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Immigrant women's participation in a voluntary organization

A tool towards empowerment, recognition and social capital?



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This thesis is worth 40 study points

Summary

In Norway, many immigrant women from Oslo lack inclusion in mainstream society and employment (NOU 2011:14, p.82). This thesis was set out to explore how these struggles can be met through participation in a voluntary organization. The main research question was to investigate if participation in an organization called Stella – Red Cross Women’s center, have helped women increase their (1) competence, (2) social networks, and (3) recognition, that might help them to feel more included in the mainstream society. The study findings are based upon a random sample of registered participants and volunteers from Stella – Red Cross Women’s center, since August 2012. As I was interested to shed light on the women’s center from different perspectives, a mixed method research was conducted. Hence, quantitative and qualitative data was gathered between January and April 2016, through an online questionnaire and in-depth interviews. The thesis draws on Robert Putnam’s theory of social capital and Axel Honneth’s recognition theory. The findings suggest that most immigrant women have good experiences from their participation from the women’s center. This is illustrated through the collected data, where many women claim that their participation on Stella have helped them to increase their competence, social networks and confidence. Based on my findings, I argue that voluntary organizations might work as an alternative integration arena for immigrant women and as a channel for participation and inclusion in society.

Key words:

Immigrant women, voluntary organization, integration, social capital, recognition, empowerment

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1. INTRODUCTION

The integration of immigrants is not a new issue, but it is becoming more pressing because of the large influx of immigrants that have entered Europe during the past two decades. Migration is a global, powerful force for change not easily controlled by governments. Norway is part of this global migration picture, which have affected the composition of the population in several ways and contributed to a rapid population growth. Today, as of 1th of January 2016, 848 000 person's resident in Norway are either immigrants (699 000) or born in Norway to two immigrant parents (150 000) (SSB). These groups combined make up 16% of Norway's population, with nearly 33% of the population in Oslo having an immigrant background (SSB). This is a very high increase of immigrants throughout the years, compared to the population in 1970 where only 1,5% of the population was foreign-born (Meld.St.6, 2012-2013, p.17). Alongside the rapid growth of the nation's ethnic immigrant population, a crucial question is how immigrants and their descendants can become part of the receiving society, and how the state and civil society should facilitate this process (Castles & Miller, 2009, p.245). Consequently, debates concerning integration, immigration policy, multiculturalism and national identity has flourished in Norway the recent years (Eriksen, 2013, p.1).

The White Paper to the Norwegian Parliament *En helhetlig integreringspolitikk – mangfold og felleskap (A comprehensive integration policy: diversity and community)* deals with opportunities and challenges of being a country and a society with immigration (Meld.St.6, 2012-2013). One important goal within the Government's integration policy concern how all people who live in Norway should be able to utilize their resources and participate in the community. Inhabitants in Norway have rights and obligations and must be provided with incentives and opportunities to participate and contribute in the labor market and in the society as a whole. Although the majority of immigrants in Norway are in employment, speak Norwegian language and participate in a variety of social arenas, immigrant women (especially from Asia and Africa) remain a vulnerable group (Meld.St.6, 2012-2013, p.9). These women have in common that they lack inclusion in mainstream society and employment, something that reflect upon poor language skills, few Norwegian friends and loneliness (NOU 2011:14, p.82). Unless the documented and experienced problems get resolved, the challenges we face today, combined with increased immigration, can lead to a corresponding growth in the

number of immigrants who stand outside the society and working life. Failed integration is a significant risk to the society and rise mistrust and rejection of common values, as well as it creates a basis for radicalization and increased conflicts (NOU 2011:14, p.19).

One strategy listed in the Official Norwegian Report to prevent this is by facilitating meeting places and activities in local communities, where minority and majority population can interact:

“Voluntary organizations promote interpersonal trust, understanding and contribute to create democratic society. Participation in voluntary organizations creates opportunities for shared experiences, friendships, identity and community awareness. Participation in these arenas might establish social networks and be important for participation in other arenas, such as education and employment” (Meld.St.6, 2012-2013, p.123)

The statement illustrates non-governmental and voluntary organizations as important channels for exercising influence and arenas to help build trust. Stella - Red Cross Women's center, is one example of a meeting place mentioned above and the organization that will constitute my study case. Stella is a women center run by volunteers, and it aims to strengthen and boost women and their possibilities to develop themselves and their competence, recognition and participation in the society as a whole (Stellakvinner, 2016).

There are great expectations for the voluntary sector potential, but limited knowledge about the extent and effects of the work already done in the sector (Hagelund & Loga, 2009, p.77). I want to find out if Stella, a voluntary organization in Oslo, can help to empower and develop immigrant women in Oslo.

1.1 Research objective

One of Stella – Red Cross Women’s center’s main intension’s is to strengthen women’s opportunities to develop themselves and participate in the mainstream society (Stellakvinnesenter, 2016). The overall objective of this study is to analyze how immigrant women from the developing world are empowered and integrated in their hosting country through their participation in voluntary organizations.

Bearing in mind the previous discussion, I want to find out *if* and *how* a voluntary organization can work as an alternative integration arena for women with immigrant background, and how this affects them. On the basis of Stella’s slogan: “competence self-development, achievement and joy”, I want to find out if Stella can help to empower immigrant women in the Norwegian society.

My main research question is:

- Has participation in Stella help immigrant women gain (1) new competence, (2) social network and (3) recognition that might help them to feel more included in the mainstream society?

1.2 Theoretical framework

The thesis draws upon two main theories, namely Robert Putnam’s (2000, 1993) social capital theory and Axel Honneth’s theory about recognition (1995). Putnam is credited for examining the role of voluntary organizations as an integrative force in the society. His research is relevant for this research as voluntary organizations and civil society plays a fundamental role in it. Honneth, on the other hand, have derived a model of how to create the conditions for social inclusion as the basis of a just society. He proposes three positive “patterns of recognition” necessary to achieve self-actualization and to develop a positive relation to-self: love, rights and solidarity. His theory is relevant in this research as members of marginalized groups, like immigrant women, are vulnerable to experience the denial of recognition.

1.3 Methodology

Since I was interested to shed light on a voluntary organization from different perspectives, a mixed method research was conducted. This approach allowed me to send out an online questionnaire to all the registered participants at Stella – Red Cross Women’s center, before I conducted in-depth interviews to make my data collection more robust. Collecting both quantitative and qualitative data enriched this research with appreciated information, including both objective data from the online survey and subjective understandings from the immigrant women’s interviews.

1.4 Structure

The thesis consists of six chapters. In this first chapter, I intended to provide the broad as well as the specific contextual background of immigrant women’s situation in Norway and how voluntary organizations might work as a corner stone in the society. In the second chapter, a brief background information about Stella - Red Cross Women’s center and previous literature about integration and voluntary organizations are presented and discussed. In chapter three, I will present relevant theories for interpreting my collected data in order to answer my research questions. In Chapter four I justify and reflect upon the applied methodology, research design and methodological considerations I have done to achieve my findings. In Chapter five I present my findings and analyzes of immigrant women’s experiences from their participation in a voluntary organization, such as Stella – Red Cross women’s center. This will include topics related to my research questions like immigrant women’s competence, recognition and social capital and its relation to a voluntary organization. Finally, in chapter six, the main statements and conclusion are discussed.

2 BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will start with a brief presentation of Stella Red Cross Women's center, from now on called Stella, providing a backdrop of the case study. Further, some international and national studies and surveys exist concerning literature related to my research topic. I will start to introduce the concept of integration and how the voluntary sector plays a fundamental role in the society. After that, theory about empowerment and its relevance toward this research is presented.

2.1 Oslo Red Cross Women field & Stella

One of Red Cross's visions is that all women in Oslo should be a part of a safe and inclusive society where everyone has the opportunity to participate. Consequently, a lot of Red Cross's work involves reaching out to immigrant women. A new initiative, Oslo Red Cross Woman Field (Oslo Røde Kors Kvinnefeltet), was created in 2009 and aims to gather women, and develop and strengthen services related their needs in Oslo.

“Common for all the activities in the Woman field is that we [Red Cross] facilitate women to create new networks that can strengthen their ability to participate in society, social and in the workplace. This will contribute to a greater inclusion of women with immigrant background”

(Red Cross Annual Report 2011, p.8)

Stella opened the doors the 1th of February 2012, and is a part of the Woman Field in Oslo. Stella's main intension is to act like a helping hand to women, and strengthen their opportunities to develop themselves and participate in the mainstream society. The target group is mainly immigrant women, but ethnic Norwegian women are welcome to participate or volunteer. In reality it is, however, mostly immigrant women visiting the center. Participation at Stella is free and the center is open every day during the week. They offer a variety of activities in line with the participant's needs and at present, their services include:

- Employment counseling, Norwegian and English language education, computer classes, yoga and different courses on economy, entrepreneurship etc;

- An opportunity to work as a volunteer in a café – Stella Café;
- An opportunity to participate in a mentor and internship program;
- A place to socialize (Stella as a meeting place)

Every woman that enters Stella for the first time gets the chance to receive one-to-one guidance about their situation and their motivation for visiting. The guide offers individual support as well as information, and helps towards the development of one's goals and interests. It is also exchanged information about suitable courses and activities that can help the specific women to integrate into the Norwegian society.

2.2 What is integration?

The steady growth of immigrants in Norway have shaped our society into becoming multicultural. Due to this, various government institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have a specific focus on integration. A continuing problem in the ongoing public debate about integration is, however, that one rarely says, or asks, what kind of integration we are discussing. Both politicians and bureaucrats all over Europe, talks about how important it is to “integrate” immigrants’, with no further qualifications. The term is well cited in previous literature and used in many different contexts. In this study, I therefore find it necessary to clarify *who* is supposed to get integrated to *what* and by *whom*.

Integration has since the origin of sociology been a central theme in the field and have its roots from the traditional and classic sociologist Emile Durkheim (1984). Durkheim used integration as a core concept in his search for conditions to achieve social solidarity and cohesion via the socialization of its members (Hagelund & Loga, 2009, p.16). Successful integration should work as counterweights to marginalization and social isolation in a modern society where traditional structures were changing rapidly. He concluded that people's beliefs, values, and norms make up a collective consciousness, a shared way of understanding each other and the world. Integration in this sense partly refer to how individuals were part of a whole, and partly to the actual process of the unity (Hagelund and Loga, 2009, p.16). According to Brochmann (2002, p.30) integration in a sociological context include learning and adopting into the values of the society. She argues how this process connects the individual to the society, both

economic and social, and creates recognition and loyalty (2002, p.30). Opposite to integration is marginalization or exclusion, a process where individuals or communities of people are blocked or denied access to various rights, opportunities or resources that is normally available to members of a different group. Marginalization is not only a risk to the individual itself, but also to the community as a whole (Brochmann, 2002, p.31). The social aspect of citizenship and integration is important in this study as being recognized, as an equal member of the society might be essential for immigrant women to feel included and participate in the society. In light of our society's rapid development, especially in connection with increased immigration and an increasingly diverse population, is Durkheim's classic question of what underlies social cohesion as relevant as in his own time.

As a political concept, integration often refers to one of several possible strategies states might adopt towards minorities in the society (Eriksen, 1992, quoted in Hagelund & Loga, 2009, p.16). The term is used in several ways with different content depending on what kind of society one wants to create. The general integration approach adopted at the European level is one of mutual rights and obligations between the legally residing immigrants and the host country. As stated in the Communication on Immigration, Integration and Employment:

“Integration should be understood as a two-way process based on mutual rights and corresponding obligations of legally resident third country nationals and the host society which provides for full participation of the Immigrant” (COM, 2003, p.336, as cited in Lodovici, 2010, p.4).

In Norway, this implies on the one hand that it is the responsibility of our country to ensure that the formal rights of immigrants are in place in such a way that the individual has the possibility of participating in economic, social, cultural and civic life. On the other hand, immigrants must respect fundamental law, norms and values of the host society and participate actively in the integration process, without having to abandon their own identity (COM, 2003, p.336, as cited in Lodovici, 2010, p.4).

In the Norwegian approach, “integration” often brings up a term concerning equality between majority and minority and can be situated as the “golden middle way” between

assimilation and segregation (Hagelund & Loga, 2009, p.16). An assimilation culture refers to the process whereby a minority group gradually adopts to the customs and attitudes of the prevailing culture and customs (Brochmann, 2002, p.31, Hagelund & Loga, 2009, p.16, Eriksen, p.7). The opposite of this is a segregated society, the policy of keeping people of different races, religions etc. separated from each other, with restricted contact and cultural exchanges (Hagelund & Loga, 2009, p.16).

According to Eriksen (2013, p.6) the Norwegian government try to foster a fair and just integration policy that includes both old and new Norwegians, by striking a balance between equality and difference. This balance is, however, not unproblematic. Eriksen (2013, p.7) argues that the thrust of Norwegian policies toward immigrants has trended in the direction of equality, sometimes understood as assimilation. Eriksen (2013) makes use of Gullestad (2002) which considers integration a difficult question and concept as the social fields of integration are constantly changing. Gullestad (2002, p.62, 82) argues that it is within the majority's power to determine when a person is sufficiently integrated, and that cultural emphasis on "imagined sameness" is a core component in Norwegian discourse on integration. To frame the understanding of equality and freedom, Gullestad's provocation point is that *likhet*, "equality", means rather "alikehood" or "sameness", while difference (that is, a consequence of equal opportunity) is easily perceived as hierarchy and injustice (2002, 46). According to Gullestad it is commonplace in the Norwegian discourse on immigrants that the latter should "become like us", frequently without any reflection on the content of this proposition. Immigrants are not a homogenous group, and prejudiced categorizations can result to discrimination and stigmatization.

2.2.1 Integration through citizenship

Central to one argument in this study is the notion of civil society as an important sphere in which citizenship is practiced. Citizenship helps create and strengthen a sense of belonging to one's adopted country, and can therefore be an important tool for immigrant women's participation in the society. Simplified, we can distinguish between two dimensions of citizenship where the first one is from a legal aspect. Citizenship as a legal status is defined by civil, political and social rights. Citizenship is, however, not merely defined by certain rights and duties; it is also used as a term for

social and cultural identity. This means, according to Brockman, citizenship concerns people's sense of belonging and recognition as an equal member of one's community (2002, p.31). Similarly, Nyhagen-Predelli & Halsaa argue how feminist scholars suggest an idea regarding citizenship as not limited to status, rights and duties, and propose a broader understanding of citizenship as practice (2016, p.60). Citizenship as a practice is closely related towards an individuals' identities, their actual participation (or non-participation) in different spheres and their sense of belonging to the smaller or larger communities in which they live (2016, p.60).

In this broader view of citizenship, civil society, including its array of voluntary organizations ranging from community groups, advocacy groups, charities, sports associations, religious organizations and social movements, is one of the major spheres in which citizenship is lived and negotiated (Nyhagen-Predelli & Halsaa, 2016,p.60). Similarly, Eriksen argues that the leaders of the society must state that, "being Norwegian is not a question of racial or ethnic origin but of citizenship and commitment to the common good for society" (2013, p.13). Ideally, integration is a two-way process, which results in changes within both immigrant communities and the receiving society.

While on the other hand the most important goal for the Norwegian government's integration policy is to ensure that all people who live in Norway are able to utilize their resources and participate in the community (NOU 2011, p.14). This means that all groups in the society should have equal obligations and opportunities to contribute and participate in public venues, while having the freedom to uphold religious and cultural characteristics. In other words, choose not to assimilate culturally into the receiving society. To achieve this the government encourages authorities and professional sectors to make greater use of the voluntary sector in its work, which will be further explained in the next section (NOU 2011, p. 124-125).

2.3 The voluntary sector in Norway: a brief overview

Volunteering as a subject of research has received much attention in the past decade or so. Given the size and the scope of the volunteering culture in Norway and elsewhere, this focus is not misplaced. According to Nyhagen Predelli (2008, p. 939), “Norway has a long-standing historical tradition of contact and cooperation between civil-society – in the form of voluntary associations- and the welfare state”

First, volunteerism has an intrinsic value in Norway as it plays an important role in how the society is structured (Meld.St.6, 2012-2013, p.123). Today, it is estimated that it exists approximately 100 000 voluntary organizations in Norway (FrivillighetNorge, 2015) and 61% of the population (over 16 years old) contribute with voluntary work annually (Folkestad, Christensen, Strømsnes and Selle, 2015, p.25). This is the highest percentage ever recorded worldwide and Norway share the first place with Sweden (FrivillighetNorge, 2015). The organizations are usually categorized within sectors, such as sports, culture, children and youth, religion and belief, charities, solidarity, minority organizations and political parties and interest groups. They create engagement, venues for interaction and bridges the individual and the public and private sector (FrivillighetNorge, 2015).

