has joined the Top-Trip two times.

*“It was super fun! We drove bus far away. I don’t remember exactly where. Both Norwegian and foreign people where hiking; adults, elders and kids. Very many. And everyone had very much fun and enjoyed, and became happy”* (Interview with Tanisha).

#### 5.1.3.5 Cheap driving lessons

The activities of The Volunteer Central is mostly shaped by the wishes of the volunteers. But they also wish to start up activities which are requested or suggested by migrant women themselves (or others). Driving lessons was a wish from some migrant women in early February (Interview with Jorunn).

*“We have worked very much to get this up and running. Now, we have finally received two cars from NAV, to borrow, for the purpose of giving free driving lessons to migrant women and others who want it”* (Interview with Jorunn)

These free driving lessons was still in an early planning stage during my field work. Still, there was a need for volunteers, preferably four, to give the driving lessons for free once a week (Interview with Jorunn). The requirements for volunteers is that they are at least 25 years old and have had their driving's license continuously for 5 years. But the Volunteer Central had already reserved 10.000 NOK (around 1200 USD) from their budget to pay the deductible in case of an accident, and had two cars at their disposal (Participant observation 8. February). Jorunn just needed to be sure that this amount would cover personal injuries also, and not just damage on the car (Participant observation 8. February). So, there where practical issues and legal concerns to settle. However, some things were already in place, and Jorunn seemed to be enthusiastic about the idea and proactive in terms of making it happen. In May, this offer was up and running (VT, 2017b)

#### 5.1.3.6 “Tilstede” – “Present” – A small clothing store with extremely cheap clothes

“Tilstede” (being *present*) is a small clothing store where each piece of clothing only costs 1 NOK (0,12 USD). This store is like any other store, with clothes hanging nicely and things looking tidy. However, there are no price tags. Instead, every piece of clothing has a nice note on it, i.e. a beautiful verse or a friendly greeting. The store is, as all offers of the Volunteer Central, open to both refugees and Norwegians (see chapter 5.1.1).

*“That one krone is actually just symbolic. But if a family comes directly from Syria, as quota refugees, then it is those who receive them on NAV who bring the family to “Tilstede”. There, they can get little extra clothing to the whole family”* (Interview with Jorunn).

The store was established last summer (in 2016). In media, there was an enormous focus on refugees coming from Syria and upwards in Europe. “I think that the local Norwegians in Vennesla pictured these refugees coming up the road between Kristiansand and Vennesla, so to speak (...). We got an abundant number of phone calls, where people wished to contribute, and they wanted to deliver clothes” (Interview with Jorunn). At that time, there was not a great number of Syrians coming to Vennesla. Then, Jorunn wrote on the Volunteer Central's facebook page:

*“We are very grateful to you all for wanting to contribute. However, right now we cannot receive more clothes because we have no space to keep it. But what we need is that you, we, open our homes. Because that's when integration happens. So, if anyone wants to contribute with this, they can call”* (Interview with Jorunn)

In just 24 hours after this post was published, 22 people called in. And from those people, “one them wanted to give us a room for storing the clothes” (Interview with Jorunn). Then, the Volunteer Central

could accept clothes from those who wanted to give. And they decided how the concept should work, with 1 NOK and nice notes. That was how “Tilstede” was established, a small clothing store with extremely cheap clothes – for people in need.

*“It was created from a wish among volunteers to help the refugees”* (Interview with Jorunn).

#### 5.1.3.7 The Refugee Friend - Flyktningsvennen

The Refugee Friend is an offer where Norwegians can volunteer to be the friend of an immigrant. There can also be a Norwegian family who will be friends with an immigrant family. It is also the offer where immigrants – whether individuals or families – can opt for Norwegian friends. In many cases, the Volunteer Central get an overview of the refugees who go to the introduction course in the Adult Training, and what their interests are. It is the responsibility of the few employees in the Volunteer Central to find good matches of people – who can become friends, and do things together, depending on what they wish to do themselves. Thus, they never put a young girl up with an adult man (Interview with Jorunn). They try to match people with similar interests, same gender, and similar age. The name of this offer is very suitable, because it is not just a temporary “buddy system”. Rather, people actually become friends on a long-term basis (Interview with Jorunn). Naturally, friendships developed through the Refugee Friend can end or fade, like other friendships also change or end by time, for various reasons (Interview with Jorunn).

Tanisha received a Refugee Friend, a Norwegian woman around her age. They live little far apart, but they have visited each other and Tanisha has joined her Refugee Friend at her cottage (Interview with Jorunn). They still keep in touch and Tanisha started meeting with a group of young, Norwegian women because of this friend (Interview with Tanisha). It is a concept among many Norwegian women, when they are a group of friends, they meet regularly, maybe just once a month, to eat good food and talk, or go for a trip together or anything they wish to do (in Norwegian: syforening). Tanisha’s Refugee Friend knew a group of friends who met regularly in Vennesla who wished to get to know an immigrant woman too. When Tanisha heard about them and their wish, she was happy and willing to meet them (Interview with Tanisha). Now, they have met several times and are all friends (Interview with Tanisha). The group of women are valuable to Tanisha:

*“It means a lot to me. Because I get to know them, and they get to know me. Sometimes, I have invited them. And we share culture (we get to know each other’s culture, when we meet). (...) I also think that it is important (...) if we get friends who we can talk and communicate with in Norwegian. That is important”* (Interview with Tanisha)

#### 5.1.3.8 Driving friends

This is an offer where volunteers offer driving services to anyone who needs it. It can be to drive an elderly to the church or another activity they would like to join. Several immigrant women need a ride

when they want to attend the Women's Club or the KIA Café. The Volunteer Central organizes the volunteers. When someone request a 'driving friend', this is arranged. It is supposed to help anyone who does not have the means to reach an activity they wish to attend, by themselves. I observed the use of driving friends especially in the end of the KIA Café. Not all of those who drives people home after an activity has signed up as volunteers. However, there are enough drivers with cars (i.e. in the KIA Café) to bring the people home.

#### 5.1.4 Aims of The Volunteer Central and their activities

The overall aim of the Volunteer Central (in Vennessla, as well as other municipalities) is "to create cooperation between the organizations and the municipalities, and individuals who are not organized" (Interview with Jorunn). In the different activities of the Volunteer Central, the volunteers also consider integration to be an important aim. This is especially relevant to the Women's Club, the Girl's Group and the KIA Café.

These activities are supposed to be a meeting point between Norwegian women in Vennessla and new women to Vennessla, either they are refugees, immigrants or Norwegians from other places in Norway. The KIA Café is also open men and is considered a "get to know each other-place", where "we (Norwegians) are there for the immigrants" (Interview with Monica). There is a wish that something more will come out from these meeting points (Interview with Monica), i.e. that people will meet at other times too and that friendships will be developed.

My Norwegian informants also agreed that an aim is that people will recognize each other on the street, in the store or anywhere they meet and greet each other – and perhaps stop for a small talk. "From my perspective, the most important things are: to *see each other*, and say *hello*, and have some *familiar faces* – not just to be *invisible*" (Interview with Marthe). The volunteers in the Girl's Group wish that they can help the young migrant girls to become integrated into the society, and to get some friends and contacts. "It can be easier to ask a friend than your teacher, or contact person on NAV (...). I think it is easier for them to ask *us* if they wonder about anything" (Interview with Trine).

## 5.2 Migrant Women's Motivations for and Benefits from Attending

This section will outline the reasons and motivations for migrant women to participate in and attend different activities offered by the Volunteer Central. Additionally, it will describe what type of benefits the migrant women get from attending the activities. These two aspects of the women's attendance in activities are very much interconnected. Moreover, their expectations of activities matched their motivations for and the benefits they gained from attending. Therefore, these will be presented under the same headlines without differentiating between them. Finally, there will be a subchapter about how these women heard about and started in the activities of the Volunteer Central. The information in this chapter is based on interviews with five migrant women, all of them with

different countries of origin (in Asia, Africa and Europe). Two of them were Christians (Minal and Julia) and three of them were Muslims (Huda, Tanisha and Sarah), but religion was not highlighted in the interviews. Huda had only lived in Norway for 1 year and 2 months at the time of the interview in February. Julia has stayed here around 2 years. Minal and Tanisha have been here for 3-4 years, while Sarah has lived in Norway for about 6 years.

### 5.2.1 Learning the language better

One of the main motivations for my immigrant informants to participate in the different activities of the Volunteer Central was to learn Norwegian better. This is also one of most important benefits they gain from attending activities and speaking with people they meet there.

*“I learn more Norwegian”* (Huda and Sarah)

*“We only use Norwegian there. So, then I can hear the pronunciation and such”* (Minal)

*“The other volunteers [Norwegians] ‘force’ me to speak Norwegian. That’s good. I learn much more”* (Huda and Tanisha)

*“People are very patient. They talk [Norwegian] slowly with me. I could very little Norwegian in the beginning, when I came here [to the KIA Café]. My Norwegian skills have improved very much in this period (4 months)”* (Julia)

### 5.2.2 Meeting people and getting friends

The second motivation for attending activities mentioned in all the interviews was to meet people and get friends.

*“I get to know people (...), and they help me when I need it, that’s very good. I meet many nice, friendly people and I get friends”* (Huda).

*“I get to know people (...). It is good to be among people. It makes me happy”* (Sarah).

*“I get friends. It is nice to get out and do something with other girls”* (Minal).

*“I meet many people. They are very open, nice and good-hearted. I get to know them”* (Julia)

### 5.2.3 Having fun – and getting away from boredom at home

All the informants said that the activities were fun and they enjoyed it there.

*“It is fun!”* (Sarah about the Women’s Club; Minal about the Girl’s Group)

*“It is fun to be volunteer and help others”* (Huda about the KIA Café; Tanisha too)

*“It was/is really fun!”* (Tanisha about the Top-Trip; Sarah about the new Mother’s group)

Whether she was a mother of several children or a young teenage girl, she also mentioned that it was boring to just stay home.

*“It becomes boring to just be home. When I am home, I get tired and sleep. Also, I think too much when I’m only at home. It is good to meet other people”* (Sarah).

*“I have much spare time, and previously I was too much alone”* (Huda).

*“I spend much time at home. It is good to get out for a while and meet people”* (Julia)

#### 5.2.4 Understanding Norwegians and Norwegian culture better

The migrant women are also interested in understanding Norwegians and the Norwegian culture better.

*“I get to know people, traditions, culture and Norwegians”* (Huda)

*“I like to be among Norwegians. I wish to get to know them even more”* (Sarah)

*“As a volunteer, you can meet many Norwegian women (...). It was good to have contact with them. And to say “Hei! Går det bra med deg?” (Hello, are you alright?) (...). One can always get Norwegian friends (in different activities)”* (Tanisha)

#### 5.2.5 How the migrant women started in the activities of the Volunteer Central

My respondents heard about the Volunteer Central and their activities in different ways. Although my sample of immigrant women is rather small, it is possible to assume that many other women learn about the voluntary organization in similar ways. The most important ways for my informants was through The Volunteer Central’s own presentation in the Adult Training, and information from NAV – whether from their own case officer or cards/booklets. Additionally, one woman started attending an activity because her Norwegian neighbor invited her to join it.

Sarah, who has lived in Norway for many years, first started in the Women’s Club because of her case officer on NAV. She lived far from Vennesla at that time, so the case officer drove her all the way, the first times, so that she could attend the gatherings. Later, when she lived in Vennesla, a friend from her own country of origin invited her to join the KIA Café. In that café, she got to know a Norwegian woman who invited her to join the new mother’s group (Interview with Sarah). So, although she started in one activity in the Volunteer Central through NAV, it was other friends who invited her to the other activities.

Tanisha already knew some Norwegian when she came to Vennesla, because she lived in another place before she moved here. One day in the Adult Training, Jorunn and another woman from the Volunteer Central came to her classroom and presented the organization, and their offers and activities. She was mainly interested in how she could become a volunteer and help others in different

ways. She gave her name and number to Jorunn, and it was through Jorunn that she started in her first activity and many other activities.

No one told Julia about the Volunteer Central at all. She went to the NAV office and found booklets/small cards about the organization and some offers. Since she found it interesting, she found her way to the office of Jorunn, the general manager in the Volunteer Central, and asked about it. Jorunn was positive and helpful, and explained several activities for her, and said that “you can attend anything you want to” (Interview with Julia).

As seen above, Jorunn has had an important role for both Tanisha and Julia, and their first meeting with the Volunteer Central. This nicely leads us to the next chapter about so-called gate-keepers, and their significance for immigrant women.

### **5.3 The Significance of Gate-Keepers for a Mutual Integration Process**

In this section, I will describe and discuss the significance and roles of Jorunn and the mentors in the Volunteer Central for immigrant women and a mutual integration process. Additionally, I will describe a few other persons who have been significant to the immigrant women. This is connected to the concept of gate-keepers, which will further be discussed in chapter 6 (see also chapter 3.1.4). The presentation here is mainly based on the subjective experiences of immigrant women and information from Jorunn. The aim of this section is to give some sort of understanding of these individuals and their importance, without going into the theory.

#### **5.3.1 The role of Jorunn, the general manager of the Volunteer Central**

Jorunn has a significant role for certain migrant women. Even those migrant women who has started in the activities in the Volunteer Central without the influence of Jorunn, still have a very positive impression about the general manager. All my informants know who Jorunn is because they have met her in the activities they attend – or elsewhere. As I observed myself, Jorunn is always smiling widely and greeting people as if all of them are important to her (Personal observation). She focuses on and looks at the one she is talking to, and she speaks up in gatherings of people with seemingly high confidence (Personal observation). My immigrant respondents state that Jorunn is a very nice, helpful, good, kind, active, engaged and enthusiastic woman.

That day Julia showed up in Jorunn’s office to ask about the activities in the Volunteer Central, she knew very little Norwegian (Interview with Julia). Nevertheless, Jorunn was determined to explain and illustrate well enough for Julia to understand, so she found pen and paper and explained until Julia understood. “She was very kind and helpful” (Interview with Julia). The fresh immigrant to Norway felt appreciated and respected from the great efforts of Jorunn the first time they ever met (Interview with Julia).



Minal started in the Girl's Group due to an invitation from her case officer at NAV. Thereafter, she met Jorunn and got to know her. She met Jorunn several times, with her family too, when they were new in Vennessla. After a while, Jorunn suggested and asked if Minal and other girls would like to do something more in their spare time, like exercising. Minal and the other girls were positive and enthusiastic from the beginning and thereafter they met weekly in a hall for exercising (Interview with Minal). That little exercising group would not have started without the initiative of Jorunn. "She talked with us, and she fixed a place for us which we could use [to exercise]" (Interview with Minal). However, the group only worked out together for 6 weeks, because the girls got occupied with school work instead (Interview with Minal).

Jorunn means a lot to Tanisha. To the question "Who is most important for you to feel included and integrated in the society?", Tanisha answered without thinking "It was Jorunn. And after a while, there were others too. But mostly, it was Jorunn".

*"It was she who asked us (...) and wanted to do what we wished to do. It was she who arranged for many people to be in the same place, so that they can be known members in the society. And all the time, really, we meet Norwegians. And when they have a party, we are also invited. We get information. So, we can join it or go there (...). She means a lot to me. Because it was she who asked us first, to become volunteers (...). And afterwards I got more friends, who make me feel included in the society"* (Interview with Tanisha)

Tanisha describes the contrast between her meetings with Norwegians before and after she started in the Volunteer Central. Previously, it was very difficult to get to know Norwegians, because they did not smile, only they said "hello" but seemed cold. She assumes that they are skeptical to her and other immigrants, as they are different with their clothing (she wears hijab), their skin color and their culture. However, after she started in the Volunteer Central, she got to know many people. She visited them, and they visited her. "We invite each other. That is very nice for me: to meet many people, and get to know some of them. So, it means a lot to me – the Volunteer Central. And Jorunn, who always keeps going and motivates foreigners and Norwegians to be together" (Interview with Tanisha).

*"She is very, very kind. She is doing a great job (...). She's very engaged and always tries to make things happen and develop the organization"* (Interview with Julia)

*"Jorunn is nice, a beautiful woman, and very kind"* (Interview with Sarah)

*"Jorunn is a very good person. She's very, very nice. She always wishes to include as many as possible in activities (...). She is very inclusive"* (Interview with Huda)

### 5.3.2 The mentors in the Volunteer Central

The mentors in the Volunteer Central are immigrants from different countries, who have already stayed in Norway for some years and knows Norwegian well. When new immigrants come from their country of origin, they can be contacted for help and translation. The mentors normally have one or two areas of responsibility, like a Somali man who leads a group of children in soccer playing. It is an offer from the Volunteer Central: free soccer exercise for children. When any new Somali family settles in Vennessla, Jorunn can put them in touch with this Somali man, and then he can meet the children by the public library in Vennessla and follow them to the place for playing soccer. It can be hard to find the way on their own, and it is of little benefit to explain the directions in Norwegian when they are new in Norway. Therefore, they can get information in their own language and someone to follow them to the soccer field the first time they want to attend.

Other times, there can be new Syrian women who wants to understand the activities and program offered by the Volunteer Central. Then, an Arab mentor can be contacted for translation. The Norwegian volunteers can feel helpless in such meetings, because they cannot explain things either in Norwegian or English, as some Arabs only understand Arabic. Then, the mentors who has agreed to a certain responsibility on a voluntary basis can be contacted and used for the new immigrants' benefit. Although, I have not researched these people, relations and benefits myself, it seems like the mentors have a very significant role to play for new immigrants in Vennessla. In one meeting I attended in February, with the Volunteer Central, the municipality, the Adult Training, NAV and other actors in Vennessla who deals with refugees and immigrants, the list of mentors in the Volunteer Central was of great interest to some others. However, Jorunn would not let the list go freely to anyone, so that those mentors would get more tasks and responsibility than they have agreed to (Personal observation).

These immigrants have already played an important role with helping people from their own country and translation. It was right before my field work in February that they had made an official commitment and got the title "mentor". For this reason, the list of mentors has also developed. And it was still uncertain in what way the Volunteer Central – and possibly the Adult Training or others – could use these mentors. It was a work in progress – and probably still is. But the list itself – with names, languages, country of origin, which activities they can help with – is an excellent resource. It facilitates good communication and information to new immigrants in a language they understand. So far, the use of these mentors has been very successful (Interview with Jorunn). When two new Arab women wanted to understand more about the Volunteer Central, what they do and what activities they offer, and a mentor came to translate. Jorunn was also present in the meeting, and it seemed to mean a lot to the new Arab women to get information in their own language. They were very happy, satisfied and grateful afterwards (Interview with Jorunn). Surely, Norwegians in public, private or voluntary sector who only speaks Norwegian and English (and other European languages) fluently, cannot give

that support, help and information which an individual who shares the new immigrant's language can give.

These mentors are therefore highly important in the integration work of new immigrants. Perhaps new immigrants would seek out someone who knows their own language, country and cultural background, on their own, when they settle in a Norwegian town. However, the list of mentors as well as the collaboration between the Volunteer Central, the Adult Training, the municipality and NAV, facilitates this and makes the process easier. In addition, the Norwegian volunteers develop a relationship with and knowledge about both the new and 'old' immigrants.

### 5.3.3 Other gate-keepers

The migrant women I interview mentioned other Norwegian women than Jorunn too, who have been important to them, and have made them feel included and integrated in the society. Huda mentioned Jorunn, her neighbor woman, and the mentors – especially their function as “free translators” – as the most important ones to her (Interview with Huda).

Although Jorunn was important to Julia when they met, Julia is an outgoing and friendly woman who talks easily with the people she meets. Therefore, there is not one person or a few who are the most important to her, rather she stated: “Everyone. Those I talk with in Norway. People are kind” (Interview with Julia). Sarah experiences it similarly, as she said “Different persons are important” (Interview with Sarah). She mentioned the woman she recently got to know in the KIA Café and Jorunn as two of them (Interview with Sarah). The important thing for her now is that “I am invited different places (especially the different activities in the Volunteer Central and to café). It was not like that previously. I like it better now, when I get out and meet people”.

Certain individuals from NAV and the Adult Training can also be considered as gate-keepers, due to their collaboration with the Volunteer Central. The case officers in NAV who has told the immigrant women about activities in the Volunteer Central – and even given them the ride needed to attend – have opened the way for these migrants to start in activities and get to know more people there. This has in turn lead to them feeling included and as part of a bigger whole, not just lonely or segregated. The people in the Adult Training who has taken the time to write overviews of the immigrants (who learn Norwegian there) and what their interests are, have been important in the process of helping several migrants to start in activities in the Volunteer Central, which are relevant to them.

The Volunteer Central uses that list actively when they come to the Adult Training for the presentation as well as conversation with individuals (immigrants of both gender). When they have information about the individuals' interests, they present the most relevant activities to them. Then, they often decide to start in the activity which the Volunteer Central suggests. Normally, it is two employees in

the Volunteer Central who present the organization to the immigrants in the Adult Training. Among them are Jorunn, the general manager. The two of them are important gate-keepers in this way.

## **5.4 Challenges for the Volunteer Central in Offering Support and Help to Migrant**

### **Women**

In this section, various challenges of the Volunteer Central with regards to offering better support and help to migrant women is presented and discussed. Due to the immigrant women's high satisfaction and very few complaints about the offers of the Volunteer Central, the first five challenges are from the views of Norwegian women. The last challenge is my migrant respondents' perceptions and ideas about why other immigrant women they know do not want to attend activities with the organization. The challenges include: the language barrier, transportation and distance, the diversity of migrant women, too little mapping of their interests, limitations of the volunteers, and the fear of the unknown.

#### **5.4.1 The language barrier**

The language barrier – the fact that the Norwegian volunteers and many immigrants do not share a common language – is mentioned by several of the Norwegian women in my material. Especially many immigrant women from Arab countries do not know either English or Norwegian. This can be both challenging and frustrating for the Norwegian volunteers and employees in the Volunteer Central, because they cannot explain and express what they really want to the immigrants.

Nevertheless, one volunteer woman stated that “we experience that we don't need that many words to communicate together”. I observed this myself in the KIA Café: that there was much warmth and laughter between Norwegian volunteers and immigrant women, although they could not have any long or deep conversation (Personal observation). The Norwegians spoke slowly, and highlighted the most important words, for the immigrants with poor Norwegian skills to understand (Personal observation). My migrant informants have also mentioned this happily about the Norwegians they meet in activities: they are patient and speak slowly, and force me to speak Norwegian, so that I learn more (see also chapter 5.2.1).

Naturally, there is a power aspect to this language barrier. It is the Norwegians who knows Norwegian fluently, while the immigrants must learn and can only express themselves in a limited way. However, because this is a voluntary organization, I experience that the Norwegians feel inferior in a way and almost wish that they could speak the immigrants' language. In public institutions, I assume, that the Norwegians have a more distant and indifferent attitude to not being able to communicate properly with immigrants – and that the power aspect is more clear. Although the language is a barrier, The Volunteer Central have several 'mechanisms' to counter this challenge. The mentors are especially important for translation when it' is needed. Also, the warm, patient and friendly behavior of many Norwegians volunteers towards the migrant women can create feelings of respect, tolerance and

appreciation, instead of feelings of inferiority and shame for not being skilled in Norwegian. Body language is also used frequently in meetings between Norwegians and migrant women. This is also a way of communication which creates some understanding, even though the words are limited.

However, some explanations need many words to be understood properly. One cannot explain the directions to a building or the events in an activity only by pointing and moving around. If a person knows how to read a map, that eases the first task. But not everyone has that skill either. So, getting a translator – either a voluntary mentor or one who needs payment – is more time-consuming and complicated, than to communicate directly with the person(s). Nevertheless, it is not an endless problem. It is a challenge with solutions. Many migrant women have some Norwegian skills after all, but the newest ones to Norway and Vennesla start from scratch.

#### 5.4.2 Transportation and distance

Some immigrants live far from centrum, up long hills and with poor collective transportation available. Additionally, few refugee families have cars to use. Moreover, many women come from culture where it is not safe to walk alone outside after the darkness sets in the evening (Interview with Jorunn). “It is cold (...) and pretty scary to walk in the darkness when it is snow. I understand that very well. Then, we need to find ‘driving friends’, who can pick up and drive them (i.e. migrant women) to the activity they want to attend”. (Interview with Jorunn). There is no challenge without a solution. The Volunteer Central offers ‘driving friends’ to the people who cannot reach an activity on their own (see chapter 5.1.3.8).

Those who arrange the KIA Café have consciously decided that they will not offer driving services for the people who wants to attend the café. Nevertheless, different people take this responsibility on themselves (Interview with Monica). Probably, some of them are volunteers in the Volunteer Central’s ‘driving friends’-offer. Others are just participants in the KIA Café themselves, and has a car and the time to drive others home too. I observed this myself several times. One time, I was asked if I had a car today and could take the time to drive a few migrant women to their homes, because the people in the café realized that there was a need for more drivers. It was only that one time I attended the KIA café that this became a theme and an issue: how will all the participants get home? Perhaps some of those who had picked up immigrants or elders needed to leave early that evening, so they needed a few others to take them home again. However, they fixed this issue without my help. The Norwegian volunteers talked and arranged things, so that the issue disappeared (Personal observation).