Through national surveys gathered between 1998 and 2014, Folkestad, Christensen, Strømsnes and Selle (2015) have analyzed the level and scope of voluntary work in Norway. Some of the results from their analysis show that the voluntary sector in Norway is characterized by both stability and change (Folkestad, Christensen, Strømsnes and Selle, 2015, p.96). Stability can be found when it comes to the level of participation, measured as the number of volunteers, time spent on volunteering and the size of the “core group” in the voluntary sector (2015, p.72). The analysis also imply voluntary participation relates to social resources. Men participate more than women do and the most common age group is 35-49 years. Also high income, high education and being married/ partner separate the volunteers from those who do not take part in volunteering. Although the study shows an overview over the voluntary sector in Norway, is it little information regarding the nature of immigrant’s participation.

Wollebæk and Enjolra’s report from 2010 discuss social cohesion and inclusion

regarding immigrants' volunteering experiences and their individual characteristics to those of the general population. They found that ethnic minorities in Norway are strongly underrepresented in almost all organizations types, except churches/religious organizations and immigrant associations (2010, p. 15). Although ethnic minorities have a higher representation in religious organizations, is it a concern that such networks often characterize by low diversity and internal orientation. As a result, they might remain "isolated" without links to other organizations or groups in the Norwegian society. The barriers to participate in the civic society are associated with individual factors such as age and length of residence in the country and language and income (Wollebæk & Enjolras, 2010, p.18).

Despite lower and weaker participation in voluntary organizations, Wollebæk and Sivesind (2010, p.80-81) found that a high proportion of the immigrant population finds associations important. This means that it might be tough for immigrants to enter the voluntary sector in Norway, even if they want to be included. Unfulfilled desires among immigrant women's memberships in associations and opportunities for participation in this group, brings us over to the next aspect of the voluntary sector; namely its integration effect.

2.3.1 Integration through volunteerism?

One central question in the Norwegian immigrant politics is how to incorporate immigrants into the traditional association life as a way to include this group due to weak participation in other arenas in the majority society. The subject has political relevance as the latest White Paper "From the refugee camps to employment – an effective integration policy", encourages authorities and professional sectors to make greater use of immigrant organizations and communities in its overall work (Meld. St. 30, 2015–2016, p.73). The role of the voluntary sector as an alternative supplier of services to the population is highlighted as an important supplement to public services.

Christensen and Christensen explain that there is a distinction between voluntary organizations that work *for* immigrants and voluntary organizations that work *with* immigrants (2006, p.28). In organizations that work with immigrants, the group consists of both volunteers and participants. Everyone work together towards a shared

goal, which not explicitly aims towards integration (although it can be a positive effect). In organizations working for immigrants the efforts are, nevertheless more directly aimed towards integration and immigrants needs and challenges in the society. Stella is considered an organization where the main purpose is to empower women's opportunity to develop themselves and help them to participate more in society. Hence, for immigrant women Stella might work as an entering ticket to the "voluntary Norway." Here they can get their first experiences with a Norwegian non-governmental organization, its objectives and requirements. They can participate in activities and learn how to become volunteers with tasks and responsibilities.

As this research has a general focus on voluntary organizations "integration" effect due to increased competence, social network and recognition among immigrant women, Stella can be considered to work *for* immigrants in an "empowering" way. The term "empowerment" is, however, used in many different contexts so it is important to clarify what is implied by "empowerment" in this study.

2.4 Empowerment

One way of thinking about power is, according to Kabeer (1999, p.436), in the terms of the *ability to make choices*. To be disempowered means to be denied choice, while empowerment refers to "the processes by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability" (Kabeer, 1999, p.437). In other words, empowerment entails change. We can think about changes in the ability to exercise choice as a process of three inter-related dimensions: resources, agency and achievements (Kabeer, 1999, p.437).

The first dimension, resources, are the medium through which agency is exercised. In addition to material resources understood in an economic sense, are also human and social resources included which serve to enhance the ability to exercise choice (Kabeer, 1999, p.437). Resources in this broader sense of the word can be acquired through multiple social relationships such as in through family, friends, and market and in the community.

The second dimension of power relates to agency, “the ability to define one’s goals and act upon them” (Kabeer, 1999, p.438). Agency incorporates the meaning, motivation and purpose individuals bring to their activity, which Kabeer defines as ‘the power within’ (1999, p.438). This process includes, according to Kabeer decision-making, as well as less measurable manifestations of agency such as negotiation, deception and manipulation (1999, p.438). She describes agency having both positive and negative meanings. ‘Power to’ (Kabeer, 1999, p. 438) is a positive agency referring to people’s capacity to define their own life choices and to follow their own goals even in the situations where they face opposition from others. On the other side might ‘power over’ (Kabeer, 1999, p. 438), be used in a negative sense. These are the capacities of other actor(s) to supersede the agency of others through for example violence, coercion and threat.

The third and last dimension is the achievements, or outcomes of empowerment. By citing Sen (1985), Kabeer argues that resources and agency together constitute what Sen refers to as capabilities: the potential people have for living the lives they want. Nevertheless, people achieve and value ways of “being and doing” differently. Sen claims that when the failure to achieve valued ways of “being and doing” can be linked to laziness, incompetence or individual preferences and priorities, the issue of power is not relevant. It is only “when the failure to achieve one’s goals reflects some deep-seated constraint on the ability to choose that it can be taken as a manifestation of disempowerment” (Kabeer, 1999, p.438).

In another well-cited piece called “Working with women of color: an empowerment perspective” Gutiérrez’s (1990, p.150) describes how the process of empowerment occur on the personal, interpersonal and institutional levels. The aim of empowerment is to some extent similar to Kabeer’s (1999) definition, which include individuals chance to take action towards improving their life situations. Making use of existing literature, Gutiérrez describes four associated psychological changes that seem crucial for this change, moving individuals from apathy and despair to action.

Increasing self-efficacy is the first change, defined as a belief in one’s ability “to produce and to regulate events in one’s life (Bandura, 1982, p.122, quoted in Gutiérrez, 1990, p.150). The phenomenon is referred to concepts such as strengthening ego

functions, developing a sense of personal power or strength and developing a sense of mastery. The *second* change is the development of group consciousness. This involves, according to Gutiérrez, the development of an awareness on how political structures affect individual and group experiences (p.150). The group consciousness might create a sense of shared fate within the individual, or among members of a group or community. This awareness allows powerless persons to focus on the causes of their problems rather than on changing their internal subjective states (Gutiérrez, 1990, p.150).

Gutiérrez mentions *reduction of self-blame* as the third step in the process of empowerment. By attributing their problems to the existing power arrangements in society, clients are freed from feeling responsible for their negative situation. Self-blame is often associated with feelings of depression and immobilization, so the shift of focus allows people to feel less defective or deficient, and more capable of changing their situation. The fourth change involve a *personal responsibility for change* (Gutiérrez, 1990, p.150). This assumption counteracts some of the potentially negative results of reducing self-blame. Powerless persons with little concerns and responsibilities regarding their life situation may not invest their efforts in developing solutions unless they “assume some personal responsibility for future change” (Gutiérrez, 1990, p.150). Gutiérrez states that even though the changes are listed in a specific order, the process of empowerment is not a set list. The phases might be mixed around and occur differently. The changes can in other words happen simultaneously and enhance one another, whereas a woman developing self-efficacy may be more likely to assume personal responsibly for change (1990, p.150).

I find both Kabeer (1999) and Gutiérrez (1990) empowerment theories relevant for this reserach. While Kabeer stresses one’s ability to exercise choices through resources, agency and achievements, Gutiérrez discusses four necessary changes to achieve empowerment. Some, or all of the discussed choices and/or changes necessary to achieve empowerment, might be fundamental for immigrant women’s way into the Norwegian society. Women choose to visit Stella of their own free will, and by joining relevant activities, they take action to improve their life situation (Gutiérrez, 1990, p.149). By taking control of circumstances in their life and setting personal goals, immigrant women slowly start a empowerment process (Oxaal, 1997, p.6), working

towards helping themselves and others to boost the quality of their lives.

Oxaal (1997, p.6) suggests people not necessary “achieve empowerment” but rather that it is a continual process of growth and change that can occur throughout the life cycle. Oxaal stresses that we should look at it “as a bottom-up process rather than something that can be formulated as a top-down strategy” (1997, p.6). As women’s empowerment is subject to a fundamental shift in perceptions, it should have its root from below. To look at empowerment from this perspective means that development agencies cannot claim to “empower women”. Women must empower themselves – because no one else will do it for them.

To sum up, I started to present a brief background of Stella in order to present the study case of this research. Then, the concept of integration and how the voluntary sector plays a fundamental role in the society was demonstrated. I argue that this study deals with socio-economic integration through the voluntary sector, and that it is problematic to be integrated without the possibility to participate as full members in the society. Further, by offering a meeting place with activities aimed towards the development of one’s competence, social network and recognition, Stella works in an empowering way.

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter discusses the theoretical framework on which my study is embedded. It draws on Putnam's social capital theory and Honnet's theory about the struggle for recognition.

3.1 Robert Putnam, social capital and civic engagement

The civil society has been at the center of democratic theory ever since Alexis de Tocqueville's study of 19th century America revealed, "democracy works better and citizens are more engaged when people learn to cooperate within the civil society (de Toqueville, 2000, as cited in Kraus & Kvisto, 2015, p.183). During the decades after World War II, the importance of civil societies became a background of academic debates, revitalized through social capital theory. The scholar most credited for examining the role of voluntary organizations as integrative forces in the society is Robert Putnam. I have chosen to focus on Putnam's conceptualizing of social capital because of his emphasis on the civic society, which is a core concept in my study.

Putnam refer to social capital as "the ways in which our lives are made more productive by social tie's" (Putnam, 2000, p.19), and it includes "features of social life such as networks, norms, and trust that enable participants to work together to more effectively pursue shared objectives (Putnam, 1995, p.664-665). These social connections play a critical role in the ability of people to cooperate with each other and functions as "social glue" (Wollebæk, Selle & Lorentzen, 2000, p.89). Social capital is private *and* public good with benefits accruing not only to those people investing in social networks, but also to the entire community in the form of positive externalities (Putnam, 2000, p.20). Consequently, Putnam in particular brings the research agendas of civil society and social capital together. Civil society engagement in associations and clubs is, from Putnam's point of view, appreciated places to create and boost social trust, common values and norms of reciprocity. Civic society organizations, which includes my case study Stella, hence create an important place for the generation of social capital as it forms a protected environment where people can learn to cooperate, trust each other and learn necessary civic skills (Wollebæk, Selle & Lorentzen, 2000, p.89, Kraus

&Kvisto, 2015, p.183). Both the structural elements of engagement, social networks and the cultural elements of trust and values of solidarity, foster the social capital of a society. Hence, the amount of social capital arising from civil-society engagement works in favor for social integration and stability of a society.

Putnam was first known through his book “Making Democracy Work” (1993) where he questioned why some democratic governments succeed and other fail. By using the concept of social capital, Putnam offers empirical evidence to show the importance of civilian commitment in developing successful democratic societies. Putnam claim civil associations contribute to the effectiveness and stability of democratic government firstly because of their “internal” effects on individual members, and secondly because of the “external” effects towards the wider community (Putnam, 1993). By comparing different regions in Italy, Putnam found that it existed mutual trust between state and civil society in the Northern regions of the country. The Southern regions, however, was characterized by distrust and suspicion that hindered institutional reforms and development. Putnam suggested that the Northern regions higher degree of social capital were linked to their higher union activity (Putnam, 1993, p.121, 176). He concluded that participation in organizations and volunteerism could be defined as central sources of social capital, understood as reciprocity, honesty and trust among community groups (Putnam, 1993, p.173-174, Putnam, 2000, p.134-135) The more widespread such associations are in a society, the more likely it is that citizens will be able to cooperate to achieve common goods.

It is especially through Putnam’s famous, (and controversial) book “*Bowling alone*” (2000) that the term social capital has been generalized. His focus switched from how social capital was created and maintained in Italy, towards how social capital can deteriorate in a society. Putnam argues that the United States has undergone an unprecedented collapse in civic, social, associational and political life since the 1960s (2000, p.16). One of the reasons for the fallback is related to people spending less time in public social activities or associations where people who don’t know each other can come together. Consequently, there is less time for joining community groups and voluntary associations, socializing with neighbors, friends and even family as people spend more and more time in the office, commuting to work and watching TV alone (Putnam, 2000, p.247, 367). The United States fall in active union participation,

indicate a disintegration. This have, according to Putnam, negative consequences at the national level due to education, security, economy, health and democracy.

Putnam advocate a strengthening of the social capital as the solution to the modern dissolution trends in the society, and he argue that it's people's personal networks that make up the core of his theory of social integration. According to Wollebæk, Selle and Lorenzen ties to other people and connections to the social community is essential to be shaped as a social being in the society (2000, p.89). Voluntary organizations hence help to create, maintain and strengthen such comminutes regardless of external purposes. Individual participation in social networks can be essential to obtain basic needs for support, identity and a sense of recognition. They can also be a place to grasp knowledge and information that can result in mobility and connections to other groups in the society.

3.1.1 Social capital: Reciprocity, Honesty, and Trust

To provide a better understanding of the relationship between individual's participation in local networks and the positive effects on the community level, it is useful to clarify the relationship between the social capital's different components. Putnam divides social capital in three components: reciprocity, honesty and trust (2000, p.134-135). He argues that the touchstone for social capital is the principle of generalized reciprocity – "I'll do this for you now, without expecting anything immediately in return and perhaps without even knowing you, confident that down the road you or someone else will return the favor" (Putnam, 2000, p.134). Putnam claim that members of a community that follows the principle of generalized reciprocity, who keeps an eye on a friend's house or lend some coins to a stranger for a parking meter, will find that their self-interest is served.

The two next components, honesty and trust, lubricate the inevitable frictions of social life (Putnam, 2000, p.135). Social trust is a valuable community asset if, and only if, it is warranted. People are better off when they are honest towards each other, than when people fear betrayal and decline to cooperate. Putnam argues that social networks encourage honesty. It is, however, a big difference between honesty based on personal

experience like trusting a friend, and honesty based on a general community norm, like trusting someone whom you just met. Putnam distinguishes trust with what he calls “thick” and “thin” trust (Putnam, 2000, p.136, Wollebæk&Selle, 2002, p.33). While thick trust is embedded in personal relations that are strong, frequent and nested in wider networks, the thinner version refers to a generalized social trust between individuals who do not know each other very well, if at all. Although thick trust is important to maintain and strengthen social relations at the micro level, is thin trust more useful (Putnam, 2000, p.126). In our modern society is it an advantage to extend our radius of trust because it is difficult to know everyone in the society personally. This mean that we day-to-day are pushed into situations where we are dependent on cooperation and trust towards people we do not know. We have to trust people to drive on the right side of the road and that the coffee shops do not poison their coffee. People, who trust their fellow citizen, volunteer more often, contributes more to charity, participate more often in politics and community organizations, are more tolerant to immigrant’s view and are more likely to follow the law (Putnam, 2000, p.137). To summarize, “people who trust others are all-round good citizens, and those more engaged in community life are both more trusting and more trustworthy” (Putnam, 2000, p.137). Consequently, people that disengaged in the civic networks find themselves surrounded by troublemakers and feel less constrained to be honest to themselves.

3.1.2 Bridging and bonding social capital

Putnam argues that it exists different dimensions and forms of social capital, but that the perhaps most important one is the distinction between bridging and bonding social capital (Putnam, 2000, p.22). Bridging social capital refers to social connections, which are inclusive, and connects different groups. Bonding social capital is on the other hand exclusive and tends to help like-minded members within narrow groups to create and sustain their own inner solidarity. From a societal perspective have bridging social capital been viewed as the most beneficial social capital, as it connects people and creates unity. Bonding social capital tends to strengthen closed group identities. It may, however, be of value for oppressed and marginalized members of the society as it can maintain mutuality and solidarity within a specific group (Putnam, 2000, p.22-23). On

the other hand, bonding social capital can within for instance an immigrant network, limit the member's opportunities and create negative social capital. In-group bonding can reinforce and promote the norms and cultural codes found within the group that might make it more challenging to adjust to the host society's cultural codes. Nevertheless, Putnam argues that the two kinds of social capital, bonding and bridging, strengthen each other. Consequently, with the decline of the bonding capital comes the decline of the bridging capital leading to greater ethnic tensions.