After I attended the Women’s Club, I needed to wait the bus for quite a while. When I realized that a Polish woman was going to drive home three other migrant women from different nationalities, and that she had one extra seat in her car, I talked little more with her, until she offered me a ride home. Then, I also benefited from this woman’s time and willingness to drive others home. This little incident also shows that it is not only Norwegians who have cars and drive people home. People get to

know each other during activities. And anyone who has a car can drive people home. I come to learn that the three other women lived close to the Polish woman. So, then it is likely that she drives those women other times too, whenever they will attend the same activity in the Volunteer Central. She was very friendly, open and generous too me also. She seemed to be very happy to give people that service (Personal observation).

#### 5.4.3 The diversity of immigrant woman

Immigrant women is a very diverse group of women. They have different ages, interests, nationalities, educational level and needs. It is impossible to generalize that group in easy terms, in any realistic way. They are as different as Norwegians are. According to Trine, it is very difficult to know if they fulfil the immigrants' wishes and expectations, because they are so different, and even if you fulfil it for some of them, not everyone will be satisfied anyway (Interview with Trine).

*“Some are super happy if they can come and drink little coffee, right? It is completely dependent upon who you ask. Those (immigrant women) are also a great diversity. (...) And some are so grateful. And others, I think they will never be satisfied. So, they are exactly like Norwegians [different from each other]”* (Interview with Jorunn)

*“[The term immigrant women] means incredibly much. It is very various (...). And how much which comes up, and who they are, and all these resources many of them have (...). That is impressive to see, and become familiar with”* (Interview with Marthe).

The Women's Club has changed a lot throughout the years. In this period, there is a great number of Syrians who attend. One Syrian woman is also in the board, with the other volunteers in the Club. When she got the mission to ask other Syrian women what they want to do during gatherings, she came back with a real long 'wish list' (Interview with Marthe). There were lots of things that they wanted to do, learn and contribute with. “That is *very fun!* That is a big change also. That they are so proactive themselves. I notice that in this group, especially those from Syria, there are many resourceful people. They want to do things, come up with things, and (...) have many resources. They are in no way passive” (Interview with Marthe).

The Norwegians in The Volunteer Central generally have a positive image of immigrants. They notice that many of the immigrant women who attend activities have a lot of resources and quickly wants to become volunteers themselves – to help and other people and not just receive help and support passively.

*“Many of them are used to arranging things and are very interested in culture and literature (...) and ‘How do one become a strong woman?’ (...) Which is wierd for us (Norwegians), because we're thinking that they are strong with all the tests they have been through”* (Interview with Marthe)

*“Some are very engaged and some are not equally engaged. So, it varies a lot. For me, it is very fun when we get in those women who really wants to engage actively, and quickly becomes a **resource**”* (Interview with Jorunn)

*“There are a lot of resources among the women who comes here”* (Interview with Jorunn)

The diversity of immigrant women makes it difficult to generalize about this group and to fulfil all their expectations and wishes. However, the diversity – especially the resourcefulness, engagement and proactivity of many women – is also a strength and of great benefit to the Volunteer Central. Two of my migrant respondents were themselves volunteers in the organization in different ways. It was very important for them to help others and not just be passive recipients of help and benefit. One of them also talked comprehensively about how she really wants to work and earn money, so that she can pay taxes and give back to the Norwegian society, because she is grateful for everything she got here after she fled from her home country (Interview with immigrant woman).

#### 5.4.4 Too little mapping of the immigrants’ needs and wishes

*“The first thing that hits me is that we have made an ‘Active program’. I’m not sure how the different activities appeared or was decided. But it is something we just offer? Should we perhaps get feedback: What are you missing? What do you want?”* (Interview with Pernille)

*“I’m thinking that we can never fulfil everyone’s expectations. Because we don’t even know all the **needs**. Our activities are very much steered according to the volunteers’ wishes (...). We also try, if they (migrant women) come with wishes themselves, to make it happen”*  
(Interview with Jorunn)

In both the Women’s Club and the Girl’s Group, they ask the participants what they want and try to shape their program accordingly. “I normally use ‘user involvement’. So, that they can also be part of deciding what to do. So that, we will not just do the things that I want to” (Interview with Trine). Their program is thus decided according to what the engaged, outgoing and creative women and girls who speak up and suggest things. Especially in the Girl’s Group, many girls are shy and do not suggest activities. I observed that the Norwegian girls asked the group towards the end of the gathering what they would like to do next time or another time; if they had any wishes or preferences. When a girl is shy, it can be difficult to speak up in a bigger group. However, the girls also have a facebook-group and the Norwegian girl who leads the group also encourages the girls to write message to her privately if they have wishes (Interview with Trine). This facilitates well for the girls to suggest and get their wishes fulfilled. In the Women’s Club, there is a Syrian woman in the board this year. Therefore, the Syrian women have more say in the program during the gatherings. Throughout the years, the program has been shaped by those who attend and what they wish to do (see chapter 5.1.2.1). So, the Women’s Club they also listen to participants and try to fulfil their expectations. Nevertheless, the diversity of women and their wishes is a challenge in and of itself. Not everyone can be satisfied.

*“The Women’s Club (...). It’s a need and an offer which has been developed by the [immigrant] women themselves. They started it. Then, we connected with Norwegians after a while. So, that is exciting. It was a need that they had”* (Interview with Jorunn)

What is missing is perhaps a broader mapping of immigrants – both participants and those who do not attend activities – and their wishes and needs from activities in Vennesla. Then, the program or activities can become even more targeted and beneficial. However, my migrant respondents I talked with were very pleased with the activities they attended. One woman wished that the Women’s Club should be daily – or at least once a week. Otherwise, the women were satisfied with the frequency and the variety of the activities. As one girl pointed out, the only bad thing about the Girl’s Group is when they will do something fun and she is too occupied to attend that gathering (Interview with Minal).

I think that the mapping which is done by the Adult Training – about the interests of the immigrants – is of great use and importance to the Volunteer Central. It makes the work of inviting immigrants to specific activities, which can suit them, much easier. The fact that a significant number of migrant women show up to activities – repeatedly – is a good indication that they get what they want from the activities. Nevertheless, mapping the needs and wishes of immigrant women more can help to develop the organization further.

*“I’m thinking that we can always improve our activities. That’s just how it is. It can be developed all the time”* (Interview with Jorunn)

The harshest criticism I heard during the field work was regarding the summer job project. Although the woman was very happy to get work for that summer and earn little bit, she only experienced partial benefits from the project. She really wishes to get work further – for longer term and where the employer will pay her (instead of the Volunteer Central). These wishes or expectations were not fulfilled. She is still in the process of applying jobs, and find it very challenging.

#### 5.4.5 Limitations of the volunteers: time, energy and commitment

The Volunteer Central is completely dependent upon volunteers who take their voluntary work seriously. They have many engaged, enthusiastic and active unpaid helpers on their team – in all kinds of activities. Most of the women I observed and talked with seemed happy to help and participate in activities as volunteers. However, the nature of voluntary work is clearly different from paid work. Therefore, the time, energy and commitment individuals put into their voluntary position varies.

*“For some of us volunteers. Or for my own part, I can rather say, it is limited how much I manage to... You see, I am present and contribute in the Women’s Club. But outside it, it is limited how much I can put into it. Right? To spread information in the news or something, for more women to join, for instance. Sometimes I have intentions [to do something more], then suddenly I’m out of it”* (Interview with Marthe)



*“Some of what has been a problem for me is that I feel that I need to lean on the other volunteers (I need their support). Because we are many participants, so it is a lot of responsibility to take all alone. So, some of them have been little... There are only three volunteers in addition to me. Two of them hardly every comes. That’s little hard, not to know [if they will show up or not]” (Interview with Trine)*

These quotes illustrate some of the difficulty of being voluntary worker. It can especially be challenging when other volunteers do not take their role seriously, so that more work and responsibility lands on your shoulders. Another challenge with coming close and get to know refugees is that it becomes hard to deal with if they suddenly get rejection on their asylum application and are sent back to their home country. “So, it has been little like this: I cannot stand in too many of those close relationships at the same time (with refugees). Because it demands so much” (Interview with Monica).

Nevertheless, all the volunteers gain positive benefits from volunteering and meeting other people – often with very different life stories, backgrounds and experiences from themselves. They become happy; their perspectives are opened; they become more grateful for what they have.

*“And I see that they are humans. I think that we are actually pretty similar, we humans, with our needs. To feel belonging, to get friends, and to be social” (Interview with Pernille)*

*“I find it real fun and nice to do. I also think that it is somewhat important to do something like that [volunteer for the benefit of immigrant girls]” (Interview with Trine)*

*“It gives so much back. Especially, it opens the perspective! [Not just] to go into one’s own bubble, and only see that. And we meet very many hurtful destinies. It hurts! To see that they are hurting. And we have experienced that people are sent back, right? But I would not like to have missed out on it [those experiences and relations]” (Interview with Monica)*

#### 5.4.6 Fear of the unknown: limited knowledge about Norwegians and activities

During the field work, I did not get the chance to talk with any immigrant woman who does not participate in any activity in the Volunteer Central. However, most of my migrant respondents knew a few or many other migrant women who did not come to the activities of this voluntary organization. One of them said that she has no idea why they do not come and attend. Those who knew about women who did not come to attend activities were similar in their explanations and assumptions. It had to do with the culture and what they are used to in their home countries. Some women are not used to go out, meet unknown people and just be social.

The most important reasons they suggested was that many immigrant women are actually skeptical to Norwegians and they do not understand what the activities are about. In one country, it is common that

different sects welcome people happily and smilingly to their gatherings, then after a while they start asking for money and the new people get into trouble with them. These ‘horror stories’ are shown on the news in that country. And this is one reason why immigrant women are skeptical and afraid to attend i.e. the KIA Café. Perhaps the friendly, welcoming people there will change and start asking for money and different things? (Interview with immigrant woman).

*“Women from my home country are not used to it. They don’t go out in such a way to new places to meet many people. They are shy also. I have tried to invite others, but they are skeptical. They don’t know what to expect, and they are afraid and worried”* (Interview with immigrant woman)

*“I know very many who does not come. It is habit and culture. They are skeptical to Norwegians. They need someone to ‘push’ them little – invite them to join activities – from their own country”* (Interview with immigrant woman)

This skepticism towards Norwegians is a challenge for the Volunteer Central, which they might not even be aware of. Most of the immigrants who attend activities are open, warm and cheerful in their meeting with Norwegians. They also appreciate and value the opportunity to come out and meet people. Thus, it is not natural to imagine that others are highly skeptical and afraid that the activities might be a trick to get money from those who attend. From the last quote, it also seems difficult for Norwegian employees or volunteers in the Volunteer Central to do something about it. Naturally, they can be warm and friendly with any immigrant they meet. However, the ‘skeptical immigrant women’ will probably need someone from their own country to explain things and invite them, if they are to feel comfortable and choose to attend an activity. My migrant respondents had already tried to invite others without luck. And all of them said something like: “I try to tell them: Just come and see for yourself how it is like. It’s not dangerous. You should just try, then you will understand how nice and simple it is”. To me, it seems like what keeps certain migrant women away from the activities of the Volunteer Central is the fear of the unknown, as they lack knowledge about Norwegians and the activities.

## **5.5 Understandings of Integration and Everyday Integration, and the Volunteer Central’s Role in the Integration Process of Immigrant Women**

In this section, different understandings of integration and everyday integration is presented. Secondly, the impressions of the Volunteer Central’s role in regards to integrating immigrant women is presented. The views, opinions and perspectives are from both Norwegian women and immigrant women connected to the organization.

### 5.5.1 Understandings of integration and everyday integration

*“Everyday integration is about you and me. It is about us opening our homes. And about meeting each other in everyday life, randomly, I think. We will be able to succeed if we manage to inspire and motivate people to be generous and warm towards each other. That’s when integration happens, I think. When we open our homes”* (Interview with Jorunn)

*“It is about who you are and who I am, and what we wish to do where we are. It starts with us! Do we smile? Do we include? Do we greet people? In other words, do we meet people with respect? That’s what it’s about”* (Interview with Jorunn)

*“I’m thinking that integration is to be able to accept other cultures, so that everyone feels welcome, taken care of and seen. Regardless of religion. And that we must respect each other for our differences and to learn from each other. And to complement each other. (...) That everyone shall feel included. And that we have use for everyone”* (Interview with Pernille)

*“We live in the same world. Everybody has a ‘story’. That we can talk together and laugh. That we accept each other”* (Interview with Julia)

For some of my migrant respondents, their understanding of integration was shaped by the integration courses they had received, i.e. during the winter vacation when they otherwise attended the Adult Training. They mentioned factors like: to learn the language, to understand the Norwegian the culture, to get job and pay taxes, and “to participate in several courses, which can help us to get more information about the culture and what is integration – that was important, I think” (Interview with Tanisha). Additionally, my respondents highlighted that integration is about respecting and accepting each other, and that it is a two-way process. For all of them it is important that they can keep their own religion and culture while living in Norway.

*“If we only focus on us [immigrants], that we must become integrated. Ok, that is important. We accept this. But they [Norwegians] shall also respect us. When we come for job [to apply and for interview], they must give us a chance. Not just say ‘ok, we got many applications, who are Norwegian and who are not, who will get [work] and who will not?’ I think that it is very good if it goes both ways. Because it is not good to be dependent on NAV all the time. If we get the chance to work, we can pay taxes. (...) When it goes both ways, then we can build a good society together”* (Interview with Tanisha)

*“It is wonderful that we can learn from each other. All of us, regardless of the culture and nationality you belong to. All of us are good at something. If we can take the good in each other and build further on (...). There is a very nice quote I read: ‘I had a very wise mother. She said: Bring with you the good you meet in everyone, and let the rest be’. That is nice”* (Interview with Pernille)

### 5.5.2 The Volunteer Central's role in the integration process of immigrant women

The Volunteer Central have a highly important role in the integration – or everyday integration – of immigrant women in Vennesla. This is the impression by all my respondents, as well as myself. Other actors, especially the neighbor of any immigrant, are also important. But one of the great benefits of the activities in the Volunteer Central is that the people who meet there get to know each other. Then, they also invite each other for other activities as well, i.e. to go to café, to come for dinner, or like explained here:

*“[The neighbor] is the most important. Because that’s what’s the daily life. In addition, it is nice to have arenas like the Women’s Club, the Girl’s Group and the KIA Café. Which are those meeting places where we can inspire each other, be creative together and (...). If you meet a woman there [on one activity], then you might want to invite her to your cottage one day. That’s what we hope for”* (Interview with Jorunn)

Another benefit is that the Norwegians in the Volunteer Central respects and appreciates immigrant women and their differences from ourselves and among themselves. The volunteers meet and see humans, instead of just a number or a name on a list. They get close to certain immigrants, and otherwise see that the rest of them are like us, with similar needs and wishes.

*“I am thinking that perhaps we [in the Volunteer Central] are those who see **the whole human**. Little more perhaps than (...). Everyone is doing a great job. But in NAV, (...) you become only a name in a system. So, I feel that in the role we have, we have the opportunity to see the whole human. More than the systems, in a way”* (Interview with Pernille).

All the immigrant women I talked with during my field work – either in interviews or informally in activities – were very happy to attend and participate in activities. It is good to come out and meet people. Most of them wish to get to know Norwegians and the Norwegian culture better, so the meeting places are of great benefit. As one Norwegian woman pointed out, not all Norwegians have the ‘guts’ to take initiative to talk with or help random immigrants on the street. Therefore, “to facilitate for that [interaction between Norwegians and immigrants], like we do”, that is important and beneficial (Interview with Norwegian woman). Regarding the Women’s Club, and other activities, they are not considered the ‘golden solution’ for everything or the integration of immigrant women. Rather, they are like small puzzle pieces in the big picture (Interview with Marthe). But the abundance and variety of activities from the Volunteer Central makes the overall impact and benefit of the organization valuable and significant for integration of female immigrants.

*“The Norwegians I meet, especially in the KIA Café, help me a lot to become integrated. They talk Norwegian with me, become my friends, and come for dinner in my house”*  
(Interview with Huda)

*“The Volunteer Central means very much to me. Because the Volunteer Central is an organization which creates opportunities [meeting places] where all people can participate, either they are Norwegian or not. So, people who are lonely, they can get friends (...). It means very much to me actually”* (Interview with Tanisha)

*“I think that the Volunteer Central has played a big role”* (Monica)

*“The Volunteer Central has a super important role (...). I feel that we become the social meeting place for them [the immigrants]”* (Interview with Pernille)

*“I think that the Volunteer Central is a super important part of integration. In regards to having so **incredibly** many **ideas**, and have so **incredibly** many **contacts** – who also have ideas. (...) I don’t know what they don’t have of activities (...) which are about connecting people. In my opinion, that is something of the **most important**. To join in a context where one in a way ‘lands’, and becomes **integrated**. To know someone, and to be allowed to come **home** to someone, and to be **together**. That is what many of them (migrant women) say that they **wish**”* (Interview with Marthe)

The empirical findings will be further discussed in the next chapter, where they will be connected to the theoretical framework of the thesis.

## 6 Discussion and Analysis

This chapter will bring together some of the existing literature on the topics of integration, gate-keepers and culturalization, with the empirical findings of my field work. Integration is often understood as immigrants learning the Norwegian language, getting job and paying taxes – and as such, contribute to the society and become ‘equal’ with Norwegians (NAV, 2016; White Paper no. 39, 2006-2007, p. 59; Rugkåsa, 2010). In this chapter, I will focus on three other aspects of integration. Namely, integration as ‘shared arenas’, as ‘social capital’, and as a balance between ‘the right to be different’ and ‘the right to be same’. The Volunteer Central’s contributions in regards to these aspects of integration will be explained and discussed. Furthermore, the author will link the concept of gate-keepers to the central persons in the organization, and their importance for certain immigrant women. Lastly, the term culturalization will be discussed and linked to how Norwegian women and immigrant women connected to the central in Vennesla expressed themselves. Although this part of the thesis does not answer the research questions for the study, one by one, it aims to give a broader overview of the main objective. That is, to explore in what ways the Volunteer Central contributes to the integration of immigrant women in Vennesla. The subjective experiences of my migrant informants and the impressions of my Norwegian informants are central in this chapter.

## **6.1 The Contributions of the Volunteer Central for Integration**

This section will explain and discuss the ways in which the Volunteer Central contributes to integration. The three aspects of integration which are in focus: ‘shared arenas’, ‘social capital’ and ‘the right to be different’ and ‘the right to be same’. These aspects are chosen because they might be more important for individual immigrant women than the normal language, work and income factors of integration. The researcher is more interested in experiences in daily life, than statistics, numbers and material measurements.

### **6.1.1 Shared arenas: The meeting places**

There are multiple activities of the Volunteer Central and its partner organizations which function as meeting places which supports and facilitates integration. However, due to the huge range and variety of activities, and the specifications of my research, this section will focus on the three most relevant activities in which I have participated in myself. They are: The Women’s Club, the Girl’s Group and the KIA Café. Additionally, I will share some thoughts on how the Refugee Friend can be an important meeting place – in small-scale – although I only have second-hand knowledge from this activity.

When discussing integration, several authors highlight the importance of shared arenas for Norwegians and immigrants (Østberg, 2003; Hylland-Eriksen & Sørheim, 1994). Østberg (2003, p. 197) argues that mainly public institutions and activities – school, work, sports, politics – need to be shared arenas, while for the more private aspects of our lives – family, religion, culture – we should have our own arenas. This can be a useful way for the majority and the minorities to give space for each other. However, as my material shows, the activities of the Volunteer Central can also be good and beneficial shared arenas – or meeting places – for the Norwegians and immigrants in Vennesla. This voluntary organization finds itself somewhere in the middle of the public and private sectors, or with one foot in each of these, due to the different collaborations the organization is part of and promote (Interview with Jorunn). The public funding also makes the organization somewhat answerable to the Norwegian government, although the guidelines from the Department of Culture are few and flexible (see chapter 2.3.2 and 2.4.2).

Since the Volunteer Central is in this middle position it is not one of those public institutions which Østberg (2003) argues that need to be a shared arena, although it is close to sports with its voluntary characteristic. Nevertheless, I will argue that the meeting places created and maintained by the Volunteer Central are highly important and beneficial for Norwegians and immigrants alike. As one Norwegian woman in my material argued, most Norwegians find it hard to make the first move and approach unknown immigrants – like randomly out in public. However, when someone (like the Volunteer Central) facilitates for meetings and interactions with immigrants, this becomes much easier. Firstly, I assumed that it can be harder for immigrant women to approach, greet and talk to

Norwegians – because of the minority-majority aspect. However, none of the Norwegian women I interviewed had this impression. Rather, they experienced that the immigrant women were warm, happy, smiling and greeting the Norwegians first. So, it was easy to get in touch with them when they first met in a good setting. This behavior and the mutual interaction between immigrant women and Norwegian women have in several cases led to acquaintances and friendships being established.

Overall, these meeting places have many benefits for immigrant women (and the Norwegians too – but they are not the focus of this thesis). Among these are the accumulation of social capital, both by bridging and bonding with other women. Although this cannot be properly measured and my material is limited, I will describe and discuss the impressions I have from my field work with regards to social capital in the following section.

### 6.1.2 Social capital: Bridges and bonds

In this section, I mainly follow the understanding and descriptions of Putnam (2000) with regards to the two different forms of social capital. In simple words, bridging is a process between people who are different from each other, while bonding is process between people who are similar. The process is benefiting both parties in the process. In this chapter, I will focus on the immigrant women and how they create, maintain and benefit from both bridges and bonds with other women during – and as a result of – activities in the Volunteer Central. As such, the focus is on the individual level, rather than a higher level as proposed by other authors (Granovetter, 1973; Nayaran, 1999; Newman & Dale, 2005).

The Women's Club and the Girl's Group are quite similar, although the age groups, the content and the frequency of their gatherings differ. Nevertheless, both activities attract several women and girls with immigrant backgrounds and they are gender-specific, as their names suggest. Since the overall aim of my research is to the role of the Volunteer Central in integration work of immigrant women, these two activities are especially relevant. In the KIA Café there is also a good number of immigrant women attending each time. In most cases, the immigrant women interact only with other women, although it is a mixed gathering of men and women of different ages and nationalities. As such, they mostly use this meeting place to socialize with their own gender. I will get back to how this might be considered an obstacle for integration and gender equality (see chapter 6.1.3.1b). Nevertheless, these three activities are important meeting places between Norwegian women and immigrant women. Additionally, the Refugee Friend will be mentioned as it is clearly can bridge social capital between Norwegian women and immigrant women. However, since I only have second-hand knowledge about this offer, it will not be get the main attention.

### 6.1.2.1 The Volunteer Central's activities as arenas for bridging social capital

As I have observed personally, there is a good mix of women with different backgrounds, and much joyful interaction between Norwegian women and immigrant women, in the activities of the Volunteer Central (specified above). My migrant informants stated that they have gotten friends from attending activities, and the Norwegians they meet are friendly, patient and supportive when they try to speak Norwegian. I did not go too deep into what kinds of relationships or how strong the friendships between Norwegian women and immigrant women are. However, several of my migrant informants had met Norwegians outside activities too, i.e. for dinner in their own home, to go to cottage of a Norwegian friend, to go to café with a Norwegian friend. This shows that the relationships are not weak and only present during an arranged activity. Especially, as my Norwegian informants explained, it is important with some “known faces”. When women of different nationalities have met in the Women’s Club or the Girl’s Group, it becomes natural for them to greet each other and talk together when they meet randomly too, i.e. in centrum, in a store, in a parent meeting in school., and on the bus. The strength of those relationships depends very much on the individuals. One of my migrant informants said that she has developed both friendships and acquaintances with those she has met. Nevertheless, she seems happy, smiling and talkative regardless of the type of relationship she has with other women, whenever she attends an activity, since she is a positive and outgoing woman (Personal observation).

Naturally, the immigrant women do not bridge with every Norwegian woman they meet – and opposite. There are some women who go along very well across national borders, and those can develop stronger relationships and find it natural to meet on other occasions as well. Of course, there is a difference between meeting randomly and plan to meet. I would suggest that in many cases, the women who talk little bit when meeting randomly might only have weak bridges, while those who plan to meet have more solid bridges. Nevertheless, the bridges between women of different backgrounds can be beneficial. As Granovetter (1973) realized, many immigrants value ‘weak ties’ with Norwegians. Some immigrants even think it is unrealistic to develop strong relationships with Norwegians, and therefore emphasize the ‘strength of weak ties’ (Valenta, 2009). From my material, such assumptions are neither confirmed nor denied, as I did not focus enough on the relationships between Norwegian women and immigrant women during interviews. From my observations and informal conversations, it seems like the relationships are of varying strengths.

According to Jorunn, actual friendships are developed through the Refugee Friend, because the people stay in touch over long time and do many fun things together (Interview with Jorunn). This is also my impression regarding Tanisha and her Refugee Friend, although Tanisha was in a busy period in February and March, so that she did not have enough time to mend that relationship (Interview with Tanisha). However, Tanisha is one of those who has gained many Norwegian friends during her time with the Volunteer Central. In the activities, she bridges both with Norwegian and immigrant women



from other countries (Personal observation; Interview with Tanisha). It seems to have a lot to do with her personality, open-mindedness and desire to get to know many people, that she is so active in bridging processes (Personal observation).