The motivation to obtain both types of social capital can, according to Handy and Greenspan, draw people into networks that influence them to volunteer (or participate) for a variety of causes, both within an organization and beyond it (2009, p.960). Activities within an organization that reach out to the wider community can create a chance for members to form bridging connections, as well as increased reputation and visibility of the organization in the community. As P. E Becker and Dhingra (2001, p.320) authored, "when people volunteer within a congregation they not only to maintain the congregation, but also use the congregation as a vehicle to accomplish outreach and service beyond the congregation's own four walls" (Quoted in Handy & Greenspan, 2009, p.960). Although this quotation relates to religious congregations, I consider it relevant for voluntary organizations in general.

The significance of bridging network links Putnam to Granovetter's influential work called "the strength of weak ties" (Granovetter, 1973) where he discusses the relationships between strong and weak ties. Strong ties are interpersonal relationships, characterized by "the amount of time the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding) and the reciprocal services", i.e. a group of people who are close, bonded and spend considerable time together. Strong connections, towards for example relatives and close friends, display a high degree of redundancy because it is likely that your close friends also know each other. Weak ties, of which people have many of in a complex society, tend to comprise people who do not know each other very well. They may consist of former colleagues, acquaintances, friends of friends and so on. Granovetter's analyze of social networks found that persons who possess many weak ties have greater access to diverse information from the outside world, than people who are limited to a few strong ties (Granovetter 1973, p.1364, Kraus & Kvisto, 2015, p.183). Granovetter also points out that weak ties are more valuable because they give

access to information and resources beyond those available in our own social circle (1973, p.1360). Strong ties have, on the other side, greater motivation to be of assistance and are typically more easily available.

3.1.3 Social capital through voluntary organizations

The civilian networks play a key role in Putnam's definition of social capital. Putnam argues that it is through experiences of interaction face to face with other people from different backgrounds we learn to trust each other (Wollebæk & Selle, 2002, p.36). Voluntary associations represent one of the main arenas for interaction of this type, but the network's structure is also essential to determine how effectively social capital can be created and spread. Horizontal associations "bring together agents of equivalent status and power," while vertical associations "link unequal agents in asymmetric relations of hierarchy and dependence (Putnam, 1993, p.173). Nevertheless, our society exists of networks mixed with both horizontal and vertical associations, and as Putnam acknowledges, "even bowling teams have captains" (1993, p.173). Network of civic engagement linked to non-political leisure-activities like neighborhood associations, choral societies and sports clubs are promoted as the main source of social capital (Putnam, 1993, p.173). These organizations characterize less power and domination and promote cooperation and reciprocity between members. Another advantage with organizations in the local level is their bottom-up approach rather than top-down government strategies, which are often more vertical in nature. Putnam's differentiation between horizontal and vertical association reminds us of the importance of what kind of organization it is we are dealing with. Stella is not a civic network where the participants are equal members of the organization, but a place where a majority organization has established an offer for immigrant women. (Christensen and Christensen, 2006, p.28). Women who visit Stella will therefore become participants of a voluntary service run by volunteers, rather than equal members. This vertical, top-down structure might have impact for the formation of social capital.

3.2 Axel Honneth's struggle for recognition

The second theory I want to draw my work upon in this thesis is from Axel Honneth's work called "*The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*" (1995). The work of Honneth offers an anthropologically derived model of how to create the conditions for social inclusion as the basis of a just society, which is a goal Stella aim to share with their participants. One of the reasons I have chosen Honneth's theory about recognition is because members of marginalized groups are vulnerable to experience the denial of recognition. Andersen point out how one of the causes is "the worth of their culture or way of life, the dignity of their status as persons, and the inviolability of their physical integrity" (in Honneth, 1995, p.x). Consequently, I consider immigrant women to fall under the category of a marginalized group, although Honneth not specifically talk about immigrants in his theory. Their past and on-going struggles throughout the world can indeed be understood as struggles for recognition.

Recognition theories begin with the assumption that human identity is intersubjective (Anderson, 1995, xiii- xiv). This means that the self emerges through interactions with others and as a result, we become who we understand ourselves to be, through social relations. Honneth's subjectivity within his theory is an advantage in this study, as I want to explore immigrant women's feelings and beliefs around a specific voluntary organization.

Honneth draws particularly from Hegel that a just society refers to the capacity of people to fully and freely self-actualize. He proposes three positive "patterns of recognition" necessary to achieve self-actualization and to develop a positive relation-to- self: love, rights and solidarity (Honneth, 1995, p.92-93). In doing so, Honneth aims to explain and justify the importance of social relationships to the development and maintenance or a person's identity. The experience of (1) "love" enables self-confidence, access to (2) "universal legal rights" enables self-respect and receiving acknowledgement of one's social value or (3) "solidarity" among others supports self-esteem (Honneth, 1995, p.129). In setting down this three principles of recognition, Honneth has worked towards providing a theory for normative and social change

through outlining conditions of interaction within which human beings can feel confident of attaining a state of personal dignity and integrity.

My objective will be to examine and summarize the utility of Honneth's three forms of recognition and explain why they might be relevant to immigrant women (that of different reasons have left their original home country).

3.2.1 Love

The first mode of recognition termed "love" refers to our physical needs and emotions by others. Honneth locates love in our primarily relationships like parent-child, intimate partner and close friends (Honneth, 1995, p.95). He keeps, however, his focus on early parent-child interaction. If our first relationship to others is successful, "infants gradually acquire a fundamental faith in their environment and, concomitantly, a sense of trust in their own bodies as reliable sources of signals for their own needs" (Anderson, 1995, p.xiii). Honnet has, however, received some criticism for isolating "love-based-recognition" within the family, away from broader social relations. Connely (2010) suggest that this misleadingly impose that interactions in the so-called "private sphere" are not influenced by and influencing of public, political considerations (Connely, 2010 in Hamer, 2013, p.488). Hamer (2013) also criticize Honnet's assumption about the development of self-confidence in infancy. He argues that humans have an ongoing need for experiences including love-based-recognition (Hamer, 2013, p.489).

In broadening what I consider Honneth's restricted discussion of love, I make the assumption that positive emotional connections are indeed present and important in the public sphere. Honneth argue that relationships are places for complex interactions and I would argue that emotional "confirmation", "affective approval" and "encouragement" (Honneth, 1995, p.95) are common experiences in the everyday world of work and society. As a result, I link the presence of love-based recognition as part of the interactions and friendships finding place at Stella.

If love is provided, one develops self-confidence. Fundamental self-confidence is, according to Honneth, the structural basis for morality and makes the individual able to communicate and participate successfully in other social relations. This is because we

trust the people we love to maintain affection, assuring that one's needs will be met since we feel valued of the other person. On the other hand, people experience their self-confidence to be undermined if they are a subject to physical or physiological abuse, such as rape. Violations like that can result in lasting damage to one's basic self-confidence (learned through love). It can also result in loss of trust in oneself and the world; one cannot longer be assured one can autonomously coordinate one's own body (Honneth, 1995, p.132). Honneth acknowledge that many things can go wrong in such primary relationships, but the outcome, when they are successful, is a mutual recognition of independence "supported by an affective confidence in the continuity of shared concern" (1995, p.107).

3.2.2 Rights

The second mode of recognition termed "rights" refers to the respect for persons implied in modern legal relations. Honneth argue that being an active and responsible agent in one's own life generates self-respect, and one can only be fully agentive when one possesses universal rights. To be the bearer of rights one must, according to Hamer fulfill two conditions (2013, p.491). First, one must recognize norms and regulations that apply to all the members in the society. Secondly, one must be eligible to appeal to the law to claim one's rights within this framework. Hence, Honneth explains that in modern societies you have to be socially recognized as a member of the community to achieve rights. This means that self-respect is developed only if the individual is recognized as an autonomous legal subject, who is ascribed the same moral sanity as all others (Honneth, 1995, p.114).

Honneth makes use of Joel Feinberg to show why being accorded rights are crucial to self-respect. Feinberg discuss, "...what is called "human dignity" may simply be the recognizable capacity to assert claims" (Feinberg, in Hayden 2001, p.179). This demonstrates that one of the biggest values of rights, according to Feinberg, is the ability to make claims. However, in order to make a claim, you need to know that you have the right to claim a right. The object of respect (including self-respect) is an agent's capacity to demand or claim just treatment (Anderson, 1995, p.x.).

Consequently, when one experiences exclusion or the denial of one's rights, one's social integrity is at stake, and one's self-respect is jeopardized. Feinberg explains,

“respect for persons may simply be respect for their rights”, so you cannot have either of it without the other (Feinberg, in Hayden, 2001, p.182). Hence legal recognition is about the universal and equal treatment of each and everybody. To be recognized as an equal member of the community of rights provides people with self-respect and makes it possible for them to make claims on equal terms with others.

3.2.3 Solidarity

Solidarity is recognition that acknowledges an individual’s contribution to the collective. This third mode of recognition identifies that humans have an ongoing need for social-esteem (solidarity) that allows them to relate positively to their personal traits and abilities (Honneth, 1995, p.121). We live in a society with a strengthened pluralism and individualism that have resulted in an increased need for social appreciation of individually chosen lifestyles and ways of living. Unlike legal recognition which is bound up to view yourself entitled to the same equal treatment as everyone else, self-esteem involves a sense of what it is that makes a person unique, special and (in Hegel’s term) “particular” (Honneth, 1995, p.122). It is our particular qualities that characterize us into who we are. The characteristics that define us cannot, however, be based on only a set of trivial or negative characteristics. What distinguishes us from each other must be something valuable (Honneth, 1995, p.125).

Honneth links the particularity of self-esteem in modern societies against the concept of solidarity and social worth because it “allows individuals to attain...a feeling of group pride or collective honor” (Honneth, 1995, p.127). Solidarity, then, is best achieved inside a group with shared goals in a society which makes it possible to get to know each other’s uniqueness as meaningful to collectively shared values and practice.

Unlike in pre-modern societies where status was measured in terms of honor, is one’s esteem today developed through our abilities, talents and accomplishments. What happens then if people are taken for granted, or not applauded or recognized for their personal achievements or efforts? In modern societies, relations of esteem are in permanent struggle. The kind of disrespect found in this third mode of recognition is involved when one’s social group is not appreciated for their form of life or way of

faith (Honneth, 1995, p.134). Such disrespect robs members of the group from honor and dignity as well as their chance to attribute social value to their own abilities. A lack of engagement or relationships of solidarity can also result in isolation and potential vulnerability to persecution as an outsider or non-contributing member. Experiences like mentioned above can in our case deprive immigrant women's potential of taking a positive view of themselves. Having the sense that one has nothing of value to offer is to lack any basis for developing a sense of one's own identity.

3.2 Immigrant's claim to recognition

Every day, immigrant women are placed in situations where they are approached and asked questions. Mutual recognition is one of the most fundamental types of social interaction and it influence immigrant women's daily experience of recognition, and sense of belonging in the host society. Honneth stresses that these valuable exchanges enable interactions and thus an understanding and awareness of ourselves and our relationships to others in society. Most immigrant women that immigrate to Norway enter a country with a new language and culture. The struggle to be understood and communicate one's needs or desires becomes obvious.

Many of them are left to understand unspoken words, gestures, movements and body language in society, and might experience frustration as a lack of mutual understanding. As Honneth argues, experiences like this might threaten one's self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem (Andersen, in Honneth 1995, p.xix). All the three forms of recognition are crucial for the development of a positive attitude towards oneself. It is, however, important to have in mind that recognition through love, rights and solidarity not are separated and mutually exclusive. We can find each type of recognition within different aspects and stages of our lives. This means that our needs for recognition through love do not suddenly stop. This makes Honnets theory available to interrogate several social settings, like a voluntary organization for immigrants.

As previous research has showed, non-Western women in Norway struggle to feel recognized as a result of poor inclusion in mainstream society and working life (NOU 2011:14, p.82). My aim is to investigate if and how Stella Red Cross Women center

work as a meeting place for women where they can gain recognition either through affective care, universal rights and/or a sense of solidarity. Can Stella be a place for immigrant women to gain knowledge about the adaptation to a new society where one is dependent on being understood by others? By allowing the immigrant women at Stella Red Cross to raise their voices, I hope to find out if the “struggles” are real and whether a voluntary organization can work as a tool against them. My argument would be that all the three modes of recognition are essential for women’s participating in the mainstream society. Immigrant women will not engage fully if they lack a sense of warmth and affection, they will struggle to participate equally if they are not respected as rights-holders; and they will not have a real impact unless there is mutual esteem and solidarity and a sense of shared purpose.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology used while conducting research on immigrant women's experiences with the voluntary organization Stella. It outlines research strategies, methods and procedures followed in this study. With the purpose of justifying the appropriateness of the particular approaches I selected to address my research questions, I want to give the reader a better understanding of my findings and conclusions. I will start to present the research design and the appropriateness of the methodology and methods used for data collection. The following part will elaborate on the sampling procedures, how data have been collected and strategies adopted for the data analysis. Finally, limitations and ethical considerations applied in this research will be mentioned.

4.2 Research objective

The overall objective of this study is to analyze how immigrant women from the developing world are empowered and integrated in their hosting country through their participation in voluntary organizations. Stella's purpose is to strengthen women's opportunities by developing themselves in order to participate in the mainstream society. How does this happen in reality? How effective they are in their mission?

I want to find out *if* and *how* a voluntary organization can work as an alternative integration arena for women with immigrant background, and how this affects them. On the basis of Stella's slogan: "competence self-development, achievement and joy", I want to find out if Stella can help to empower immigrant women in the Norwegian society. My main research question is:

- Has participation in Stella help immigrant women gain (1) new competence, (2) social network and (3) recognition that might help them to feel more included in the mainstream society?

4.3 The case – Stella Red Cross Women’s center

As a starting point for this research, I conducted a review of literature in order to narrow down my research topic and obtain the theoretical and methodological framework to guide the development of my research proposal. Firstly, I knew that I wanted to include integration, namely integration of immigrant women and the struggles that follow in this process. Integration is, however, a broad concept difficult to measure. With personal experiences within voluntary work, I realized therefore that exploring the relationship between immigrant women linked to a voluntary organization with the purpose of empowering them into the Norwegian society would make an interesting fit. As a result, I decided to contact different voluntary organizations. I received several rejections due to the organizations lack of capacity and time, although many of them found the project interesting. The project manager of Stella was nevertheless interested if I could provide her with quantitative information from the participants. I agreed to this and we started our corporation August 2015.

4.3.1 Case studies

The contextual setting that my research is based on enabled me to easily choose a type of research design to follow, namely a descriptive case study design. Case studies is a frequently used design type in social science, and preferred within both quantitative and qualitative research. The basic case study entails a detailed and intensive analysis of a single case, such as a workplace or organization or community (Bryman, 2012, p, 67-68). This design relates to my study as all the collected data present detailed information about women that have participated and/or volunteered at the women center Stella. Said in other words, specific information collected from an intensive examination about a specific group in a certain setting.

It is challenging to generalize empirical data from one single case in the sense that the findings are limited to the case itself. However, according to Yin cases are often selected because they are informational rich and retain a holistic and real-world perspective (2014, p.4). They give insight about a phenomenon, rather than an empirical generalization from sample to the population. I find Stella not only interesting in itself; the organization also provides an illustration of a socio-economic integration initiative

under the auspices of a voluntary organization. The findings from my participant's experiences regarding the center may be valuable for others interested in integration initiatives, and the connection between Norway's voluntary sector and immigrant population. Knowledge increases understanding and can hence provide better conditions for immigrant's inclusion and participation in Norway.

4.4 Mixed methods and triangulation

It is normal to distinguish between two different methodological approaches in research, namely a qualitative or quantitative approach. This study is based upon a combination of both approaches so-called mixed methodology. The choice behind the methodology is linked to my research questions, which according to Creswell should weigh heavily finding the optimal approach (2015, p.15). Creswell (2015, p.2) defines mixed methods research as "an approach to research in the social, behavioral, and health sciences in which the investigator gathers both quantitative (close-ended) and qualitative (open-ended) data, integrates the two, and then draws interpretations based on the combined strengths of both sets of data to understand research problems". While there has been a growth in the amount of mixed methods research, not all writers support its use. The objections to mixed methods tend to be the result of a view that "there are epistemological and ontological impediments to the combination of quantitative and qualitative research" (Bryman, 2012, p.651). I therefore find it important to acknowledge that it exist major differences between quantitative and qualitative research, but I argue that it is essential not to exaggerate them.