Clearly, several factors are of importance when there are chances for bridges to be built between women of different nationalities. The bridging does not happen automatically, but are dependent upon the women, their personalities, their motivations, their aims and their interactions. Additionally, having shared arenas is critical. As Sandlie (2006) points out, immigrants often lack social occasions and arenas where Norwegians and immigrants can meet to increase mutual understanding and trust, which is a prerequisite for a successful integration process. Moreover, it is easier for those who already knows someone from the majority to increase their level of societal participation, however, establishing this initial tie with a local can be a challenge for many (Sandlie, 2006). Therefore, the activities and meeting places of the Volunteer Central are of great benefit to immigrant women who wants to meet and get to know Norwegians. The activities provide good space for bridging across nationalities. From my material, Norwegian women also value and benefit from these meeting places (see chapter 5.4.5).

#### 6.1.2.2 The Volunteer Central's activities as arenas for bonding social capital

Naturally, some immigrant women from the same country often sit near each other and talk. As one Norwegian woman told me, it is more often that the immigrant women sit together two-and-two, rather than alone with Norwegians and immigrants from other countries. I also observed this trend. In one case, I also saw one big group of women from a certain country sit by themselves, almost without interaction with the Norwegians or women from other countries. In that situation, they clearly strengthened their bonds and enjoyed very much with each other. However, for that group in particular, they did not develop or strengthen bridges in that specific evening. Perhaps bonding with other like-minded and similar women is important for them, and the reason for them to attend that activity? In the KIA Café I also observed that three women from a specific country usually came and sat together. They happily talked and engaged with Norwegian women too, including myself. So, it seems to me that they were both bonding between themselves and bridging with Norwegians whenever they attended the café. From the interview with one of those women, I learnt that she started to attend the café because of an invitation from her friend (from the same country). Therefore, it is also natural for them to sit together. As their family situations are different, the KIA Café might be a very good opportunity to meet and talk, while also meeting and talking with others.

Some might assume that bridging between Norwegians and immigrant women is more important and crucial for integration, than bonding between immigrant women from the same country. This might be correct in one way. However, for a person's well-being and satisfaction with life, it can be just as important to have and maintain friendships with somewhat like-minded people, who one perhaps share

a longer history with, and at least have similar background as oneself. I saw the happiness of many immigrant women both in their interactions with Norwegians and with other women from their country. I think that bonding is just as important as bridging. The line between these two forms of social capital is not easy to draw, because relations and human interactions are dynamic. As I experienced during and after the Women's Club, there was happy conversations with laughter between several women from different countries. The immigrant women acted like friends across their ethnic borders, as if they were bonding with someone like themselves. Perhaps their similar situations as immigrants in Norway make them feel alike? Or perhaps they have just met so many times before that the 'bridges' they built in the beginning has taken the form of 'bonds'?

From the interview with one immigrant girl, I understood that she is not thinking about the concept of integration at all. She lives in Norway with her family and those around her are most important for her to feel well and included. She loves the Girl's Group because it is fun and she meets friends there. She seemed to be very indifferent about their different colors, languages and cultures, since they all speak Norwegian there. However, she only meets girls which are on the same level as her in high school outside the gatherings with the Girl's Group. It so happens that those girls also have immigrant backgrounds, and are not Norwegian. But this seems to be more a co-incidence, than her conscious decision to have more contact with other immigrants than with Norwegians. Most of the girls – both immigrants and Norwegians – were in high school or university. For this reason, they were busy with homework, reading for tests, studying or writing their bachelor's thesis. Therefore, I learnt from interviews that the girls were satisfied with meeting only twice a month, and in several cases had to drop the Girl's Group in order to do school work. Perhaps their busy life situation contributed to limit the interaction and planned meetings outside the group's gatherings? One can argue that the life situation of a mother with several children or a little baby, and even a husband, is more busy and hectic than teenage girl's school life. However, when they are young and want to do well in school, this takes both time and effort, and they consider themselves busy. And as my material shows, some of these girls decide to prioritize school over being social with the Girl's Group, especially in cases where they have a school test the next day.

Initially, I understood bridges as something people build across ethnic boundaries, while bonds are strengthened between people with the same nationality/ethnicity. But when reflecting upon the data I have gathered, from activities and interviews, I have the impression that the factors which can make people alike and different can be something else than just nationality. In the Girl's Group, for instance, there might be three Norwegians while the rest of the girls are from different countries. Perhaps only two or max three of the immigrant girls come from the same country. Still, there is a good group dynamic, where everyone talks with each other and laughter spreads as soon as one of them says something funny. Shyness is one factor which hinders certain girls from participating much in the conversations. Poor Norwegian skills make a few of them talk only with the girl who knows her

language. Nevertheless, the girls seem to get along very well and enjoy each other's company. Do we talk about bridges in this case, because of their different ethnicities? Or can they be bonding when they meet, since they share gender and are about the same age?

From my understanding, bridges form acquaintances, while bonds shape and strengthen friendships. This is similar to how other authors state that relationships between Norwegians and immigrants are often based of weak ties – rather than close friendships (i.e. Sandlie, 2006; Valenta, 2006). However, I find it difficult to draw a strict line between bridging and bonding processes. For sure, these processes are dynamic and depend upon the individuals involved. Nevertheless, in this thesis I have made the distinction that bridges are created between women of different nationalities, while bonds are shaped and maintained by those of same nationality. Although I have described how immigrant women sometimes focus on bonding over bridging, this is equally relevant and true for Norwegian women. At times, the Norwegian women sit together without immigrants, and tend to their already-established relationships (Personal observation). So, it is not an act only of immigrants. Rather it is a natural thing to do, because people have friends and acquaintances who are similar to themselves, and time and efforts are required for maintaining relationships. So, when meeting in a social setting, it is natural to spend some time with those one already knows, even if one also wishes to bridge with new people too.

### 6.1.3 'The right to be different' and 'the right to be same'

#### 6.1.3.1a How the Volunteer Central facilitates for 'the right to be different'

None of the immigrant women in my material experienced trouble with being different when they attended the different activities in the Volunteer Central. Some of them had participated in a wide range of activities and been volunteers themselves in many instances. Yet, no Norwegian they met in such situations commented negatively on their skin color, Norwegian skills, culture or religion. Rather, they experienced acceptance, respect and warmth. Their differences were unimportant because people enjoyed their company, their personality, their uniqueness and their contributions.

Especially one of my informants, a practicing Muslim woman, said that the only times she received negative comments and questions about her culture and dress code were when talking with case officers from NAV. They claimed that it is impossible to get work in Norway when she dresses like she does. She is wearing hijab and long skirts, but is not covering her face. Therefore, she was asked: If you were offered a job on the condition that you must remove your hijab, will you? She said, no, because it is her culture and no one forces her to wear it. It is her own choice and she wants to continue wearing it. She felt offended and disrespected, because she is in fact an active, enthusiastic and strong woman who wants a job to support herself and pay taxes. Yet, they did not see her like that. They did not see her. They only saw her hijab - and how that is an obstacle for her opportunity to work. She did not feel any kind of cooperation and support from them.

This is in line with the experiences of respondents of Rugkåsa (2010). Several immigrant women who Marianne Rugkåsa (2010) interviewed and talked with informally experienced similar treatment and questions because of their clothing. Rugkåsa (2010, pp. 151-161) has especially highlighted the story of one practicing Muslim woman who wished to work and got ‘help’ from the social services office. Sara is a single-mother of three children, is 40 years of age and came to Norway as a refugee 10 years ago. She wears wide skirts and clothes and covers her head with hijab, since she considers this the correct way to dress according to the Islamic law. Hilde is her Norwegian case officer in the social services office. Their conflicting opinions illustrate well how certain Norwegians (especially in NAV and other organizations aiming at helping immigrants to get work) and many immigrant (Muslim) women in Norway think very differently regarding the connection between the hijab and integration.

*“Hilde has several times expressed that the clothing is a problem and an **obstacle** for Sara’s integration in the work life. But for Sara it is the opposite. Her clothing can make participation possible and can be a means and an opportunity to achieve integration. Sara’s wish to wear full-covering clothing in the work life is an expression of that she wishes to participate in the society, and it is exactly to be allowed to wear that clothing which makes it possible”* (Rugkåsa, 2010, pp. 164-165, **emphasis** in original)

During their meetings, her way of dressing was always highlighted as an issue, to the extent that Sara was given the ultimatum: to compromise her clothing and get work, or continue dressing like she does and stop receiving social support. Although Sara had said that she can wear pants, as long as she has a long coat or so which covers her knees, and a tight hijab, the case officer did not meet her halfway. A few weeks after a job offer which she refused due to the work uniform requirement which conflicted with her faith, she stopped the contact with the social services office and lost her social support. Later, she said in an interview:

*“According to Norwegian law, one shall respect people, and everyone has the right to believe what they want (...). The fact that I am not respected because I am Muslim is very difficult. I saw very clearly that it was a strong focus on what I was wearing rather than helping me to get work (...). I have experienced that someone has said ‘uff’ to me. I have never experienced before that an adult human being treats another human being in this way. (...). Norway is a democratic country where one can live as one wants. Then, I think that it is unacceptable to be treated in this way”* (Rugkåsa, 2010, p. 155)

The focus during my field work was quite different from this. Still, the words of Sara (quote above) could have been from my own informant, when we got into this topic of work due to the flexibility of my interview guide. She had a similar experience, similar expectations to Norway and Norwegians, and the same positive attitude about working – without getting satisfactory support. Nevertheless, this

experience of being treated negatively for being different was not connected to the Volunteer Central at all. That is exactly why it is relevant to bring this story here.

Immigrant women may experience trouble or discomfort for being different in certain situations and in meeting with certain official institutions or case officers. However, the activities of the Volunteer Central are like their 'free space' (Personal observation and interviews). There, Norwegians do not comment negatively on their differences or advise them to change. They are accepted and cherished for who they are. They love attending activities because it is fun and they meet good, nice people. Naturally, my material is limited and there can be immigrant women who have other experiences with the Volunteer Central than those five I have interviewed. There can also be instances where my respondents actually felt little left out or uncomfortable in certain settings with the Volunteer Central, which they did not want to share with me for any reason. Jorunn also explained that in several cases, the Norwegians advise the immigrant women to let the husband stay home with the children, so that they can be able to come alone to the activity they want to attend. This is probably more relevant to the Women's Club than the KIA Café, because in the latter activity, there are always many children present and they have space for playing. Other than this, I do not know of anything else which Norwegians may try to 'change' with immigrant women. My impression from my material is therefore very positive. It seems like immigrant women with different nationalities and ages are highly satisfied with the offers of the Volunteer Central in Vennesla. One of the reasons is that they feel accepted and respected for who they are.

All the Norwegians I interviewed – and many of those I observed – seemed to have very warm, friendly and open-minded attitudes. They know that immigrant women are different – both from Norwegians and between themselves – but they value and treasure their differences, and believe that we all have something to learn from each other. Their attitudes are like that of methodically relativistic researchers, who wishes to gain respondents' trust and honesty. As Thorbjørnsrud (2008, p. 101) explains, one cannot expect openness, honesty and friendliness from people, if one start off with judging them, consider them as victims and continuously try to make them change their minds. Many of the workers and volunteers in the Volunteer Central is thus doing something right. Naturally, there is a wide variety of personalities, attitudes and behaviors among the Norwegian women connected to the Volunteer Central, so it is difficult to generalize about this group. Nevertheless, those I came in touch with were open-minded and friendly. "Volunteer" is not a title limited only to Norwegians either, since many immigrant women wish to help and benefit others too. Two of my immigrant respondents were currently volunteering with the Volunteer Central, and had done so for a long time. They actually started there as volunteers due to their wish to help and support other. Additionally, they have benefited from attending different activities.

Overall, the Volunteer Central facilitates well for immigrant women's right to be different, and thus, to maintain their own identity and cultural practices, i.e. continue wearing headscarf.