It exists several ways of combining quantitative and qualitative research, and I chose to answer my research questions with the method called triangulation. According to Bryman, triangulation "refers to the traditional view that quantitative and qualitative research might be combined to triangulate findings in order that they may be mutually corroborated (2012, p.633). One of the main reasons behind adopting more than one method or source of data to my study was to shed light on the organization from different dimensions/perspectives. First, an online questionnaire was sent out because I wanted to give every participant in Stella a voice and an opportunity to express their

thoughts, and *if* they found the center useful. The questionnaire provided the research with numerical and objective data. Secondly, three interviews were conducted to gain a deeper subjective understanding about *how* they felt Stella had helped them strengthen their life situation or not. The qualitative interviews were conducted to check, correct and assists in explaining and interpreting the findings of the quantitative study.

Using mixed methods allowed me as a researcher to use multiple styles of expression such as words, numbers, and multiple ways of thinking by combining inductive and deductive reasoning (Bryman, 2012, p.36). It made my data collection more robust. The combination of quantitative and qualitative research, at a more specific level, provided the study with two different perspectives. While one is drawn from close-ended response data (quantitative), is the other drawn from open-ended personal data (qualitative) (Creswell, 2015, p.15). This helped me obtain a more comprehensive view and gave me an insight on on how participation on Stella have helped women to increase new competence, recognition and social networks.

4.5 Sampling and recruitment

Sampling in mixed methods refers to the procedures for selecting participants in both the quantitative and qualitative research. Questions of size and the nature of participants occur. This study was conducted in Norway's capital Oslo, given that the vast majority of immigrants are settled there (SSB). In my case, the focus was to explore standpoints of participants belonging to a defined organization in a specific context. In view of that, the criteria for inclusion included (1) being an immigrant¹ woman, (2) living in Norway and (3) registration at Stella - Red Cross Women's center. Being a visitor at the center is not enough; registration is needed. I received help from Stella's project manager in the recruitment process for the questionnaire. She gave me insight and access to a confidential document including 1028 names and e-mails of registered participants since August 2012. My sampling was therefore random because each member of the organization had an equal chance to participate. Before sending out the survey, I went

¹ Persons born abroad of two foreign-born parents and four foreign-born grandparents (SSB)

through the e-mails checking for typical error mistakes like double spaces and missing commercial at's (@).

In order to identify participants for the qualitative follow up sample, I made use of a popular technique as Creswell defines it, by asking for volunteers while collecting quantitative data (Creswell, 2015, p.79). I found the technique useful since it made sure my participants came from the same population (Creswell, 2015, p.78) and had given the research some tough and motivation before the interviews. More than 70% (129 women) of the women clicked “yes” and was positive to receive more questions regarding their experiences with Stella. I selected three for interviews.

Another goal in the interview recruitment process was to ascertain that the sample included different ethnicities, religions and age, hence a purposive sample. Because of limited time during the research, no more than three women was interviewed. The women were selected strategically, because random sampling could leave me with women from a very similar category (ex. well integrated, old etc.), something that could result in difficulties for the explanation of the quantitative survey. Since I could see the women's answers from the questionnaire, this was not a problem, and I started to contact potential candidates after I had receives around 100 answers. Under these conditions, the recruitment process went smoothly. Some of the women I contacted on mail was nonetheless very late to reply, but with 129 potential e-mails, this was not a big problem. The participants were given a small gift in effort to thank them for their help.

4.5.1 Reflections on sampling

As mentioned previously, the topic of this study is political and sensitive as it concerns immigrant women, a marginalized group in the society. Being an outsider in terms of a young, Norwegian woman, I have strived to be as open and objective as possible during my research. There is however a risk that my own opinion about this group and their situation could unintentionally have affected my research. According to Bryman (2012, p.39) is complete objectivity in social research an impossible goal, as the values and biases that might reflect the research's personal beliefs or feelings, might occur and intrude at various points during the research.

4.6 Data Collection Method(s)

4.6.1 Online questionnaire

Bryman distinguishes between two main ways of conducting a survey: structured interviews and self-completion questionnaires (2012, p.184). Each method has its strengths and weaknesses. It was natural for me to choose self-completion questionnaire as data collection method, which implies that the respondents complete the questionnaire by themselves, without the researcher present. This was a natural choice because it would be impossible to gather all of Stella's registered participants from 2012. Self-completion questionnaires can be conducted in different ways through post, e-mail or through other electronically forums (Bryman, 2012, p.232, 670). Since I had access to a list with the names and e-mails from the women that have registered at Stella since 2012, it was a natural choice to send out the survey electronically and reach the participants through their personal e-mail. The questionnaire was also made available on a computer in Stella and some participants were encouraged to answer the survey there. The main advantages behind self-completion questionnaires is that it the ability to distribute the questionnaire to a large number of respondents, regardless of geographical location. It is also cheap and quick to administer and gives a very good opportunity to achieve the participant's anonymity (Bryman, 2012, p.233). Several of these points were important for the implementation of this study. Since Stella knows little about their participant's situation today and whether or not they are still in Oslo, the questionnaire through e-mail helped me solve the geographical problem. Anonymity and privacy is another important safeguard to receive honest answers. I safeguarded all the e-mails and the collected data during the study, while it was encrypted and deleted afterwards. As the questionnaire contained questions about the immigrant's background, participation and outcomes from Stella, anonymity might have helped the participants respond more open and honestly.

Self-completion questionnaires have two major weaknesses, which was both relevant factors in my study. First, misunderstandings regarding a self-completion questionnaire might occur and the second weakness is low response rate. Another limitation is that not everyone is online and has the technical ability to handle questionnaires online in either email or web formats (Bryman, 2012 p.673). Couper (2000) recognize Internet

users as a biased sample of the population because they tend to be better educated, wealthier, younger, and not representative in ethnic terms (quoted in Creswell, 2015, p.673). This relates to my study since the questionnaire was sent out electronically.

I knew that one major obstacles would be to create a survey that was measuring what I wanted to measure. Consequently, time was spent creating the questionnaire and customize the survey to avoid misunderstandings. Due to my research questions, I wanted to obtain both general background information as well as more specific information regarding competence, recognition and social networks. Moreover, many of Stella's participant's lack Norwegian reading and talking skills, so I tried to adopt the questionnaire in an easy and understandable Norwegian language, hence give immigrant women a chance to understand what I asked. All the e-mail invitations were also personalized. This means the e-mails started with "Hi + first name!" something I hope resulted in an increased response rate. It also conducted a pre-test before the survey was sent out (see subsection 4.7.2) and left my number and e-mail address so the participants could contact me if they had any questions.

The low response rate is however difficult to control, and it is important that the participants join the survey by their own free will (NESH). I sent out a reminder with a request to respond to the survey one week after dispatch, which resulted in 61 more responses. I asked the respondents to write their e-mail address in the questionnaire so I could contact the winner of the gift card. Further, this gave me a good opportunity to filter and remove e-mails from the women who had answered the survey when I sent out the survey reminder. Consequently, I minimized the chance for a participant to respond several times.

4.6.2 Pretest

It is important to test a questionnaire before using it to collect data. Pre-testing can help to identify questions that do not make sense to participants, or problems with the questionnaire that might lead to biased answers. I was also interested to find out how much time the respondents used filling out the survey and if they understood the questions.

I started the process by going through the survey myself, but also with my colleagues and friends. The project manager at Red Cross also went through it with two of her colleagues. They helped me regarding problematic Norwegian words, alternative answers for some of the multiple-choice questions, and was interested to add some questions for the survey. Further, the survey was sent out as a pre-test to a random sample consisting of 20 women from my target group. Seven of them answered. The women receiving the pretest got information about the study, and were asked to contribute with their answers and comments thoughts about the survey.

Testing the questionnaire on women identically from the population I was planning to study gave me a rich insight for upcoming challenges. Contributors from the pre-test felt that it was mostly good and relevant questions. I did, however, receive feedback on adjustments I have taken into consideration. One example is from the question “did you make any friends at Stella?” where one of the possible multiple-choice answers was “I don’t know”. One of the women from the pre-test group felt that this was a foolish answer as “everyone should know if they got any friends from Stella or not”. As a result, the answering options for that questions was changed. Some of the women also expressed difficulties with certain questions or sentences, which were changed or removed. It was also desirable to estimate how long the pre-test group used to answer the survey, which was about five minutes. It was important for me to keep the questionnaire short because they according to Bryman tend to achieve better response rates than longer ones (2012, p.236).

4.6.3 The survey questions

The pretest resulted in the final questionnaire, consisting of 14 (mostly multiple choice) questions. For a better understanding about the women’s experiences through Stella, the survey started with some questions related to background information, before they were asked about participation in Stella and outcomes:

| Background information | Questions | Measures |
|----------------------------------|--|---|
| Q1 Age | Which country did you come from originally? | 1=16-24, 2=25-39, 3=40-45, 4=55+ |
| Q2 Years in Norway | How long have you stayed in Norway? | Years in four digital |
| Q3 Country of origin | Which country do you come from? | Predetermined list, which I later categorized into continents: 1=Europe, 2=North America, 3=South America, 4=Africa, 5=Asia, 6=Australia |
| Q4 Status | What is your current situation? (follow up questions for: working, job seeker) | 1=Working, 2=Applying for jobs, 3=NAV Initiative, 4=Home wife, 5=Disability benefit, 6=School/education, 7= Maternity leave |
| Participation in Stella | | |
| Q5 Registration | What year did you register at Stella for the first time? | 1=2012, 2=2013, 3=2014, 4=2015, 5=2016 |
| Q6 Motivation | Why did you visit Stella? | 1=Attending courses/activities, 2=Improve Norwegian language, 3=Get new friends, 4=Help to apply for jobs, 5=Data help, 6=Volunteer, 7= Improvement of CV, 8= Other reasons (+Writing option) |
| Q7 Participant / volunteer | What was your role in these activities? | 1= Participant, 2=Volunteer, 3= Both participant and volunteer |
| Q8 Women-only | How important is it that Stella only allows women? | 1=Not important, 2=Neutral, 3=Very important |
| Q9 Missing activities | It is services or activities you miss at Stella? | 1= No, 2=More focus on Norwegian, 3=More focus on English, 4= More health & workout, 5=More data, 6=Economy, 7=More focus on employment |
| Outcomes | | |
| Q10 Competence | Have you learned something new at Stella? | 1=No, 2= A little, 3=Yes some, 4=Yes, a lot, 5= Unsure |
| Q11 Self-confidence/ recognition | Have participation at Stella helped you to gain self-confidence and/or a feeling of recognition? | 1=No, 2= A little, 3=Yes some, 4=Yes, a lot, 5= Unsure |
| Q12 Network | Have Stella helped you to get friends? | 1=No, no one 2= No, not many, 3=Yes, some, 4=Yes, many, 5=Yes, several |
| Q13 Recommendation | Would you recommend Stella to other women? | 1=Yes, 2=No, 3=Unsure |
| Q14 Further contact | Can I contact you for more information about your experiences at Stella? | 1=Yes, 2=No |

Figure 1. Survey questions and measurement for the online questionnaire.

Except from finding out the respondent's current life situation, I was interested to see if their answer to some degree could be linked/relate to Stella. Hence, some of the participant's answers from Q4 regarding current status ("working" + "seeking for job"), was automatically linked to some follow-up questions. Consequently, I was able to collect data specifically connected to topics related to my research, which will be discussed to a deeper extent later. That said, the question had a limitation, as the respondents only were able to choose *one* answer. To give an illustration could a woman applying for jobs, but at the same time attending school classes or receiving help from NAV, find it hard to answer "correct". To reduce this limitation, the respondents was told in a helping text (under the main question) to choose the answer she felt was most important and correct for their current life situation.

Nevertheless, the questionnaire was originally sent to 1002 participants. Eight women informed me that they did not want to participate in the study. Further, I received 263 e-mails in return saying, "Delivery to the following recipient failed permanently". That could mean several things:

- Many of the email accounts did not exist
- Spelling mistakes in the email or unnecessary spaces
- Difficult handwriting from the registration process at Stella which is proceeded manually by the volunteers

I cannot simply assume all the women that did not reply to my survey actually have e-mails that exist, but the remaining number are probably a reasonably accurate estimation of registered immigrant women from Stella. Nevertheless, the online questionnaire was sent out to 731 women, whereas 192 answered. A response rate of 26,3% cannot be considered high, but is sufficient to provide a meaningful analysis.

4.6.4 In-depth interviews

To conduct qualitative interviews after the quantitative questionnaire allowed me to validate the collected data by cross verifying the same information. I decided to conduct interviews based on the assumption that qualitative interviewing has been particularly attractive to research who wants to explore voices (Bryman, 2012, p469) and experiences which they believe have been ignored, misrepresented or suppressed in the

past. Conducting in-depth interviews offered three immigrant women the opportunity to voice their standpoints on how it was to be new in Norway, their integration aspect and why they visited Stella for the first time. As Kvale (2007, p.x) observes this information unpick how people construct the world around them, what they are doing or what is happening to them in terms that are meaningful and that offer rich insight.

I prepared a semi-structured interview guide based on the same questions from the online questionnaire. This allowed me to crosscheck results, ask for more detailed answers and even additional information. The interviews provided me with a direct, face-to-face interaction with the interviewees; a possibility to exchange views and perspectives and ask follow up questions to get a better understanding of a complex issues emerging under the interview. To illustrate, when one of my interviews answered one question saying, “it is not easy to be an immigrant in Oslo”, I had the chance to ask her more precisely, “Why is it not easy, what do you think the reason behind this is etc.?”

I visited one women at her home to conduct the interview, while two of them took place in a cafeteria located in Oslo. Intentionally, I did not suggest Stella as a meeting place, because I wanted my informants to talk freely and not obliged to talk positive about the center with employees and volunteers around them. To better understand the women’s quotations and viewpoints during the analysis, a brief summary of my informants will follow:

Lubna is an Albanian woman in her early 30s. She has lived in Norway in two years with her Norwegian husband. Lubna have a physiotherapy education from Albania, but need to complete the “Bergen” exam to receive the authorization. She is currently working at a nursing home in Oslo with a temporary position. Lubna heard about Stella when she and a friend visited the Mira center in Oslo, where some other women recommended them to visit it. As it will appear in the analysis (Chapter 5), Lubna was the most “active” woman from my interviews, serving the research with reflections and examples from her time spent at Stella.

Fatima is 56 years old, born in Morocco. She came alone to Norway in 1988 with her three children. Fatima raised the kids alone, and her life got very lonely when they moved out. Fatima went to high school in Norway, and have worked many years in a nursing home. Then she was hit by a prolapsed disc in her back, which lead to problems with migraine and depressions. Fatima is currently not working because of her health. She heard about Stella through a friend which though it would be a good idea for Fatima to go.

Janita is a Mexican woman in her mid 20s. She has lived in Norway in three years with her Norwegian husband which she met during her studies in Spain. Janita is a well-educated woman with a bachelor in advertisement, and a master degree within international trade. She found information about Stella on her own though internet, searching for voluntary organizations in Oslo.

4.7 Ethical considerations

Ethical issues arise at a variety of stages in social research. It circles around issues as how we should treat the people from whom we collect data for research and if there are activities in which we should or should not engage in our relations with them (Bryman, 2012, p.130). Entering the researcher role require a responsibility to adhere to research ethics standards. This includes requirements regarding honesty, impartiality and willingness to accept personal fallibility (NESH 2006 p.8). I made it clear that participation in in this study was voluntary. I therefore informed the research subject about the overall purpose of the study and possible risk and benefits from participation in the project in the e-mail with the online questionnaire survey link (Kvale, 2007, p.27). In this way, the email recipients had a chance to read the information and have understanding of the research purpose and decide whether or not they wanted to participate (NESH, 2006, p.12).

The study was reported and approved by NSD before the data collection. An important ethical consideration after the data collection is to ensure anonymity of the women's identities. My informants were therefor given fictitious names, and their age and nationality is roughly categorized. To illustrate was the women answering the survey

asked to choose their nationality from a pre-determined list, but this was afterwards categorized into the world continents.

During the transcriptions of the interviews, I chose not to print the interviews 100% verbatim, for the sake of both readability and the informants themselves. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p.195) stigmatization of specific groups might occur rendering incoherent and repetitive, verbatim quotes. In addition to affecting the flow of the text, can broke Norwegian be viewed as stupidity. Verbatim transcription is therefore not always the most loyal and unbiased solution. This was however not a big problem, and most of the answers were understandable. Two of my informants expressed uncertainty about their language skills during the interviews and was keen to excuse their “bad Norwegian”. I did however not see this as a limitation and asked them instead to take their time and ask me if they wanted help.

4.7.1 Universal gift card

It is considerable confusion regarding the ethical appropriateness of using incentives in research with human subjects. The Market Research Society advises that any incentive used should be “reasonable and proportionate”. This means incentives should be considered project- by-project based on the demographics of the expected respondents, how special the subject matter is, and how much the respondent will be inconvenienced by participating. The women participating in my online questionnaire got the chance to win one universal gift card valued 500 NOK.

The demographics characteristics of my study include immigrant women, which is a challenging group to study. Previous studies have showed that immigrants have a lower tendency (than other) to participate in surveys and other research (SSB). Consequently, some of my respondents might have preferred something to persuade them for getting involved in the online survey. Although the gift cards might have worked as a motivation to complete the survey, I believe most of the women participating in the questionnaire did it because they were given a voice and chance to influence the data collection. Being a minority in Oslo, they got a chance to raise awareness over problems and challenges from their everyday life. Hence, I do not think the chance to win one gift card influences the collected data.

4.8 Data Analysis

To determine the role of Stella in promoting women's empowerment in terms of new competence, social networks and recognition, both quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed.

First, the collected data from the questionnaire was entered and analyzed using SPSS Statistics (2016). I conducted a descriptive analysis from the survey data and presented the analyses as tables with frequencies. This provided the tables with the valid percentages belonging to each of the variable in question. Secondly, the in depth interviews were recorded transcribed and translated from Norwegian into English. Then, relevant themes were categorized, and quotations presented alongside the quantitative analyses in order to offer insight to the numbers.

4.9 Summary

To sum up, this chapter have tried to provide a reflective account for my master thesis with the purpose of justifying my choice of design and research method to address my research questions. Challenges due to some of the ethical considerations and issues encountered during the research process have also been discussed.

5. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This chapter presents the analysis and descriptions of data collected from immigrant women that have participated or volunteered at Stella. It presents a statistical analysis of the data collected from the online surveys with supplemental interpretation and descriptions from the three interviews. The chapter starts with some background information about the survey respondents. It will further discuss immigrant women's perceptions of Stella as an empowerment arena closely linked to competence, recognition and social capital.

5.1 Background characteristics

As a voluntary and free organization centrally located in Oslo, Stella opens up for a diverse group of participants, consisting of both young and elderly women with different nationality, life situations and time spent in Norway. To create a picture and an understanding of the women who visit the center, background characteristics was collected through the online survey.

The collected data from the 194 women who answered the online questionnaire told me that the majority of the participants, were women between 25-39 (47,5%) and 40-54 (40,3%) years of age. The rest was placed in the category between 16-24 years (1,1%) or 55 years of age or more (11%). The women came from no less than 60 nationalities (excluding Norway).

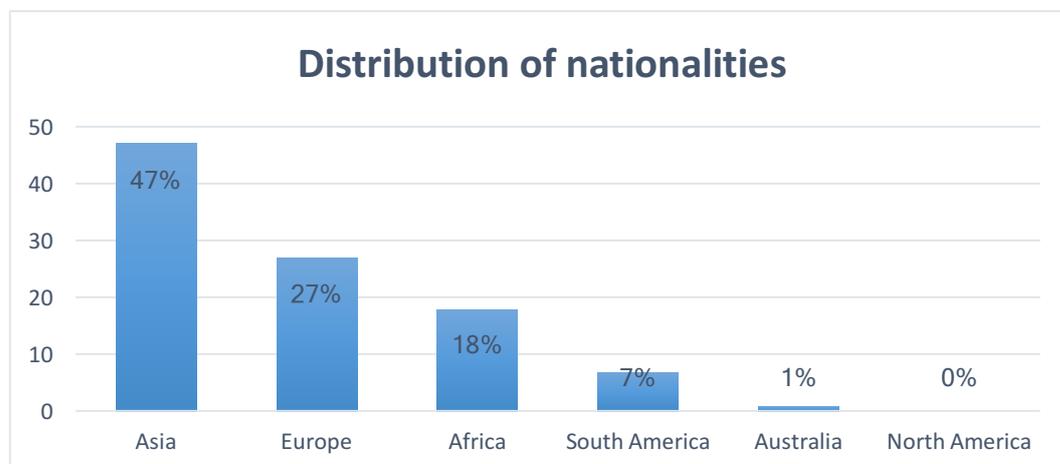


Figure 2. *Distribution of nationalities of the online survey participants.*

Figure 2 presents the participant's 60 nationalities distributed into continents. As it shows in Figure 2, the majority of participants are from the developing world, i.e. Asia (47%), Africa (18%) and South America (7%). These numbers classify Stella as an organization with a diverse audience consisting of participants from all over the world. Regarding time spent in Norway, the survey respondents were nearly equally split. The results showed that 45,9 % have lived in Norway less than five years while 54,1% have lived in Norway more than five years, which additionally confirm Stella's broad group of participants'.

5.1.1 Motivations

There is no doubt that Stella opens up for a diverse group of participants consisting of women in different life situations with various resources. Most of the women who visit the center have in common that they want to change something about their current life situation, but what that is and how to achieve it varies (Kabeer, 1999, p. 437).

All of the survey respondents were asked to identify motivations that inspired them to visit Stella, from a predetermined list based on the center's services and offers. I was interested in identifying the women's individual ranking order of the most frequently chosen motivations, to gain a deeper understanding regarding female immigrant's needs and preferences in this contextual setting. The collected data from this question identified several motivations for visiting Stella. It is, however, according to Putnam (2000, p.23) common that some motivations might overlap each other instead of acting as "either-or" categories.

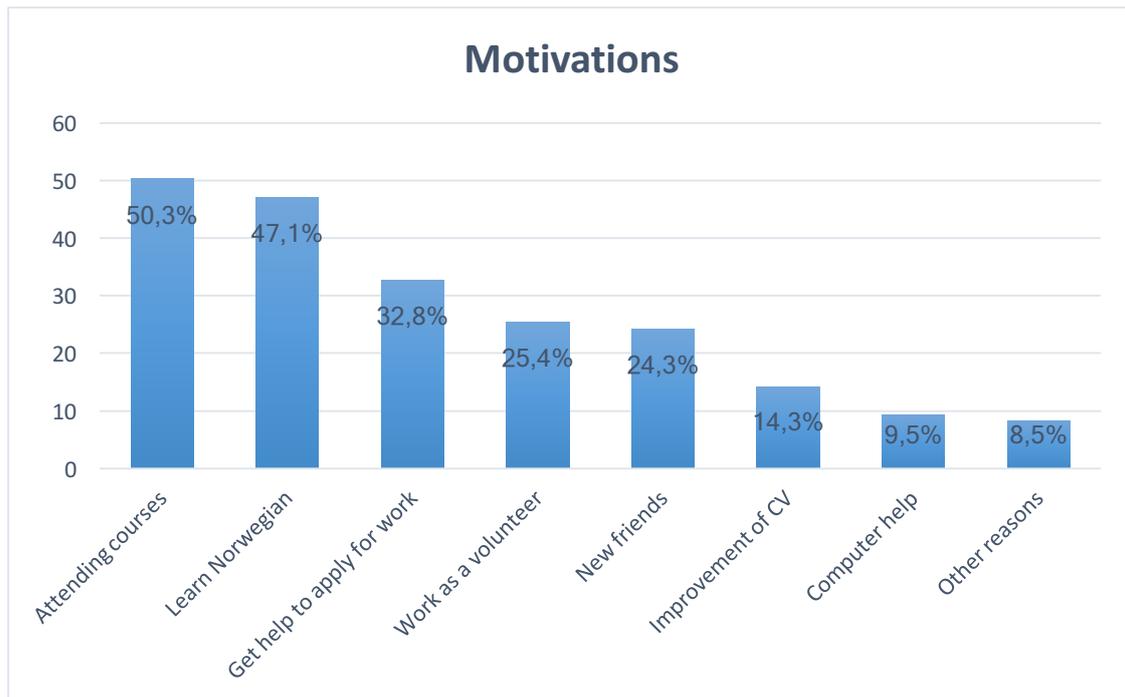


Figure 3. *Motivations to visit Stella*. The total percentages of cases are 212,2% because the respondents were free to select as many motivations they wanted.

The data presented in Figure 3 shows that “attending courses” was the most frequently cited motivation (50,3%), carefully followed by “learning and practicing the Norwegian language” (47,1%). This indicate that many of Stella’s participants want to improve their language skills since several of the courses are affiliated with Norwegian language. “Getting help to apply for work” (32, 8%) and to “improve one’s CV” (14,3%) was also a motivation for many. These numbers are very optimistic, but maybe somehow expected as the survey was carried out in a center where the overall purpose is to strengthen and develop women. Furthermore, 25, 4% of the respondents mentioned that they visited Stella because they wanted to “volunteer”. Stella’s project manager told me that they actively encourage their participants to volunteer at the center, which can help to blur the lines between participants and volunteers. Almost the same percentage as volunteers, 24,3% wanted to visit Stella in order to “get friends”. This illustrate how they do not necessary visit Stella with an aim to enter the labor market or participate in the mainstream society. The remaining 8,5% of the participants selected “other” motivations, an open answer where they were free to write their own reasons. From this option, “learning more about the Norwegian society”, “getting out of the apartment”, “recommendations from NAV” and “meeting Norwegian people” was common motivations.

5.2 Participation for empowerment?

To highlight my research questions, it is important to map the participants experience and encounters of the service they have been provided with. Has participation in Stella helped women gain (1) new competence, (2) social networks and (3) recognition? This knowledge may also contribute making the women center a more motivating, fitting and efficient place. I will start to discuss the learning outcome from Stella's activities and courses before I move on to the aspects of social network and recognition. I will present the women's voices, within the context of Putnam and Honneth's theoretical framework that I find helpful in understanding how Stella work reach the women center's intentions.

5.3 New competence

"I think almost all the women who visit Stella enjoys it. Instead of being home, they learn so many things" – Lubna

My first research questions is to find out whether participation in Stella have helped it's participants increase their competence. By competence, I refer to increased knowledge and/or skills gained from the center. As the center offer a broad spectrum of activities and courses, the respondents were consequently asked if they had learned anything new.

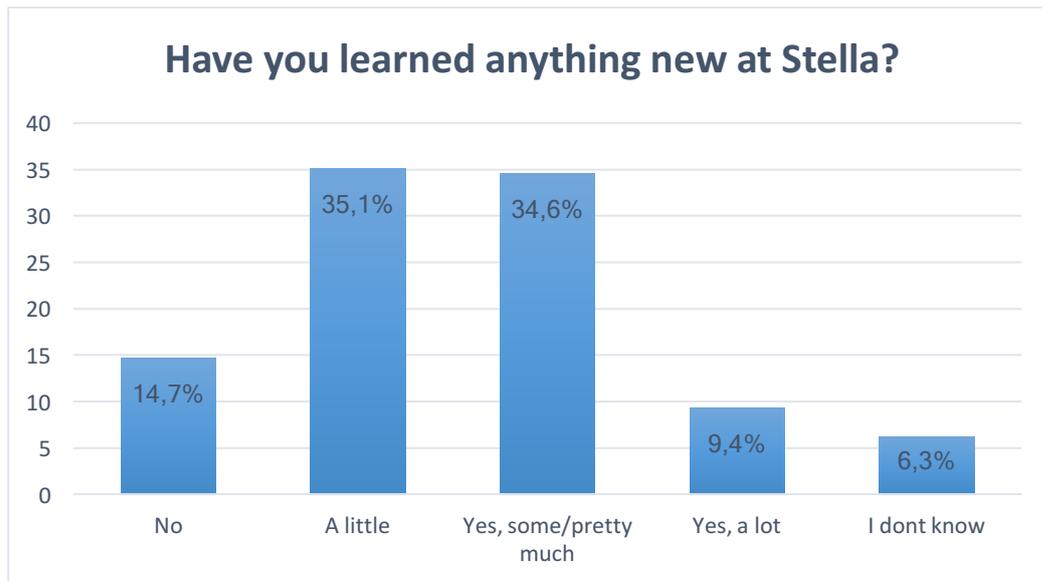


Figure 4. *Competence*

The data presented in Figure 4 reveals that one in five answered “no” (14,7%) or “don’t know” (6,3%). While approximately one-third (35,1%) of the women felt that they had “learned a little”, another one-third (34,6%) claimed to have learned “some/pretty much”. 9,4 % of the respondents had learned “a lot”.

This data material suggest that the majority of the respondents have learned something new through participating or volunteering at the courses and/or activities of Stella. The fact that 79,1% of the respondents have learned “a little”, “some” or “a lot” of new things are impressive numbers which confirms the center’s, and especially the volunteers, good work in this arena. The numbers also suggest that most participants of Stella had fulfilled their expectations, since attending courses/activities and learning more Norwegian were the two highest ranked motivations (see Figure 3). The gathered data can also be explained from the participants “free will” to visit the center. Having the ability to *choose* to visit the women’s center in order to make a change towards a current life situation, is in line with Kabeers (1999, p.436) empowerment theory. By actively seeking help and showing up to courses and/or activities, women acquire new resources that can help them to “get ahead” in their life (Putnam, 2000, p.23).

The participants’ knowledge and experiences will naturally vary considering the participants’ individual engagement and commitment to the center and it’s services.

14,7% of the respondents claim they did not learn anything. Since all the women I interviewed had learned something new, it is difficult to illustrate why some immigrant women did not increase their competence at all. It could, however, be explained with low attendance or lack of motivation and willingness to learn. The reason can also be linked to the formulation of my survey question, since I asked if they had learned anything new, not if they had learned anything at all.

The findings from the quantitative questionnaire matches with the findings from the qualitative interviews where all of my three informants illustrated things they had learned. Lubna expressed how she

“...learned how to speak better Norwegian. I feel I have become more independent in terms of language and my life situation. I think almost all the women who visit Stella enjoys it. Instead of being home, they learn so many things at the center”.

Lubna’s example illustrate how she made use of Stella’s community as a resource, deciding to learn the Norwegian language and act upon her goals and agency (Kabeer, 1999, p.437-438). Lubna’s motivation and purpose might have helped her reach this achievement, namely increased competence, skills and an independency feeling in terms of language and life situation. This is a big step towards “the potential people have for living the lives they want” and taking control over it (Sen, 1985, as cited in Kabeer, 1999, p.438)

As the oldest woman being interview and with over 20 years of experience from the Norwegian society, Fatima expressed how she already knew the Norwegian language and information about the society. This was not something new she learned at Stella. However, Fatima states participation in Stella has helped her improve her English language and yoga skills, in addition to learning how to use a computer for paying bills and reading the news. The third woman I interviewed, Janita, had similar to Lubna increased her Norwegian competence. Furthermore, Janita spoke warmly about her participation on the course “Stella tells” (Stella forteller) which involves different themes throughout the semester: *“We learned how to use PowerPoint and useful presentation techniques”*. She also explained how they learned theory and skills

throughout the course, with a bigger Microsoft PowerPoint presentation in front of an audience in the end of the semester. Janita laughed when she expressed “*It was very scary to have the presentation in Norwegian (!), but it went fine*”.

In general, the participants’ competence after their time spent at Stella will differ in relation to personal engagement and commitment to the center and its services. The collected data from the questionnaire and interviews did however show that the majority of the respondents have gained new competence (Figure 4), whatever motivation and commitment they must have. Learning something new, that be more Norwegian language or how to look for jobs at a computer, may increase one’s sense of mastery and self-confidence. Something, which again might bring women one-step closer to empowerment and their potential to participate in society.

5.3.1 Competence within the Norwegian language

There is no doubt that mastery of the host country language is important competence related to integration - both within the labor market and into society. Because of this, language training is generally the single most important measure that is directly targeted at immigrants in OECD countries, and Norway is no exception in this respect (Liebig,2009, p.50). There is a great demand for Norwegian language courses at Stella, and many women who visit for the first time is requesting this (Figure 3). As a response to this demand, Stella established new courses which includes Norwegian practice in different ways like “Stella tells (Stella forteller)” and “Join us, raise your voice” (Bli med, ta ordet!). The manager of Stella, however, was clear when she told me about how other authorities, such as the public sector, must take the main responsibility of Norwegian language training. Her attitude is that the voluntary sector should act like a supplement to public integration policies and that the state and municipality must take the primary responsibility for this.