### 6.1.3.1b Gender segregation in mixed gatherings; an obstacle for integration and gender equality?

This may be contrary to some Norwegians assumptions of integration and gender equality (Gullestad, 2002b; NAV, 2016; Rugkåsa, 2010). However, as a Muslim woman myself, who consciously limit my own interaction with men outside my family, I think that other women also should be given this freedom. If they feel comfortable in the KIA Café and enjoy conversations with other women, there is no need to push them into more gender-mixed groups in the name of “integration” or “gender equality”. The women might prefer being around other women for cultural, personal or religious reasons. If they are used to that division of genders from their culture, it probably feels more natural to continue with it even when they attend a mixed gathering in Norway. For some women, it can feel like a part of their identity or personality to mainly interact with other women – and that they become naturally more open, happy and talkative in such situations – although there are men present in the room too. Lastly, there are women who considers it a religious obligation to communicate with men outside the family only when necessary, and therefore avoid socializing and friendly small-talk. This might be more relevant to Muslim women than other religious women. However, among the Muslim women, there is also big variety. As my material shows, there are Muslim women in Vennesla who wear headscarves (and some who do not wear it), who chat and joke with men they meet in activities (as they might know them from the Adult Training or elsewhere). They interact with men in the same way as with women. While other Muslim women keep a distance to men which they do not keep to other women. I find myself in the latter group. Thus, I understand well how Norwegians generally find it strange and unnatural, and how these women might experience challenges with this behavior in daily life.

Nevertheless, these three activities are important meeting places between Norwegian women and immigrant women. The lack of interaction between Norwegian men and immigrant women can be considered an issue with integration (Rugkåsa, 2010). However, as I have explained and argued above, I think that the immigrant women who prefer to keep a certain distance to men should be allowed to do so. Since integration should be a two-way process, according to Stokke (2012) and my informants, the immigrants should be respected for choosing and behaving differently than most Norwegians. In addition, I find it important that Muslim women should not need to ‘sell their religion’ in order to become integrated into the society. When we aim for integration, rather than assimilation, many differences should be respected and facilitated for, although the immigrant women need to adopt in certain ways to our culture as well.

### 6.1.3.2 How the Volunteer Central facilitates for 'the right to be same'

For immigrants, it can also be important to become similar to Norwegians in different ways, especially with regards to knowing the Norwegian language, getting work and having the same rights as the rest of the population. The Volunteer Central facilitates for this by an activity where foreigners can learn the Norwegian language by volunteer teachers. This is called the 'language café' and is two hours every week (see chapter 5.1.3.2). Additionally, the immigrant women are expected and pushed to talk Norwegian when they come for activities such as the Women's Club, the Girl's Group and the KIA Café. One of the motivations for immigrant women to attend these activities is actually to learn Norwegian better, because it is more beneficial and fun to talk with actual Norwegians than to just practice at home. Julia in my material had started in the KIA Café some months earlier with very weak Norwegian skills, but when I interviewed her, we managed well by using the Norwegian language. Even a Norwegian woman who has met her regularly in the KIA Café commented: "I remember when you first came here. You could hardly speak Norwegian with us. Now, you have improved a lot! You speak very well!" (Participant observation). Julia uses both the 'language café' and the KIA Café as arenas for improving her language skills.

Generally, there is a strong wish for immigrant women (at least my respondents) to learn the Norwegian language. One woman who only knew Norwegian poorly was sad that she cannot talk more with Norwegians. She finds Norwegians friendly and nice people, and wish to get to know them better. But it is poor language skills which stops her. Another of my respondents said that it means a great deal to her to know the Norwegian language.

*"Because Norwegian is very nice. Or I can say that it is the keys to the society (...). It is important, I think to learn the language (...). It is the keys to life. One can go and apply job; can fill out a scheme. If one goes to hospital or a health center, one can explain the problem. But if you do not have [Norwegian skills], you need get help all the time. And maybe you don't get good enough or sufficient help (...). That's why I think, we must learn the language. One must know **some**, in order to explain one's problem"* (Interview with immigrant woman)

This woman also explained how the Norwegian woman she has meet in different activities are supportive and positive when she talks Norwegian, i.e. no one tells her "no, you're talking wrongly". Rather, they tell her "Yes, you are good! You can talk [Norwegian]". Several of the immigrant women I interviewed experienced good support from Norwegians they talked with (see chapter 5.2.1). This behavior and support has been helpful for the immigrant women, as they get encouraged and motivated more to continue talking and improving. This may be in stark contrast to certain Norwegian case officers in public institutions and potential employers, who are rather bothered by poor Norwegian skills in their meetings or a job interview. The role of the Volunteer Central is thus important and useful for immigrant women who wish to learn the language – and practice it among

positive, friendly and supportive people. Naturally, the Adult Training has the most important role when it comes to teaching the language for refugees. However, some immigrants did not yet receive asylum or have migrated from other European countries, and can therefore not benefit from the Adult Training. Julia in my material found herself in this difficult situation (see chapter 5.1.3.2). Therefore, the activities which facilitates and supports Norwegian learning have been highly beneficial and helpful for her.

The Volunteer Central also helps immigrant women and Norwegian youth to get summer job and salary for 3 weeks (see chapter 5.1.3.3). This offer can potentially broaden immigrant women's network and give them valuable work experience, which can help them to get long-term employment elsewhere or with the same organization. However, this is not granted. Tanisha in my material experienced limited benefit from the summer job project, because she has not yet succeeded in finding another job (except a small part time job, which is not permanent and generates very little income). Nevertheless, the attempt of the Volunteer Central to help in this regard is good. They cannot help everyone to get work for longer period. Especially, they cannot control the attitudes and assumptions of potential employers, if they prefer hiring Norwegians and are skeptical to those who are different in skin, language and clothing. There are several factors in the process for an individual woman to get work which are not in the hands of the Volunteer Central. Naturally, this voluntary organization can still improve their offers and activities.

Driving lessons for 100 NOK (12 USD) is one of the latest offers of the Volunteer Central (VT, 2017b). This has started up due to immigrant women's wish to learn how to drive (Interview with Jorunn). This comes nicely under 'the right to be same'. In Vennessla, which is a big town with some long distances and not the best collective transportation offer, almost every teenager get driver's license for scooter or small motorbike at the age of 16 and for car shortly after turning 18 years old (Personal knowledge and observation). Most adults also have driver's license and car(s) in the family. In this context, it may be especially attractive for immigrant women to develop the skill of driving. In many non-Western countries, it is also more common for men to drive cars than for women. I did not ask about immigrant women's motivation regarding this offer, since it was only in the planning-stage during my field work. So, these are just some assumptions as to why they would like to gain driving skills. Nevertheless, as all Norwegians are aware of, the costs of driving lessons by a traffic school are very high. For example, in a popular traffic school in Vennessla, the price for one driving lesson is 670 NOK (Eikeland Trafikkskole, n. d). There are numerous other expenses for the full training one needs for getting the driver's licence (Eikeland Trafikkskole, n. d). Thus, the cheap driving lessons currently offered by the Volunteer Central is highly beneficial and helpful to those immigrant women (and other individuals) who are interested in learning how to drive. This can reduce the costs of an individual drastically, compared to only taking driving lessons with a traffic school.



Through the activities of language training, summer job offer and cheap driving lessons, the Volunteer Central facilitates well for the immigrant women's 'right to be same'. Learning Norwegian is an important aim for many, as this allows them to communicate with Norwegians and become qualified for work in this country. By working, they can earn their own salary and pay taxes, which was especially important for one of my informants. Then they can also be in an environment with other Norwegians, and thus feel more included (the benefits of work can be discussed, since migrant women are often restricted to low-paid and low-status jobs, i.e. Rugkåsa, 2010, but this is outside the scope of this thesis). Developing driving skills is beneficial in a Norwegian context, particularly in a town like Vennesla, even if the family cannot afford their own car. In many work context, it is a plus with the driver's license. If the family or the immigrant women can get access to a car at times (or more permanently), this can be helpful in both emergency and daily situations.

## **6.2 Gate-keepers**

Gate-keepers in a voluntary organization like the Volunteer Central have useful functions. They give access to information, share advices based on their experiences, invite to social gatherings, are good discussion partners and help immigrant women in different ways (see figure 2, p. 25). According to Fangen (2010), they guard the gates which open for contact with other participants. One of my Norwegian informants preferred to call such people 'gate-openers' instead, because of their important role of opening opportunities and facilitating communication and relationships with new people. This word, gate-opener, gives more positive associations and a good understanding of the benefits such people can give others. Nevertheless, for possibility of comparison, I find it useful to use the same concept and wording as Fangen (2010).

Chapter 5.3 has illustrated how the general leader and the mentors in the Volunteer Central (and a few others) act as gate-keepers for several immigrant women. Jorunn is especially well-known and liked by many immigrant women, especially among my informants, as she meets people happily, warmly and welcoming. She does not shy away from making an extra effort if a woman with very poor Norwegian skills comes for help or explanation. My respondents have the impression that she is active, enthusiastic and constantly trying to improve the organization and their efforts. Many of them have also experienced that Jorunn has opened doors for them with regards to meeting other people, getting more friends and starting new activities. Tanisha and Minal explained that the Girl's Group and the (temporary) exercising group started up due to an initiative from Jorunn, which they were positive to and wanted to do. It was also through her resources (network and knowledge of the local circumstances), that the group of girls got an exercising hall to their disposal once a week. The Girl's Group also has a room available the two days a month when they plan to meet, since the Volunteer Central owns and uses this room for multiple activities. Nevertheless, the Girl's Group sometimes

meet elsewhere for activities such as cinema, eating in restaurant or going to one of the member's house (see chapter 5.1.2.2).

Additionally, Jorunn has made great efforts in getting the offer of cheap driving lessons up and running. In February, she was still in the planning-stage. In May, the Volunteer Central had committed volunteers, cars and other needed aspects in place (see chapter 5.1.3.5). Both women and men utilize this chance to learn the skill of driving, but most men have started to learn the theory (Email from Jorunn, May 29, 2017). The driving lessons take place for 4 hours every Tuesday after work or school (Email from Jorunn, May 29, 2017). This was an offer which was requested by a group of immigrant women. Jorunn has had a crucial role in making it happen. As such, she has really had a gate-keeper role and opened this opportunity. This function of a gate-keeper is not mentioned by Fangen (2010). However, it was visible in my material and is therefore specified in figure 2.

The mentors in the Volunteer Central clearly have important roles for the new immigrants they meet and can help, especially in terms of translation and bringing newcomers to an activity in the Volunteer Central which they participate in themselves. It is also possible that they invite to social gatherings of other kinds, introduce new immigrant women to others they know, and help in other ways. However, the commitment and list of mentors were new during my field work, so my material regarding them is very limited. Nevertheless, from the little knowledge I have, it seems like they are important gate-keepers for several immigrant women. The potential of their voluntary commitment, language skills (both Norwegian and the immigrants' mother tongue) and experiences as immigrants in Norway (for several years) are very great. As time goes on and the mentors are used in different occasions, and help the new immigrant women – and men – their roles and help can become even more crucial and helpful to the individuals involved.

Overall, the gate-keepers in the Volunteer Central – with different ethnicities – have an important role in the mutual integration process which promotes cross-cultural understanding between the minority women and the majority population. As I have realized from my material, their roles and benefits are most crucial in the beginning phase, i.e. when a minority woman first hears about the Volunteer Central and starts to attend an activity. Nevertheless, their ongoing efforts are also significant. For example, when Jorunn continually invited one of my migrant respondents to several different activities and parties. She opened opportunities for that woman to gain new friends and be active in her spare time. As such, Jorunn became the main person for Tanisha to feel integrated and included in the local community (see chapter 5.3.1).

However, once an activity is established and people attend it regularly, it seems like individuals from the minorities and the majority get along well on their own. For some, it becomes natural to meet outside the activities also. For others, especially in the KIA Café, it is sufficient to meet once a week and have a conversation each time they see each other. Therefore, the gate-keeper role does not have

an endless responsibility in facilitating for cross-cultural communication and understanding. After some time, people do well on their own, i.e. immigrant women develop relationships with others they meet in activities. This is perhaps already included in the term “gate-keeper”. Their main function is to bring someone to the gate, open it up and let them pass by. Thereafter, they manage on their own and experience diverse benefits on the other side of the gate.

### 6.3 Culturalization

My Norwegian informants and the Norwegian volunteers I have observed during activities seem to be open-minded, friendly, talkative and respectful of differences. None of them are racist in any way – as the Volunteer Central would not be the right place to be. Nevertheless, in some cases my informants has expressed themselves in ways that are to the left in the culturalization-axis (see figure 3).

Most apparent is the statement that “...integration is to be able to accept other *cultures*, so that everyone feels welcome, taken care of and seen, regardless of religion (...)” (Interview with Norwegian woman, *emphasis mine*). The wording is surely unconscious and not meant as anything negative. However, by this statement, the woman equals individuals with other cultural and national backgrounds with culture itself. This is an example of culturalization, where culture is considered the main aspect of immigrant women and main difference between “us” and “them”. Further, it indicates that all immigrants represent their culture. It is the culture we need to accept, not individuals. because their culture is surely of utmost importance to them. The consequence of this way of thinking is that we overlook individuals and place them in categories where they not necessarily feel that they belong.