Stella has an underlying expectation of active engagement from their immigrant women to participate in different activities or courses at the center. To achieve this, a minimum level of Norwegian language skills is required. The importance of language was emphasized by the three women I interviewed. All three agreed that it is of great

importance that all visitors at Stella must know some basic Norwegian to visit, and that visitors speak only Norwegian while visiting. Fatima explained:

“When I meet Arabic men outside Stella, they only want to talk Arabic or Morocco language because they speak bad Norwegian. But not at Stella! They stop us if we switch to another language. But outside Stella, I can’t say to my Arabic friend ‘stop you have to speak Norwegian’ [Fatima laughed saying the last sentence]”

Lubna shared a similar view regarding language:

“It is very good, especially since it is almost impossible to get a job in Norway without knowing how to talk Norwegian. It is nice to have a place to stimulate your language and learn more. I feel that it would be no point to talk English in Stella, it is nice to be pushed to learn the language even though it is scary in the beginning”.

The participants’ motivation, combined with Fatima and Lubna’s statement, illustrate how they enjoy having a place to practice and learn the Norwegian language. Language is considered an important pillar in Norway’s integration policies (Meld.St.2012-2013, p.28). However, it is important to remember that language education of immigrants is not Stella’s main responsibility. The organization should rather work as a supplement to their language learning progress, to help immigrant women feel more confident when using the Norwegian language. Simultaneously, some immigrants might experience the requirement of basic Norwegian language skills as an obstacle towards entering the women’s center.

5.3.2 Current situation

This section dwell around the participants’ current life situation. In addition to knowledge about their background, I was interested in seeing if their responses to some extent could be linked to the competence they have learned (or not) at Stella. The immigrant women could choose their answer from a predetermined list:

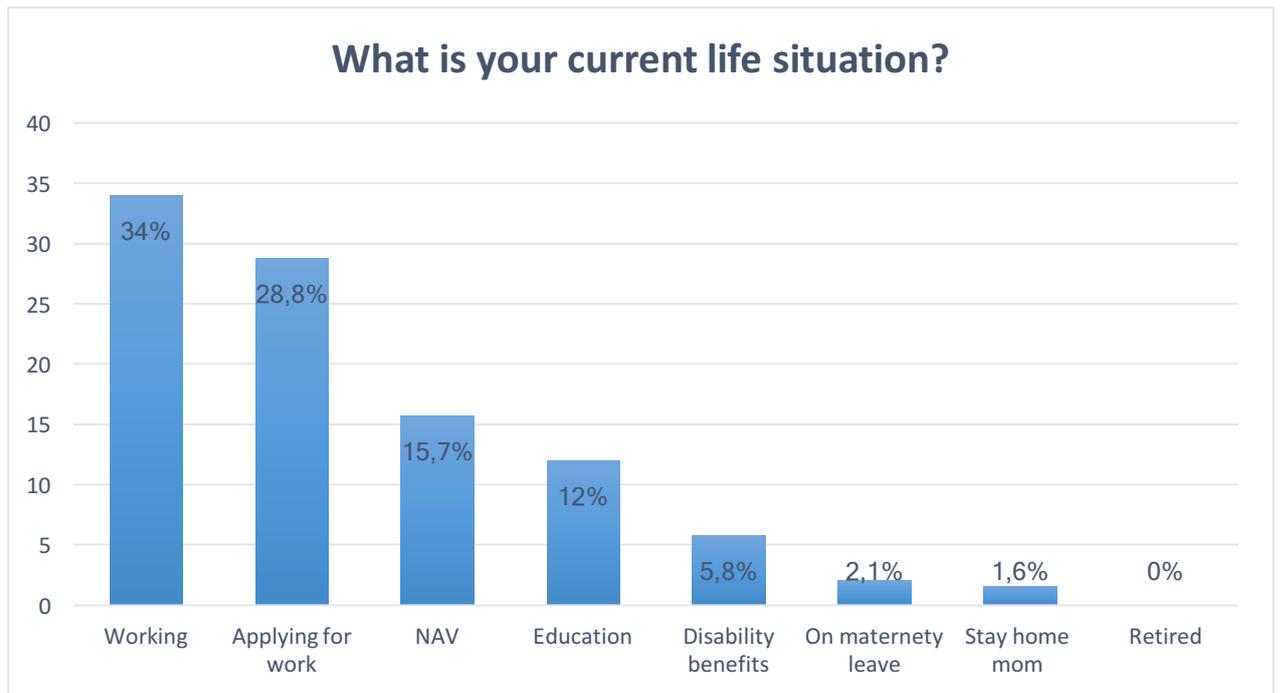


Figure 5. *Current life situation*

As presented in Figure 5, 34% of the respondents worked when they answered the survey, closely followed by 28,9% that were applying for work. Further on, the data revealed that 15,7% of the respondents are under a NAV initiative, while 12% are in an educational setting (attending school or courses). 5,8% of the respondents says that they receive disability benefits which means they are not able to work, and the remaining 2,1 % are housewives.

5.3.3 Working

Several of Stella's courses aim towards unemployed women. One example is Stella's employment training, which is a drop-in offer once a week. In this course, women receive personal help to improve their CV's, work applications and interview skills. Stella's employees also argue how other courses might be beneficial towards receiving a job, as they might help to increase one's confidence, language knowledge as well as insight about their own strengths and weaknesses, motivations and aspirations (Scott, 2013, p.44)

Since Stella uses many of their recourses on courses aimed towards unemployed women, I wanted to explore the effects of the courses. Have the learning outcomes of Stella’s courses helped immigrant women in their employment process? To find an answer to that question, all the respondents who were *working* when answering their current status in the questionnaire, received two additional follow-up questions. The women, which constituted 34% (N= 65) of my respondents, were asked if they thought that their participation in Stella have helped them receiving a job.

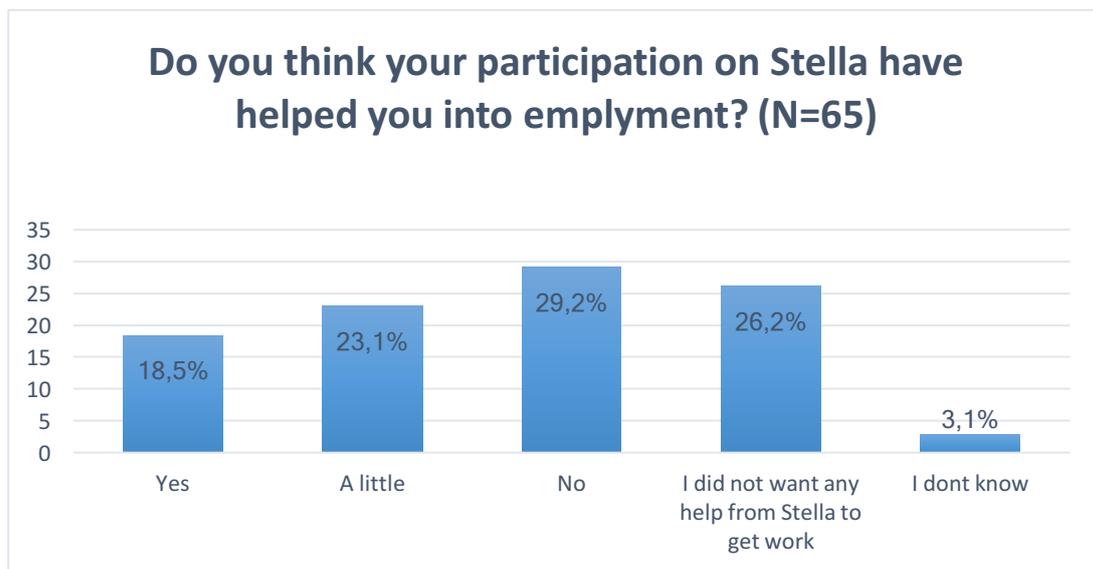


Figure 6. *Stella’s influence in immigrant women’s employment*

From Figure 6 we see that 26,2% “did not want any help from Stella to get work” and a total of 29,2% of women answered “no”. These numbers could mean the respondents already had a job, did not think Stella had had any influence or they participated in other activities at Stella than the one’s related to work.

Further, 23,1% thinks that Stella have helped them “a little” in their way towards the Norwegian labor market, while 18,5% of the respondents simply answered “yes”. Combined, 41,6% of the immigrant women think that their participation at Stella have helped them to get work. These numbers are very positive and suggest many women think that their (increased) competence from Stella, to some degree, have been essential to their statuses as employees.

5.3.4 Seeking for jobs

My respondents whose current status was “seeking for jobs” (N=55) also received a follow-up question in order to investigate Stella’s activities aimed towards unemployed women. The data from this question (Figure 7) suggest that most of the “job seekers” find Stella’s offers relevant (36,9%) or somehow a little relevant (46,2%) for their job seeking. A total of 16,9% of the respondents do not find Stella’s offers relevant at all.

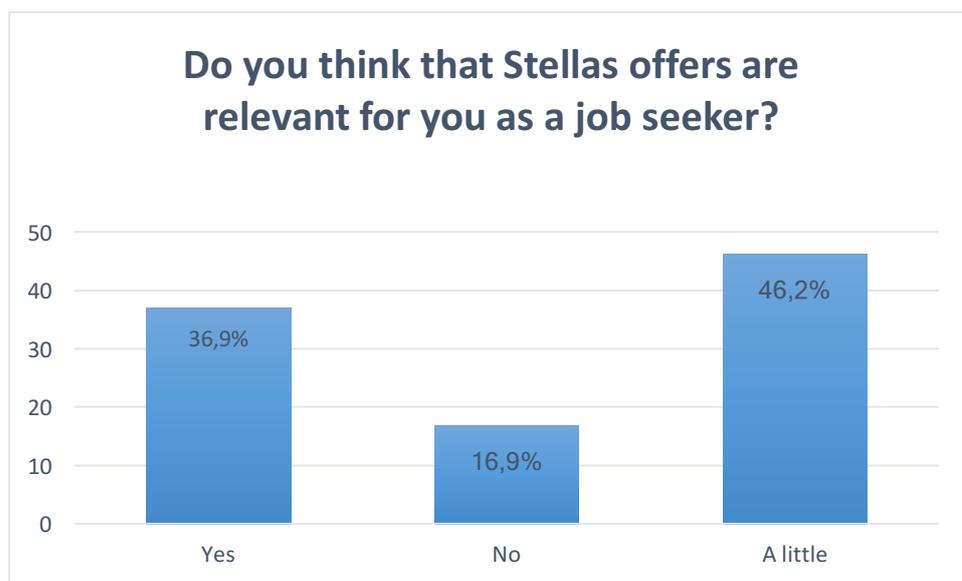


Figure 7. *Stella’s relevance for people applying for jobs*

Table 7 illustrate that Stella’s job-related activities pays off, as many of the women who are seeking for work, find it relevant in their process towards employment. Said in other words, have Stella empowered many women in their way towards participation in the labor market and society.

5.4 Social network and friends

My second research question relates to social networks. As newcomers to an unfamiliar social environment, immigrants are forced to rebuild their social networks. Hence, by providing a meeting place for this group, Stella can be regarded as an arena with the potential to establish new friendships and social capital (Meld.St.6, 2012-2013p.123). It occurred to me during the interviews that my informants emphasized different qualities of networks and relationships at the center as meaningful. Following Putnam's (2000, p.22) distinction, I have categorized the two upcoming sections as "bonding" and "bridging" networks to explain the different motivation patterns for participation. It is, however, important to keep in mind that although my respondents emphasize different network relations, Putnam do not see bonding and bridging networks as either-or categories. Instead, he favors "more-or-less" dimensions along which we can compare different forms of social capital (Putnam, 2000, p.23).

5.4.1 Bridging network

"Network is really important in Norway: I think it is difficult to get a job without it"-
Lubna

Bridging participation and/or volunteering activities are those activities that strengthen immigrant women's links to the wider community (Putnam, 2000, p.23). Several of Stella's activities exchange information and knowledge and are therefore characterized as bridging activities as they strengthen immigrant women's links to the wider community. The results from the survey indicate the importance of bridging networks activities, as attending courses, learning Norwegian and getting different kinds of help (writing job applications, make CV, computer help) was popular motivations to participate at Stella (Figure 3).

From my interviews, Lubna and Janita deliberately used the women center to build bridging networks for participation in the society. Both of them were eager to learn Norwegian when they moved here, but they had no right to attend any Norwegian

language classes since they were engaged with Norwegian boyfriends. They were however enthusiastic to fill their days, and used Stella as a place to expand their network, and to practice their Norwegian language skills.

Janita pointed out that she wanted to expand her network, as she knew few Norwegian people: *“I talked to some people from a Facebook page called “Mexiacans in Norway”, but the sad part is that this group is quite locked and does not help me integrate”*. Although ties to other Mexicans from Oslo was in Janita’s interest, building relationships towards Norwegian people (ex volunteers) was put forward as most significant for her goal towards entering the labor market. This is in line with Granovetter’s (1973) argument about social ties being more effective when they result in access to people with other resources and knowledge than one’s immediate circle (p.1364).

Lubna did also have an example from her job as a volunteer. She explained how she used to sell waffles every Wednesday with the rest of the volunteers from Stella café. One day she had started a conversation with a customer, a man working at “Red Cross Visitation services” (Besøkstjenesten) (which used to be located one floor over Stella). They started to talk and he encouraged Lubna to sign up as a volunteer within their services. Lubna did, and participated in two basic courses she found very interesting, related to nursing and care. Lubna enriched her CV with courses and references from both Stella and the visitation services, and with passion, she told me:

“Then, after the summer vacation, I was contacted by a nursing home in Oslo and I got the chance to start working there right away. Network is really important in Norway; I think it is difficult to get a job without it!”.

Lubna’s history correlates with Christiensen and Christensen’s (2006) understanding of integration as a process that consists of three phases; participation, interaction and integration. First, Lubna registered at Stella and got a chance to spend time in a voluntary organization. By (1) participating in activities and volunteering at the cafeteria she experienced to get a voice and someone that listened to her. This can be regarded as a first step towards integration in the society. Secondly, her emergence into the civic community helped Lubna meet and (2) interact with new people at the center,

for example the man who was eating lunch at the café. Hence, contact and informal meetings with other people might lead to exchanged attitudes ideas and expectations between citizens (Christensen and Christensen, 2006, p.26). Thirdly, as a person is participation in a voluntary organization and interacting with other people one might develop social skills and experiences that can enhance their chances of being listened to, involved in decision and increased influence. This creates a possibility for the citizen to be (3) integrated, as it did for Lubna. She was very lucky to get a job and a place to further develop her Norwegian language, competence and networks.

To sum up, Janita and Lubna's situation illustrate what Putnam describes as "getting ahead" (2002:23) since bridging networks to other ethnic groups, especially the majority population, can act as an important source of knowledge and mobility. Their motivation to visit the center relates to civic society literature, which produces a link to more traditional majority organizations as a stepping-stone for immigrant's further participation in the Norwegian society, working life and active citizenship (Christensen and Christensen 2006, p. 202, Meld.St, 2012-2013, p. 120).

5.4.2 Bonding network

"Stella have helped me to become more social" - Fatima

Bonding activities are all those activities where participation and/or volunteering strengthen bonds among members and are carried out within the women's center. Unlike many women from both the survey and the interviews whose motivation mainly relate to bridging networks, self- development and participation into the Norwegian society, Fatima highlighted the social and emotional networks in the center. She explained that she used to work in a nursing home but had to quit because she got a prolapsed disc in her back, which further lead to migraine and depression. She is now a retired woman who like to participate in yoga and English courses and "...visit Stella to meet and talk to other women". Fatima have gained many international friends, including women from her home country Morocco. They text, call and meet each other outside Stella. Consistent with Putnam who argue that bonding social capital must constitute a kind of sociological superglue (2000, p.22-23), Fatima described her fellow

members as an extended family and feel strong kinship ties with them. As she said, *“I can share all my troubles and joys with them, I listen to them and they listen to me”*. This data suggest that Stella is a place where friendships, hence love is created, referred to as physical needs and emotions through social interactions at the women’s center (Honneth,1995, p.95).

The fact that 24,3% of the survey respondents listed “making new friends” as a motivation for visiting Stella (Figure 3) suggest that not everyone has participation in the society as their main goal when visiting the center. Some visit because they feel lonely in Norway and would like to meet new people and try to make friends. The many activities and the many women who visit every day makes Stella an important arena for acquaintance and friendship, and women can thus expand their social networks. Fatima’s example illustrates that the development of new networks through activities in Stella might be helpful for her “getting by” (Putnam, 2000, p.23) and move away from a life situation characterized with loneliness. This was clearly stated when I asked her if something had changed in her life after her participation at the center: *“Stella have helped me to become more social. I started to go out of the apartment. I started to meet people. My life has been like a roller coaster due to my health, ups and downs, so it [Stella] has been good for me. Earlier I spent much time in the apartment and was sad”*

Fatima’s example illustrates her good experiences from Stella as a social meeting place with no aim towards example further employment or participation in the society. Her statement is in line with Rugkåsa (2010), which argue that the link between employment and integration among immigrants is problematic. Rugkåsa claim how many of the positive functions through work can be safeguarded elsewhere, such as through unpaid social work, participation in voluntary organizations, political work or caring for children and family (2010, p.252). This shows how integration include much more than just employment in the society. Social belonging and friendships can be safeguarded in other interaction arenas. Not everyone at Stella did, however, establish new friendships.