Another example: “I have the impression that the women need an arena, they like to have an activity where they can gather (...) and learn from each other’s cultures (...). The aim is to learn from each other’s cultures” (Interview with Norwegian woman). Here, the culture also get the focus. Is it not individuals who meet, and can learn from each other? Perhaps are their personal experiences, their opinions and their aims in life different from what their cultures dictate or suggest? Should we not see them as individuals rather than a representation of their own culture? Do we consider ourselves like bearers of Norwegian culture, as well? When we belong to the majority ourselves, it is easy to ‘culturalize’ minority citizens, and regard them as special or different, while the majority citizens are ‘de-culturalized’ due to their ‘universalized’ values, norms and understandings (Rugkåsa *et al*, 2015, p. 11). Nevertheless, immigrant women can also have the tendency to culturalize differences and issues.

*“What makes the Norwegian women so strong? (...) How do Norwegian women handle crisis? (...) I’m thinking that no one has been through so much crisis as the refugees coming now (...). But yes, I think that they are curious on ‘the Norwegian woman’, and I experience that they want to get to know Norwegian culture”* (Interview with Norwegian woman)

*“Because we are foreign. We have problems from our culture [with getting job]. Perhaps? We have problems with the language. Perhaps? Sometimes I wonder, there are others from Poland and other European countries, who did not know Norwegians, but they have work. Why? What is the difference? Perhaps the culture is different? [More like the Norwegian culture]”* (Interview with immigrant woman)

In the first example, immigrant women ask question about the Norwegian women as if it is something inherent in the culture which makes them strong. They are also concerned with a bigger picture, the culture of this country, rather than the individuals. Nevertheless, these statements are explained to me from a Norwegian woman, and it might be that her interpretation about culture, is her own rather than the migrant women’s. The other example, however, shows how an immigrant women experience and interprets her different culture as an obstacle to get work. She is considering different reasons for the difficulties with getting a job for both herself and others who share her culture. It seems to her that immigrant women from European countries get work more easily because their culture is more like Norwegian culture than hers. She does not state bluntly that the culture is the main issue (the wider context of this quote reveals that she thinks about several other factors too). However, she interprets culture as a significant factor for the difficulty of getting a job. As such, she culturalizes this issue. Perhaps she is somewhere between the middle-point and the left side of the culturalization-axis, since she considers multiple factors, but with an emphasis on cultural differences.

There are other examples in my material too, but from what is shown here one can already see that both Norwegian women and immigrant women can go in the ‘trap’ of culturalization. They put an excessive emphasis on culture over other factors (Rugkåsa *et al*, 2015), rather than seeing the complexity of individuals, issues and differences. Nevertheless, these processes do not happen consciously. Other statements and my personal observation shows that these ways of thinking do not hinder friendly behavior, joyful interactions, friendships and other relationships to be developed by Norwegian and immigrant women. Thus, it is not an obstacle in the integration process. Nevertheless, it can be beneficial to be aware of the concept of culturalization and try to avoid seeing individuals as representations of their culture. There can be so much more to learn and understand about individuals than just how their culture functions and what it says (culture is also a contested concept, but that discussion is out of the scope of this thesis).

## 7 Concluding Remarks

This chapter sums up some of the findings and the discussion of the thesis and offers some concluding remarks. Lastly, there are suggestions for further studies.

### 7.1 Summing Up

The main aim of the research was to explore the role of the Volunteer Central in the integration work of immigrant women in Vennesla in Norway, both from the subjective experiences of immigrant women and the impressions of Norwegian women connected to this organization. As chapters 5 and 6 has shown, several of the activities of the Volunteer Central function like meeting places for people of different backgrounds – including Norwegian women and immigrant women from different countries. Especially, the Women's Club and the Girl's Group are arenas which attract many women and girls with immigrant backgrounds. The KIA Café follows right thereafter.

In these meeting places, there are processes of bridging and bonding present from time to time. Some bonding processes between immigrant women from the same country of origin can be exclusive to them, and hinder the potential bridging processes between different types of women. Nevertheless, bonding with those who are similar to one self can be important for certain of the immigrant women's sense of belonging. Most of us are naturally concerned with taking care of our already-established relationships and friendships, even though we can also be open and friendly to new people and developing new relationships too. Thus, the researcher does not see bonding as an obstacle for integration. Rather, it is an important factor in the overall experience of immigrant women. Their inclusion and integration into the Norwegian society does not require them to leave everything they know from their own culture, religion and women from their own country. Maintaining their own group identity or is important for wanting and managing to also adopt to and fit into the society.

Nevertheless, bridging processes also clearly took place in the meeting places. Norwegian women and immigrant women who meet regularly and talks with each other get some sort of relationship. For some, their connection is stronger than for others. However, the fact that several of them meet outside activities of the Volunteer Central, i.e. for dinner to a woman's home, to go to café together, for a party, to the cottage of the Norwegian, indicates that the bridges between them are more solid than unsteady. Especially, through the Refugee Friend, some real friendships have developed (although this is out of the scope of my research). From my observations, solid bridges are also created from meeting several times in the above-mentioned activities. However, this is not a matter of course. It is not granted that just because women from Norway and other countries are placed in the same setting, that all or most of them will interact with each other and get close to each other. The cross-cultural relationships which are developed depend on the individuals: their motivations, their personalities, their behaviors and so on.

That counts for all of us. People do not automatically develop friendships although they i.e. study together for 2-3 years. Normally, one gets closer to a few people and have a distanced “hello-and-bye”-relationship with others. This also depends on what we prefer ourselves. A few of my immigrant respondent considers everyone they meet and talk with in activities as their friends, and they want a lot of friends. Others prefer to have a few close friends and then many acquaintances. Then, these kinds of relationships naturally develop.

This connects well to the concept of culturalization. The different types of relationship – intercultural and cross-cultural – which develops between Norwegians and women from numerous other countries is not necessarily an effect of their culture. On the culturalization axis, I try to keep myself in the middle or right position. We should be careful to explain everything and every difference simply by stating “it’s their culture”. Most times, it is actually other factors which are more significant and relevant – to explain a clash or someone’s behavior. The women connected to the Volunteer Central – both Norwegians and immigrants – generally have an open, curious and respectful attitude towards others. They are concerned with respecting and accepting each other. Moreover, they see those who are different from themselves as resourceful and with useful knowledge. Nevertheless, among my respondents, there are tendencies to highlight culture over individuals. So, in some cases, culturalization is happening, although it does not seem to create any issue or obstacle for the individuals to interact in good, friendly ways and develop relationships.

In the Volunteer Central, there are several people with an important gate-keeper function. The general manager herself is an important gate-keeper for most of my respondents. The way she receives and treats women while they are still unknown to her is important for how they feel about her and what impression they have about her. Further, she includes as many as she can to different activities and events. Thus, she opens doors for several immigrant women, which they would not know about or enter without her invitations. For one of my informants, Jorunn was the most important person for her to feel included and integrated into the society. That says a lot about the significant role Jorunn has in that woman’s life – and other immigrant women’s lives too. The mentors in the Volunteer Central are clearly also important for the individuals they help, although I have only limited second-hand knowledge about their roles, tasks and how people experience their interaction with them. Lastly, there are the neighbors of immigrant women, other volunteers, case officers in NAV and employees in the Adult Training. Some of these have been the gate-keeper, or gate-opener, for my respondents to activities in the Volunteer Central.

## **7.2 Concluding Remarks for the Thesis**

All my immigrant respondents experienced several benefits from the activities of the Volunteer Central, which they have attended or still attend. Most importantly, they learn Norwegian better; they meet people and get friends; they have fun; they understand Norwegians and Norwegian culture better.

The challenges of the Volunteer Central in Vennesla are the language barrier, transportation and distance issues, the diversity of immigrant women, that they perhaps map the immigrants interests too little, the limitations of the volunteers and the fear of the unknown for some immigrant women. Nevertheless, my respondents are very satisfied with their offers and did not state any complaints, except regarding the summer job project. The project itself was good and beneficial, but with hopes and expectations that it would lead to something more – a work which lasts longer and where the employer will pay the salary – it turned out to be somewhat disappointing.

There is no set definition or understanding of what integration or everyday integration really is. The existing literature and my respondents have numerous suggestions. In terms of concluding the thesis, I cannot state bluntly that I have discovered the best understanding. However, I find that in an increasing multicultural society like Norway – and Vennesla – it is valuable and beneficial to have and accept several different understandings. It is also healthy and good to see that integration is a process happening between the majority and the minorities where all parties have a responsibility. It must be set apart from assimilation and segregation. It is about finding a way to live together side-by-side and tolerate each other although we think, act and believe differently. The following quotes highlight some important aspects of what integration entails – or should entail.

*“Integration is to accept other cultures, so that everyone feels welcome, taken care of and seen, regardless of religion. And that we must respect each other for our differences and to learn from each other, and to complement each other (...) and that we have use for everyone”*

(Interview with Norwegian woman)

*“We live in the same world. Everybody has a ‘story’.  
That we can talk together and laugh. That we accept each other”.*

(Interview with immigrant woman)

As such, everyday integration is about the experiences, interactions and relationships which happen and develop in daily life. It is about how we include each other and how we make each other feel. It is about seeing each the others as human beings with needs, feelings, wishes and desires similar to ourselves. However, none in my material found it natural to talk about everyday integration instead of integration. For the purpose of distinguishing between the concepts, one can opt for an almost tangible and material definition of integration (language skills, work and taxes) and a more personal, abstract and dynamic definition for everyday integration (experiences, interactions, relationships, accept and respect). Nevertheless, I find it more natural and appropriate to mix the definitions and include different understandings under the same broad concept of integration.

However, with my material in mind, integration is clearly more than foreigners simply learning the Norwegian language, getting work and paying taxes. These are important aspects, but they are not the only ones. In cases where immigrant women cannot get work for any reason, they cannot directly be

considered unintegrated. Then, there might be other arenas and activities they attend, which bring them into the society and which make them feel included and happy in their new context. The Volunteer Central in Vennesla plays a significant role in providing spaces and meeting places for immigrant women to interact with Norwegians and other immigrants alike, to develop good relationships and to feel belonging in their new hometown. Before my informants started attending activities of the Volunteer Central, they spent most time at home and got bored, without connecting with Norwegians. In the activities – or the meeting places – they have met people, learnt Norwegian better, and even developed some friendships. One of my informants explained that she experienced Norwegians cold and reserved when she met them previously, i.e. when walking in the street or in a store. However, when she attended activities, she met many Norwegians who were very nice, warm, friendly and welcoming to her.

The way I see it, the meeting places of the Volunteer Central is highly important for the interaction between Norwegians and foreigners. They facilitate for cross-cultural communication, becoming familiar with each other, understanding each other and developing relationships (both bridges and bonds). The gate-keepers in the organization – with different ethnicities – have an extra important role in the mutual integration process which promotes cross-cultural understanding between the minority women and the majority population. Their importance is especially important in the beginning phase, i.e. when a minority woman first hears about the Volunteer Central and starts to attend an activity.

Their ongoing efforts are also significant, like when Jorunn continued to invite one of my migrant respondents to several different tasks, activities and parties. She had a crucial role in including that woman and helping her to develop new acquaintances and friendships. As such, Jorunn became the main person for Tanisha to feel integrated and included in the local community. The general manager also has a crucial role when new suggestions and ideas are brought to her; to coordinate the efforts to make it happen. However, once an activity is established and people attend it regularly, it seems like individuals from the minorities and the majority get along well on their own. For some, it becomes natural to meet outside the activities also. For others, it is sufficient to meet once a week or once a month and be friendly each time they see each other. Therefore, the gate-keeper role does not have an endless responsibility in facilitating for cross-cultural communication and understanding. After some time, people do well on their own, i.e. immigrant women develop relationships with others they meet in activities.

The Volunteer Central does not exist in a vacuum, and it is not the only actor in Vennesla which supports and helps immigrant women in their integration process. This became clear to me in the early stage of the field work. The municipality, NAV, the Health Center, the Adult Training, the other teaching institutions and other voluntary organizations – including the partner organizations of the Volunteer Central – all play important roles and have different functions for the immigrants in



Vennesla. Nevertheless, the huge number of activities, ideas, partners, efforts, funds and volunteers of the Volunteer Central make their overall contribution to the integration of minority women significant. My impression is that, particularly in Vennesla, the organization does many good and right things. Although they have some challenges and they do not target immigrant women as a group – although it is close with the Women’s Group and the Girl’s Group – my respondents experience numerous benefits from the offers of the central. My personal observations support the statements of my respondents about how they benefit from and appreciate the activities they attend.

## **7.2 Suggestions for Further Studies**

This thesis has focused broadly on the integration of immigrant women in Vennesla in Norway, through a specific organization, the Volunteer Central. This broad focus was useful and necessary, considering the limited time frame the researcher ended up with for the field work and writing process. Nevertheless, several other related topics and focus areas came to mind during these months.

Firstly, it would be interesting to look more into the collaborations of the Volunteer Central and its partner organization. Especially, the partnerships with the municipality, the Adult Training, NAV and KIA Vennesla seem to be important for the overall contribution of the central. Thus, a bigger project which digs deeper into these relations could put the Volunteer Central into a bigger context and say more about how the organization manages to arrange so many activities with numerous attendants regularly.

Secondly, the mentor arrangement of the Volunteer Central is very interesting. The list of mentors was completely new during my field work in February 2017, so it was still in the process of development. However, the potential of the list of individuals who has opted for a certain responsibility in the organization is very good. A research project aimed at understanding more about the individuals, how the arrangement works and what benefits it creates for mentors, the Norwegians in the Volunteer Central, and newcomers to Vennesla, could provide beneficial and good findings. Not least, it can be an example to follow, if it functions well. Thus, an overview and understanding of its advantages and disadvantages could prove helpful and important.

Thirdly, research on the Volunteer Centrals in other municipalities. Clearly, there is a broad variety of these centrals, as they are shaped according to local needs, ideas and the people who runs the organization. Thus, it would be useful with other case-studies, especially regarding their contribution to integration of immigrant women. From Jorunn, I heard that some centrals refuse women to bring their children to activities. In Vennesla, they allow children to come to activities too, in order to include the mothers who cannot so easily leave their small ones at home.

Fourthly, more case-studies on voluntary organizations which aim at supporting immigrants’ integration into the Norwegian society. This can be work-focused; to help increase skills important for

work and understand the Norwegian job market better. Or it can be more focused on creating meeting places and facilitate interaction between Norwegians and immigrants. There are many entrances and focuses which can be interesting. Much research is already done, but our knowledge should still increase, especially regarding the subjective experience of immigrants or immigrant women.

Fifthly, the effects of immigrant organizations are highly interesting too. Are they just segregated organizations in the Norwegian context, or do they have something to offer to the integration of female immigrants too? Do Muslim organizations create more distance between Muslims and the majority population, or do they contribute to the reduction or prevention of radicalism among youth?

There are many ways to approach studies of different organizations and their integration potential or possible advantages and disadvantages. However, case-studies can be beneficial. Not all results will be positive, but better understanding is important. Qualitative studies highlight aspects of organizations which quantitative studies do not. From my literature review, there are currently more quantitative information than qualitative findings on voluntary sector in the Norwegian context. Thus, more in-depth research is needed.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Overview of interviews and activities

*Fieldwork 2017: February and March*

When?	Who? Or what?	Where?
6. Feb 2.30 pm - 5.10 pm	Interview with an employee in Frivilligsentralen, Norwegian woman Recorded interview: 1:25 hours	In the public library in Vennesla
7. Feb 11.30 am - 12.30 am	Visit at the playground for kids, where moms (and dads) can come every Tuesday from 9 am to 1 pm, with their children	In Frivilligsentralen's room in Vennesla centrum
7. Feb 6.15 pm - 8.10 pm	Participant observation in the KIA Café, which is a meeting place for Norwegians and people with other nationalities, in all ages, where coffee, tea and waffles are free (and voluntaries work in the kitchen) – It is every <b>Tuesday</b> , from 6 pm to 8 pm	In the Protestant church near Vennesla centrum, “Frikirka”
7. Feb 7.25 pm - 8.00 pm	Interview with an immigrant women, who is also a volunteer in Frivilligsentralen Not recorded, but notes were taken.	In the Protestant church
8. Feb 12.30 pm - 2.00 pm	Observation in a meeting with the municipal, Frivilligsentralen, NAV, the Adult Training, Moonlight, the municipal doctor, the school nurse who works much with refugees, They call it “Multicultural group” and meet once a month to update each other about new happenings.	The municipal building for local politicians in Vennesla centrum
11. Feb 3.30 pm - 4.15 pm	Interview with a Norwegian voluntary worker in Frivilligsentralen, adult woman Recorded interview: 38 minutes	In Vennesla
11. Feb 5.00 pm - 5.35 pm	Interview with a Norwegian volunteer in Frivilligsentralen, young woman Recorded interview: 25 minutes	In Vennesla
12. Feb 6.50 pm - 8.10 pm	Participant observation in the KIA Café	In the Protestant church

16. Feb 6.30 pm - 8.00 pm	Participant observation in “the multicultural girl’s group”, who meet every other Thursday for different activities, often 6 pm to 8 pm (or longer time, depending on the activity). This time it was “hobby evening” (we made jewelries of different kinds)	In Frivilligsentralen’s room in Vennesla centrum
19. Feb 3.00 pm - 7.00 pm	Interview with an immigrant women, who is also a volunteer in Frivilligsentralen Recorded interview: 46 minutes	In her home in Vennesla
21. Feb 6.00 pm - 8.00 pm	Participant observation the KIA Café	In the Protestant church
23.Feb 9.00 am - 3.00 pm	Participant observation in “Intro” – an integration course for immigrants in the winter vacation week. This day was only for women, about women’s health and healthy diet, etc. Arranged by the municipal and Adult Training? The full day: 8.30 am – 3.30 pm. CHECK.	In the public library in Vennesla
23. Feb 4.00 pm - 4.55 pm	Interview with a Norwegian volunteer in one of the “cooperation organizations” of Frivilligsentralen, adult woman	In the public library in Vennesla
28. Feb 6.30 pm - 8.00 pm	Participant observation the KIA Café	In the Protestant church
2. March 6.00 pm - 8.00 pm	Participant observation in Kvinneklubben, “the Women’s Club”. They meet once a month, for two hours. It is a social gathering for women of different nationalities. Some are Norwegian volunteers.	In Frivilligsentralen’s room in Vennesla centrum
7. March 7.00 pm - 8.00 pm	Participant observation the KIA Café	In the Protestant church
7. March 7.30 pm - 7.55 pm	Interview with an immigrant woman Not recorded, but notes were taken	In the Protestant church

10. March 3.00 pm - 5.00 pm	Interview with an immigrant woman Not recorded, but notes were taken	In her home in Vennessla
16. March 6.30 pm - 8.00 pm	Participant observation in “the multicultural girl’s group”. This time it was “make-up evening”. One of the Norwegian volunteers demonstrated and taught how the girls can put their own make-up.	In the home of one of the Norwegian volunteers
17. March 9.00 am - 10.00 am	Meeting with my supervisors. Useful feedback, comments and ideas.	UiA Kristiansand
17. March 10.00 am - 12.00 pm	Lecture by Solveig Omland on the findings of her PhD research. “Young Muslim women and negotiation of religiosity and everyday life”	UiA Kristiansand
22. March 1.00 pm - 1.35 pm	Interview with an employee in Frivilligsentralen, Norwegian woman Recorded interview: 29 minutes	In the public library in Vennessla
23. March 3.45 pm - 3.55 pm	Started an interview with a young immigrant woman, but we had to delay the interview for the next day	In the public library in Vennessla
24. March 2.15 pm – 2.35 pm	Interview with a young immigrant woman Recorded interview: 12 minutes	In the public library in Vennessla

## **Forespørsel om deltakelse i forskningsprosjektet**

### **”Rollen til frivillig sektor i integreringsarbeid av innvandrerkvinner: En case studie av Frivilligsentralen i Vennesla i Norge”**

#### **Bakgrunn og formål**

Formålet med studien er å utforske rollen til Frivilligsentralen i integrasjonsarbeid av innvandrerkvinner i Vennesla i Norge, med et fokus på deres aktiviteter som er helt eller delvis rettet mot innvandrere, og på hvilke måter innvandrerkvinner drar nytte av disse aktivitetene. Dette er en masterstudie som gjennomføres av Tonje Hagen, tilknyttet fakultetet for samfunnsvitenskap og departementet for global samfunnsutvikling og planlegging ved Universitetet i Agder, Kristiansand. Forsknings spørsmål inkluderer: Hvorfor deltar innvandrerkvinner i Frivilligsentralens aktiviteter, og hvilke forventninger har de til denne frivillige organisasjonen? Hvilke aktiviteter arrangerer Frivilligsentralen som er helt eller delvis rettet mot innvandrere, og på hvilke måter drar innvandrerkvinner nytte av aktivitetene, både ifølge kvinnene selv og frivillige? Hvilken betydning har såkalte portvakter for innvandrerkvinnene, og en gjensidig integreringsprosess som fremmer tverrkulturell forståelse mellom minoritetskvinner og majoritetsbefolkningen, både i og utenfor Frivilligsentralen? Hvilke utfordringer møter Frivilligsentralen, som kanskje hindrer dem i å tilby bedre støtte og hjelp til innvandrerkvinner? Hvilke faktorer med aktivitetene tiltrekker eller hindrer innvandrerkvinner fra å delta?

Masterstudent Tonje Hagen ønsker å samle relevant informasjon for prosjektet sitt (beskrevet over) både fra innvandrerkvinner og frivillige som er tilknyttet Frivilligsentralen i Vennesla. I tillegg vil det være interessant å intervju representanter fra kommunen, Voksenopplæringen og NAV, om hva slags inntrykk de har av Frivilligsentralens arbeid spesielt rettet mot innvandrere/innvandrerkvinner.

Derfor håper hun at du har anledning og lyst til å delta.

#### **Hva innebærer deltakelse i studien?**

Datainnsamling vil skje ved hjelp av tre ulike forskningsmetoder: personlige intervjuer, gruppeintervjuer og deltakende observasjon. Et intervju vil antagelig vare 20-30 min (en person). Gruppeintervju kan var opptil én time. Under intervjuer vil student, Tonje Hagen, følge en fleksibel intervjuguide og helst ta lydopptak (om du/dere som deltar godtar dette). Ellers vil informasjon bli skrevet ned i notatbok. Deltakende observasjon innebærer at Tonje Hagen vil delta i aktiviteter, snakke med andre deltakere, ta notater om hva som skjer osv. Om du velger å delta kan du selv bestemme om du vil delta i personlig intervju, gruppeintervju eller begge deler.

#### **Hva skjer med informasjonen om deg?**

Alle personopplysninger vil bli behandlet konfidensielt. Det er kun student, Tonje Hagen, og hennes veiledere ved UiA, Hanne Haaland og Hege Wallevik, som vil ha tilgang til personopplysninger under prosjektets levetid. Lydopptak vil oppbevares innelåst og beskyttet, slik at ingen uvedkommende vil få tilgang til det. Navneliste oppbevares adskilt fra andre data, slik at ingen skal kunne vite hvem som har sagt hva, selv om de får se deler av data (f.eks. svar fra intervjuer).

Ved publikasjon skal all informasjon anonymiseres. Prosjektdeltakere vil ikke kunne gjenkjennes.

Prosjektet skal etter planen avsluttes 7. juni 2017, det vil si én uke etter innlevering av masteroppgave. Alt datamaterialet skal anonymiseres eller slettes ved prosjektslutt. Anonymisert data kan bli arkivert hos NSD – Personvernforbundet for forskning ([www.nsd.uib.no](http://www.nsd.uib.no)).

### **Frivillig deltakelse**

Det er frivillig å delta i studien, og du kan når som helst trekke ditt samtykke uten å oppgi noen grunn. Dersom du trekker deg, vil alle opplysninger om deg bli anonymisert, og kan ikke brukes i masteroppgaven.

### **Asylsøkere (for de det gjelder)**

Om du ønsker å delta i masterstudien, eller ikke, vil ikke påvirke søknaden din hos UDI på noen som helst måte. Informasjonen du gir i intervju vil heller ikke bli sendt til UDI. Etter du har godtatt å delta i studien, så kan du trekke deg igjen (ombestemme deg) når som helst, uten at dette har betydning for asylsøknaden din eller forholdet ditt med UDI.

Dersom du ønsker å delta eller har spørsmål til studien, ta kontakt med:

Masterstudent Tonje Hagen: [REDACTED]

Veileder Hanne Haaland: [REDACTED]

Veileder Hege Wallevik: [REDACTED]

Studien er meldt til Personvernombudet for forskning, NSD - Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS.

## **Samtykke til deltakelse i studien**

Jeg har mottatt informasjon om studien, og er villig til å delta

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(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)

Jeg samtykker til å delta i:

- ❖ Personlig intervju
  - ❖ Gruppeintervju
  - ❖ Deltakende observasjon
- Dvs. Du tillater Tonje å skrive notater om noe hun ser/hører fra deg, som hun finner interessant, dersom dere deltar på samme aktivitet, for å eventuelt bruke i masteroppgaven sin

**Kryss av ( X ) eller strek under for hva du ønsker.**