5.4.3 New friends

Migration usually implies that people lose their personal network. As Putnam has noted "emigration devalues one's social capital, for most of one's social connections must be left behind" (2000, p. 390). This means that migrants have to establish a network from scratch. Among other things, they might try to establish new friendships, and create a feeling of belonging and self-worth in their new social environment.

In order to assess the degree to which an immigrant association like Stella can undertake this, I asked if Stella had helped my survey respondents to gain any friends. Figure 8 shows that the women had different experiences related to social integration. Several of my respondents had gained some (37,2%), many (10,5%) or several (1,6%) new friends. Other women did not gain so many new friends (22%), or no new friends (28,8%) at all.

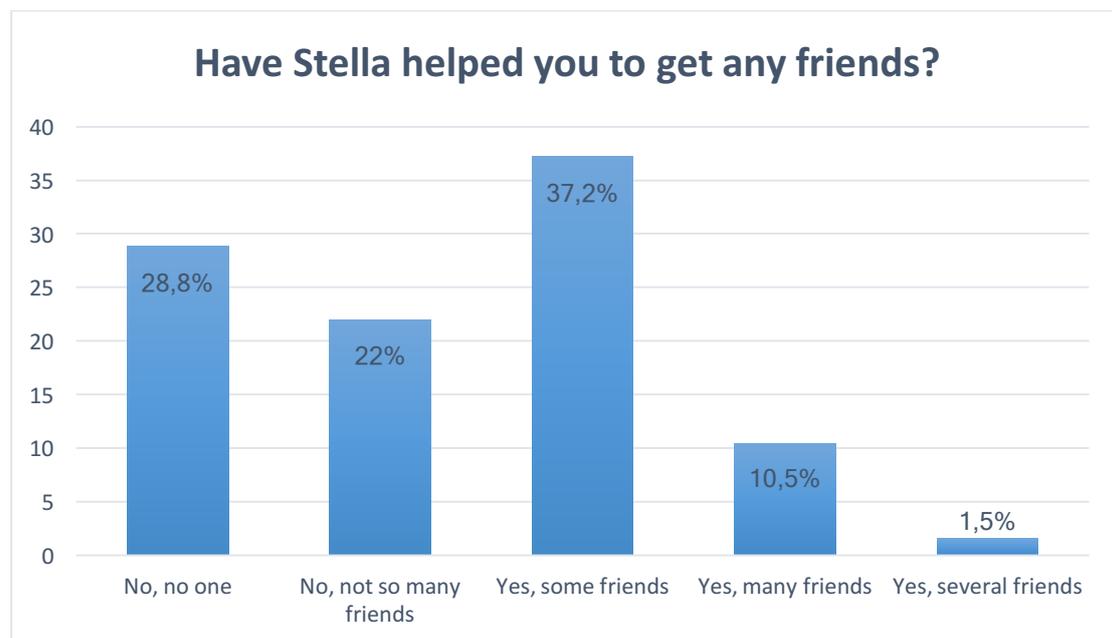


Figure 8. Social network

The overall picture from Figure 8 shows that the question regarding friendships from Stella is almost equally split. While approximately one half (49,2%) of the participants achieved some, many or several friends, did approximately one-half (50,8%) not gain any friends at all or not so many.

Stella have on the one side created many new friendships. These are relationships which, in the absence of relatives and family, might fulfill basic needs for belonging and support, important for one's "everyday life" (Putnam 2000: 22-23). Similar to Fatima, Lubna could confirm that Stella also helped her to get new friends, "*I met many nice women at the center and sometimes we went to the theater together. When I got work, it was however hard to keep the contact with everyone because I don't go to Stella anymore*".

However, despite the creation of many new friendships at the women's center, several immigrant women found it difficult to make new friends. This was also a topic I had the chance to ask for additional information about during the interviews. Reflecting over her social life, Janita complained about few friends and a small network in Oslo. She implied that she wanted to establish relationships with both Norwegians and other ethnicities, so when I asked Janita why she then did not get any new friendships from Stella, she blamed herself for being shy and not spending enough time with them. She also felt that Norwegians in general were not interested in having contact with her.

"I don't have so many friends, and in overall I think it's difficult to get friends in Norway. I have worked in the same place for three years, but it is not like they [colleges] have invited me for coffee or something. But I don't think they invite each other either. At work, we cooperate and talk, but we don't hang out after work. It was maybe the same with the women from Stella. We didn't see each other so often during the week, so maybe there was not enough time to become very familiar." – Janita

Janita's statement is inconsistent with the conventional assumption that immigrants will meet local Norwegians at the workplace and get opportunities to learn the language and establish social relations with locals (Valenta, 2008, p.167). Citing Rogstad (2000), Valenta (2008, p.167) argue "several studies have suggested that jobs do not necessarily bring with them indigenous friends and a path to other areas of Norwegian mainstream society". Although Janita had known her colleagues for long time, she did not consider them as close friends with whom she could share private thoughts. She experienced that the workplace was not the right arena for social integration, as her active participation in work life did not necessarily lead to social integration into mainstream society.

Lubna shared similar experiences

“Sometimes at work I experience that I am friends with people I work with and we have good contact and talk a lot. But suddenly, when we are finished at work and meet outside or in other setting, we don't greet. It's not because they don't see me or look at me, they just don't care and don't want to be bothered. I have lived in other countries like Italy and Albania and I experienced that people treat people more kindly there, I feel that it is more distance here [Norway] in the start”

Lubna and Janita's statement illustrate how employment is not necessary synonymous with integration within the majority society (Rugkåsa, 2010, p.251). Norwegian friends may appear as symbols of acceptance and recognition by the mainstream, but they may also patronize and humiliate immigrant (Valenta, 2008, p.13). Consequently, Lubna's denial of recognition from her coworkers outside work may threaten her sense of self (Honneth, 1995, p.95.) Gullestad's (2000) argument about how it is within the majorities power to determine integration and the emphasis on “imagined sameness” might help us understand why some Norwegians avoid situations similar to the one's my informants have experienced. “From the point of view of the new immigrants, the Norwegian practice of avoiding situations where equality as sameness cannot easily be established is an obstacle for social contact and integration” (Gullestad, 1992, p.195). Hence, immigrants might experience Norwegians keeping themselves at a distance because sameness and proximity (closeness) go hand in hand in Norwegian cultural practice. To experience a lack of recognition as an equal member of the community and not being described the same moral sanity as others may also threaten one's self-respect (Honneth, 1995, p.114, 129). Further, Lubnas statement

“... I feel that it is more distance here in the start” illustrate how immigrant women might experience everyday life in the host society as problematic because they lack knowledge about norms, values and traditions that are important part of culture of this society (Valenta, 2008, p.13) This is linked to Hamers (2013, p.491) first requirement of how to be the bearer of rights, as she argue how recognition of norms and regulations that apply to all members in the society is needed. As a Norwegian researcher myself, I know how one unwritten social rule is to act neutrally towards “strangers” in a polite way, but without any feelings involved. In other words, you might need to get to know a Norwegian before experiencing him/her as friendly and accommodating.

5.5 Claiming recognition

My research question also relates to immigrants' confidence and sense of recognition. Mutual recognition is one of the most fundamental types of social interaction (Honneth, 1995, p.95). The way everyday interactions and relationships with Norwegians are defined influence immigrant women's daily experience of recognition and sense of belonging in the host society (Valenta, 2008, p. 99). Linking Honneth's (1995) theory of recognition to my data collection, I argue that self-confidence, solidarity and recognition from women are some of the requirements for a higher degree of recognition among immigrant women living in Norway.

5.5.1 Confidence

As a result of poor inclusion in mainstream society and working life (NOU 2011:14, p.82), women from developing countries struggle to feel recognized in Norway. In order to discover if participation in Stella could have an effect on these women's feeling of recognition, I included a question regarding this issue in the questionnaire. Consequently, my respondents were asked if their participation at the center helped them gain self-confidence and/or a feeling of recognition.

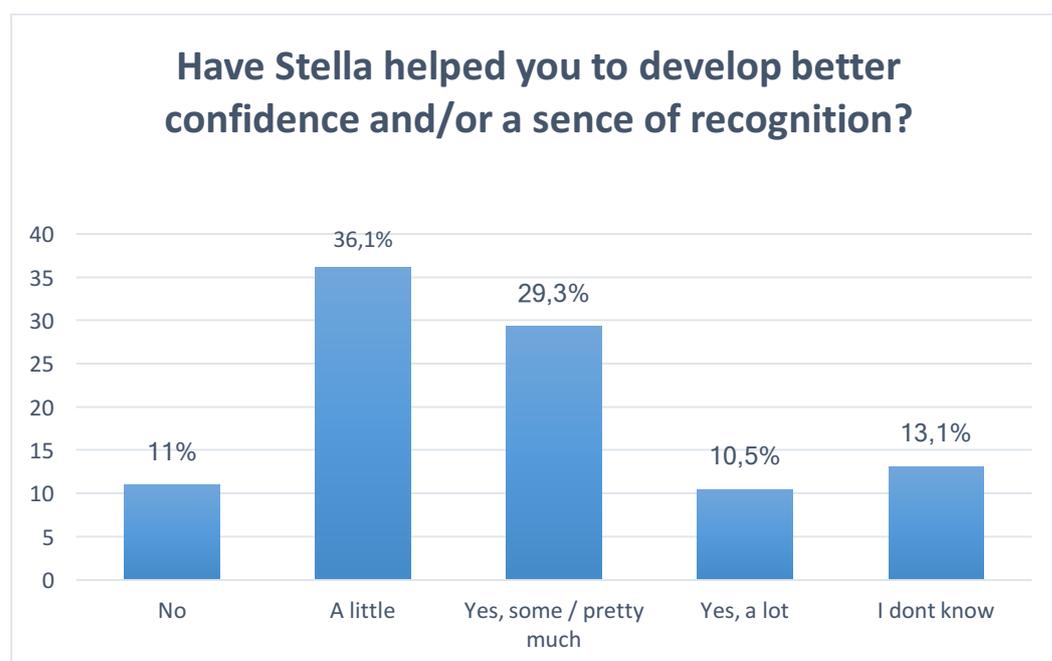


Figure 9. *Confidence and/or recognition*

The data suggest that many women claim to have increased their confidence and/or recognition by participating in Stella. As Figure 9 reveal, a total of 36,1 % of the respondents have developed “a little” confidence, while 29,3 % have developed “some” confidence. This is very positive numbers, especially if we combine them with the 10,5% of the respondents which claimed to develop “a lot” of confidence. On the other hand, the data show that 11% of the respondents “have not developed any confidence or recognition” through their participation at Stella, while 13,1% “didn’t know”.

For Honneth immigrant women’s self-confidence closely relates to physical needs and emotions met by others through love (1995, p.95). As discussed in chapter 5.2 (Figure 8), approximately one-half of my respondents gained new friendships, and according to Honneth, a chance to be provided with emotions and love through the women’s center. This is important as Stella recognize self-confidence among immigrant women as essential to achieve participation in the society (Stellakvinnerenter, 2016). This is in line with Honneth’s argument about how self-confidence makes the individual able to communicate and participate successfully in other social relations.

For people trying to change something in their life and becoming more empowered, confidence might act both like a great motivator or a powerful limitation. This is because people usually undertake tasks that they feel capable of doing and it takes great effort to overcome a lack of confidence in one’s capabilities. Sen (1985) argue that a person’s capability to live a good life is defined in terms of all possible ways of “being and doing” which are valued by people in a given context (as cited in Kabeer, 1999, p.438). As discussed in Chapter two, could these values be feeling a sense of belonging and social inclusion in Norway. Hence, self-empowerment involves people constantly to challenge their own beliefs and what they are capable of undertaking. It is important for Stella to give women greater faith in their own possibilities, helping them become a resource for themselves and the community. By having a place to go as a volunteer or participant, the feeling of being useful and helping others will most likely grow (Stellakvinnerenter, 2016). To achieve this, Stella offer a variety of different activities and courses at the center, in order to increase immigrant women’s competence (See section 5.3) activities

While discussing confidence in my three interviews, Stella's drop-in employment offer (jobbsøkerkurs) was mentioned in twice. Both Lubna and Janita had participated in the activity and received help to build up their CV from scratch. Lubna pointed out:

“I got more aware of my qualities and what I have to offer for the Norwegian labor market. I went home from the course with a confidence boost!”.

Janita shared the same positive experience from the course:

“A girl [volunteer] helped me highlight my good abilities, so even though I am not so good in Norwegian I got help to focus on what I am good in on my CV and application. She said [the volunteer]: “We should focus on all the things you can do, instead of focusing on that you do not speak 100% fluent Norwegian”

The two statements show how the employment course appeared to raise the participant's self-awareness as they got a deeper appreciation of their competence through possessed skills and knowledge. Becoming more aware of one's abilities, allows women to focus on their strengths (and weaknesses), and to focus on the causes of their problems and how to best deal with them (Gutiérrez, 1990, p.150).

5.5.2 Stella as a community

Offering empowering activities to women who share common characteristics, Stella can be recognized as a women community, which Lubna pointed out:

“Stella is a women community where everyone, employees, volunteers or participants, is easy to talk to. I felt everyone was somehow interested in each other and that we could learn from each other in different ways. We cheer and care!”

The statement illustrate how Stella might allow “individuals to attain... a feeling of group pride or collective honor” (Honneth, 1995, p.127). As women visit Stella of their own free will, many are motivated to do something about their current life situation. Further, since Stella works in an empowering way, many of Stella's participants share similar goals. This makes it, according to Honneth easier to achieve solidarity and

possible to get to know each other's uniqueness as meaningful to collectively shared values (Andersen, as cited in Honneth, 1995, p.xvi.). This is important in today's society as one's self-esteem is developed and measured through abilities, talents and accomplishments. Hence, lack of employment or low self-confidence can deprive immigrant's potential of taking a positive view of themselves. Having the sense that one has nothing of value to offer is to lack any basis for developing a sense of one's own identity. As solidarity is not possible if individuals do not have a positive and practical relationship to themselves, is highly positive if Stella to some extent play a positive part in esteeming women and helping them if they struggle with for example low confidence.

Additional, the fact that Lubna mentioned how women in Stella "cheer and care" for each other is in line with one of Gutiérrez (1990, p.150) changes necessary for empowerment, namely group consciousness. Group consciousness might hence create a sense of shared fate among immigrant members within Stella's community, and channel with shared conditions of encouragement, approval and appreciation between individuals.

5.5.3 Recognition from women

As the name "Stella - Red Cross Women center" indicate, only women are allowed to enter the organization. Christiansen and Christiansen (2006, p.71) argue that it is important for women to have a meeting place where they can participate without their family. The women participating in my study were asked about how important it is that Stella only allows women to visit and participate in activities, to see if it matters to them. The collected data from the questionnaire and interviews illustrate the immigrant women's diverse opinions regarding this question.

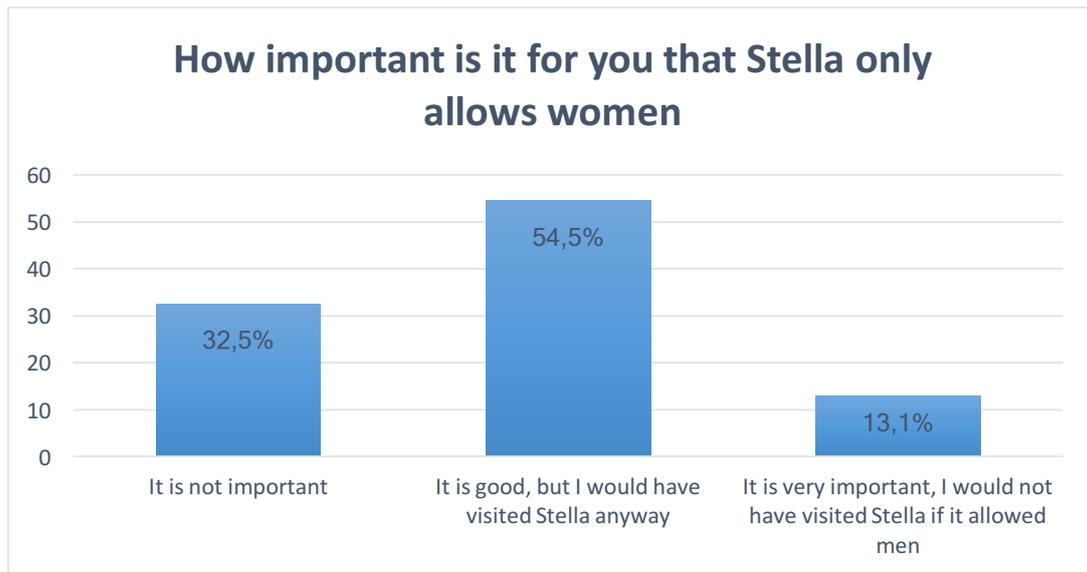


Figure 10. *Stella as a women-only center*

The data in this table reveals that approximately one third (32,5%) of the participants do not find it important that the center only allows women and they do not care about it. More than half of the participants (54,5%), however, think it is good that Stella only allows women, but say that they would have visited the center anyway. In contrast, 13,1% of the participants indicate that it is very important that Stella do not allow men and would not have visited the center if they did.

The fact that almost one third of the respondents indirectly said that they would accept it if the organization would open the doors also for men shows that a significant number of the attendants also wants men to be helped and feel included when it comes to the aspect of social and economic integration. Further on, it proves that a significant number of these women value equality and tolerance, (Meld.St.6, 2012-2013, p.8) which is important premises of every democratic society.

Although the majority of the respondents would have visited Stella regardless of the presence of men, they did, however, find it pleasant and nice that men in fact are not present. From my interviews, Janita pointed out *“the fact that Stella is a place only for women is what makes it unique”*. She thinks that the atmosphere would have been different with men around and when I asked her why, she said she believes many women feel more comfortable and relaxed to *“[...] talk about problems and question*

they would not talk about with other men around". For Fatima on the other hand, the question regarding the presence of men is claimed to be irrelevant. Nevertheless, she does acknowledge the fact that *"many women on Stella is wearing a hijab and I am not sure if they would accept having men around in the location"*.

The need for women-only activities can, as all my informants talked about during the interviews, be caused by different reasons. Christiansen & Christiansen (2006, p.71) argue that women organizations is positive because some family and cultural traditions do not allow women to participate in activities that also includes men. Furthermore, it is favorable for women to have a place where they can get information, share experiences and be recognized among other women. Fatima did implicitly exemplify this during the interview:

"Stella is a nice meeting place for sharing, both with other women and the people working there (volunteers). I thought I had big problems the first time I went to Stella, but I experienced that many women had problems with their husbands. I think many of the women are afraid to talk about it"

I asked Fatima why and she explained that some of her friends *"live in hell"*, but they are afraid to tell people due to the consequences that would occur if their husbands found out. Fatima imitated her friend's voice who had told her: *"he (husband) will only be extra mean and more violent against me if I tell anyone"*.

This empirical example show how Fatima's friends might have their self-confidence and self-respect destroyed as they experience love as replaced by violence and their rights violated (Honneth, 1995, p.129). Further, the illustration is consistent with Christensen and Christensen (2006) argument about how important it is for women to have an arena to meet other women without their family and men. A place where they can request guidance and advice related to family problems and choices, and a place where they can discuss experiences with other women – both Norwegian and ethnic (p.71). The safety Fatima experience of *"having someone (Stella) to go to"*, a place to seek if she needs help and someone to see, relates to the networks "buffer effect" (Putnam, 2000, p.332). Violence against women is a crime and a human rights violation that affects women all over the world, including Norway. Many women are trapped in relationships they struggle to get out of. In addition, immigrants have a smaller personal

network than Norwegian women, and therefore fewer options to move out of their homes or less knowledge about their possibilities and rights. Knowing that one has a social safety net may therefore feel protective. If the participants develop a sense of (thick or thin) trust towards Stella's members and volunteers (Putnam, 2000, p.135-136), it can be a place for women to open up for other women and get help to "assert claims" (Feinberg, in Hayden, 2001, p.179). In order for immigrant women to claim a right, they need to know they have the right to claim a right. Help related to just treatment could for some include recognition from other women in order to express one's struggles and understandings and advice regarding where to achieve professional help if needed (for example information about crises center, in Norwegian 'krisesenter').

The findings from this data suggest that being with other women makes women feel more comfortable and empowered. Women-only activities might therefore create a venue for recognition and empowerment of the individual women in a way that feels comfortable. Some of the women might therefore feel Stella creates a meeting place where no one is judged by their actions, problems, speech or problems.

To summarize, is immigrants claim recognition in general crucial for the development of a positive attitudes. Honneth's three forms of recognition, love, rights and solidarity, are not separated or mutually exclusive. Based on Stella's activities and the findings from this research, I would argue that recognition through love (self-confidence, interactions, friendships etc.) and solidarity (self-esteem, particularity, abilities/talents) are most shared among the participants and volunteers.

5.6. Volunteer or participant

As mentioned earlier, Stella's activities and volunteers work *for* immigrants (Christensen and Christensen, 2006, p.28) as the women's center's intentions and services is aimed towards integration aspects like learning Norwegian, applying for jobs, socialize and helping women to participate in the mainstream society. The project manager at Stella emphasize that they (and Red Cross in general) is trying to erase the distinction between participants and volunteers (Red Cross Woman field, 2014, p.6). Consequently, volunteers are welcome to participate in activities and participants are welcomed to become volunteers. Related to this research, I wanted to explore if this distinction could have any impact on immigrant women's experiences from Stella. Consequently, all the survey respondents were asked about their role at the women's center.

The data revealed that 59,2% of the respondents had "participated" while 17,8 of the respondents had "volunteered". The remaining 23% of the respondents had "both participated and volunteered" at the women's center. These numbers suggest many women have tested both roles, something that can help to remove the power relation between participants and volunteers. The numbers also correlate with the 25,4% of the respondents from the questionnaire who listed "volunteering" as a motivation to visit Stella in the first place (Figure 3).

Having both minority and majority women volunteering, Stella tries to prevent the creation of an asymmetrical power relationship. This is also linked to Oxaal (1997) which emphasis empowerment "as a bottom-up process rather than something that can be formulated as a top-down strategy" (1997, p.6). As a consequence, participants get encouraged to volunteer at the center to facilitate both integration and empowerment processes through active participation and contribution center lead to interactions and a more active use of the Norwegian language, expansion of one's network, and the feeling of contribution might increase one's self confidence. Many women expressed a desire to work as a volunteer, either to give something back, get Norwegian friends or in general help out (Scott, 2013, p.81). The "feeling of contribution" is linked to the Norwegian "arbeidslinja". To increase the number of minorities in voluntary work, Christensen and Christensen (2006) research showed that organizations that have good

experience in developing “users” to be volunteers emphasize the importance to focus on the most committed and visible people in the activities or services (2006, p.209). Rather than thinking about the whole community as potential volunteers, many organizations experiences success related to encourage users/participants who showed up to and was the most interested.

It is however, important to keep in mind that Stella is not a civic network where the participants are equal members of the organization, but rather a place where a majority organization has established a free offer for immigrant women. This was slightly expressed through the interviews. Lubna, which both participated in activities and worked as a volunteer at Stella uttered a distinction between the two roles:

“The volunteers have more responsibility and they have to, in a higher degree, commit themselves to work and give more of themselves. As a participant, you are freer and they can come and go, as they like”.

I also noticed Fatima, during the interview occasionally talked about the volunteers as *“the people working there”*. This is an example of a division between the two categories, although the Red Cross is trying to work against it. Women who visit Stella will therefore become participants of a voluntary service run by volunteers, rather than equal members.

To measure wheatear a voluntary organization successfully help integrate those who make use of it, is that themselves become volunteers one day. Putnam explain how *“volunteering fosters more volunteering”* (2000, p.121), which could be a participant wanting to give something back by volunteering him/herself, or because participation in voluntary organizations increases the powerful question of being asked (2000, p.121)

5.6.1 Volunteerism and employment participation

The food related project *“Food with purpose and achievements” (Mat med mål og mening)*, - Stella Kafè” is an important part of Stella’s community. The aim of the

project, organized by Stella, is to provide customized, qualifying volunteer work through a cafeteria. The voluntary work in the café is aimed towards

“women with little or no connection to the labor market, poor knowledge of Norwegian, women who struggle with little faith in their expertise and capacity, as mental challenges, or who are not comfortable/familiar to deal with deadlines and compulsory agreements can contribute according to their ability in safe surroundings and in a context they know from before” (Gulbrandsen, 2015, p.35).

Gulbrandsen (2015) recently published the report “Frivillighet som treningsarena for arbeidslivet”, where Stella café is one of three projects Red Cross have organized to help people outside the labor market.

The report focuses on how voluntary work might help immigrants enter the labor market. Gulbrandsen (2015) also found that the volunteers work in the café have strengthened the women’s competence and new relevant skills for the labor market (p.94). Gulbrandsens findings from Stella café correspond to one of the women from my study, Lubna who used to work as a volunteer at the cafeteria herself. Lubna explained that the food-related activity gave her a nice opportunity to undertake a volunteer task in Stella. One that she could easily succeed and receive recognition.

“The first thing we did when we arrived in the morning was to buy food and ingredients for the recipe. We could come with suggestions for what kind of food we wanted to serve; it was not like everything was planned for us. We decided together. We made the food and served it for the customers who arrived in the café. They paid a small amount of money, which we in the end had to count and report. The work was characterized by a certain routine we had to follow, but it was so nice to work there and interact with both my colleagues and customers. We always finished the day with a little language practice in a work context related to words the kitchen like stekepanne/frying pan, kjøleskap/fridge, and kniv/knif” - Lubna

This example shows how volunteers might be more attached to the women’s center than normal participants at Stella. The volunteers experience a high degree of user involvement carried out in planning and preparing the food as well as counting and reporting the cafeteria’s income. This is backed up by Christiansen and Christensen

(2006, p.26) who find it important that the contributors have an understanding of the activities carried out and the actions that should lead to the goal of the activity.

They argue how recognition and respect of the participants is essential for them to act and interact with other people and hence create a sense of belonging and cohesion. Consistent with Handy & Greenspan (2009, p.970) study of voluntary work in congregations, making and sharing meals also provides the opportunity to share problems, discuss issues, and form networks that lend mutual support.

When I asked Lubna if she learned anything from her work in the café, she said that she had become more independent since it is “*a lot of responsibility working there*”. She did not deny that she was a bit scared at the beginning and asked herself questions like “*did I do anything wrong today*” and “*did I forget anything today*”. Lubna said that she reflected over these kind of questions in the beginning and whether she

“... fulfilled the Norwegian standards. Although Stella it is a women center, it reminded me very of regularly working place. When I worked as a volunteer I felt that it was a kind of job because I had to be precise and do what was expected from me”

These findings, along with Gulbrandsens (2015), advocate Stella café as an initiative aligned with self-mastery and user involvement. The activity emphasizes that everyone possesses inner resources that can be activated and regained if one gets a chance to use them. Volunteering enhances the creation of both bonding and bridging network (Putnam, 2000), but also an ability to understand some of the culture and social norms of the host country and the unwritten norms and rules that exist (Hamer, 2013, p.491). The cafeteria provides a great opportunity to learn how the Norwegian labor market works and it's expectations. The women who have volunteered and have showed up (80% of the time they were signed up for) get a diploma they can add to their CV, and the opportunity to use Stella as a reference when applying for jobs. This will give future bosses a chance to check if the women applying for work shows up and do what she is told and expected to do.

6. Conclusion

In Norway, many women from developing countries face a variety of challenges as they try to integrate in their host country. They experience marginalization in the labor market, a lack of Norwegian friends and many struggle to feel included in mainstream society.

The research project was set out to explore how these struggles can be met through immigrant women's participation in a voluntary organization. The study has sought to give all immigrant women that have participated at Stella – Red Cross Women's center as of August 2012, a voice to speak up and share their experiences. Throughout an objective questionnaire and subjective in-depth interviews, I have examined if and how a voluntary organization can work as a place to regain (1) competence, (2) networks and (3) recognition for immigrant women, lost in the migration process.

1. Competence:

Concerning Stella, it appears to be a well-adjusted women organization with clear goals and a dedicated group of members. The center benefit from the fact that women visit with their own "free will" and many seem to have common goals. The findings suggest that the immigrant women's motivation to participate at Stella is rooted in a desire to develop themselves, increase their competence by participating in courses and activities, as well as learning and practicing Norwegian. The collected data gathered from the questionnaire illustrate how 79,1% of the respondents claimed to have learned "a little", "some" or "a lot" of new things. This is impressive numbers which confirms the center's good work in this arena. The qualitative interviews support the quantitative data, suggesting that Stella's courses and activities is in line with many immigrant women's needs, and that they are highly appreciated. To summarize, the majority of my respondents claim they have increased their possession of competence, knowledge and skills.

2. Network:

Making use of Putnam (2000), I have illustrated how friendships and social capital play an important role for the immigrants' quality of life. The discoveries of my research support this entirely. The study illustrates that several of the survey respondents were mainly interested in bridging capital activities that might strengthen their relations to the wider community. However, by participating daily in activities in an accessible and open arena, bonding network activities naturally follows as a bonus for a number of the participants. My findings demonstrate that approximately one-half of the immigrant women increased their friendships with "some", "many" or "several" friendships during their time spent at Stella.

Even though my data suggest several of the women found friends through Stella, that is not the case for everyone. A total of 28,8% of the immigrant women claimed they had not made a single new friend at the women's center. Difficulties finding friends in Norway, even through employment, was confirmed by two out of the three women I interviewed. This suggest that although employment have a positive effect both on immigrant participation and bridging to the mainstream society, it should not be interpreted as an assumed outcome, nor should it be misinterpreted as acceptance and recognition by the majority.

3. Recognition:

Every day, immigrant women are placed in situations where they are approached and asked questions. Mutual recognition is one of the most fundamental types of social interaction and it influence immigrant women's daily experience of recognition, and sense of belonging in the host society. The lack of it could result in poor inclusion within the society and working life. Hence, self-confidence is at Stella recognized as essential to develop yourself and participate in the society. This study suggest that Stella does a good job with their contribution to this issue, as many women claim to have gained better confidence and/or recognition from the women's center. This was

illustrated from the collected data, where 75,9% of the participants' claim they have developed "a little", "some", or "a lot" of confidence and/or sense of recognition.

Viewed through the lens of Honneth's recognition theory, being a social meeting place with opportunities to increase one's competence and abilities through participating/volunteering in activities at Stella, the center enables a sense of recognition for many women. Stella recognize women by believing in them and giving them faith in their own possibilities so they can be a resource for themselves and the wider community. Consequently, one's attitude towards oneself emerges in one's meeting with another's attitude towards oneself, enabling immigrant women the possibility to act with confidence as morally responsible agents (Hamer, 2013, p.353-354)

However, it is important that recognition must be mutual or intersubjective. That is, mutuality reflects attitudes of symmetrical esteem between the individual and others. In relation to a voluntary organization with focus on empowerment, it is not enough for the participants to be recognized as immigrant women. The women must also recognized the reason behind their participation at Stella, and act upon personal goals. Hence, Stella cannot claim to "empower women". Women must want to empower themselves – because no one else will do it for them.

6.1 Immigrant women's participation in a voluntary organization – a tool for empowerment, recognition and social capital?

A voluntary social integration initiative can, according to Christensen & Christensen (2006, p.31) be evaluated by the extent to which it has succeeded in targeting the participants' interest and needs. Overall, the findings from this study indicate that the majority of my participants fulfill their interests and need at Stella, using their participation as a tool towards empowerment, recognition and social capital. The fact that 87% of the respondents would recommend Stella to other friends, clearly indicate a high degree of satisfaction among its members.

Further on, central to several arguments in this thesis is the notion that civil society is an important sphere in which empowerment, recognition and social capital is practiced. In a world where millions of people are seeking a safer and better life, it is likely that several women with asylum seeker and/or refugee background are expected to arrive in Norway (Meld. St. 30, 2015–2016, p.7). It is therefore important to provide those who wish to be a part of the Norwegian society opportunities and incentives to participate and feel included in the society and working life. In this thesis, I argue how voluntary organizations play an important role in this setting, establishing valuable knowledge and social networks that can provide enjoyment and create a sense of belonging. In addition, voluntary organizations create opportunities to practice the Norwegian language and become acquainted with the Norwegian society. This is important in order to participate in the society. Linking Putnam (2000) and Honneth's (1995) theory with the collected quantitative and qualitative data, my thesis concludes that voluntary organizations, such as Stella – Red Cross Women's center, work as an important integration initiative supplement to the Government.

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