

# Events and social integration –

## How sport and outdoor events can work as drivers for newcomers' social integration

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for newcomers' social integration**

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## Abstract

Immigrant-receiving societies emphasize the need for immigrants to integrate into mainstream life. In Sweden, this trend has manifested itself in integration policies. In the present study, the authors aim to understand sports and outdoor events experience and its effects on social integration of immigrants and refugees' in the Jämtland County, Sweden.

By 'giving voice' to 19 immigrants from different nationalities, this study explores the new Swedes' perspectives on social integration process and conceptualizes their engagement and experience of sports and outdoor events throughout this process. The participants speak of the benefits and needs to participate actively in the society of settlement, but they also describe the barriers and obstacles that they may face. Their perception of integration is built on their life stories and experiences.

Based on findings and results, three descriptive themes are described. These themes are interpreted in one overarching theme elaborating the role of sports and outdoor events as a social connection leading to social integration of newcomers. It is assumed that sports and outdoors are not strong enough to achieve social integration, rather they can act as social bridges and provide a common ground where integration can be cultivated. The results of this study can be useful for the sports and events planners and organizers as well as those who deal with newcomers' integration in any society.

*Key words:* Social integration, sports and outdoor events, immigrants, newcomers, Jämtland County.

## Svensk sammanfattning

Platser och länder som tar emot migranter betonar vikten av att invandrare integreras i samhället. I den här rapporten vill författarna fördjupa förståelsen kring vad evenemang inom idrott och friluftsliv kan betyda för social integration av invandrare och flyktingar. Undersökningsområdet är Jämtlands län, Sverige där idrott och friluftsliv är centralt både som fritidssyssla och som sysselsättningsområde.

Genom att intervjua och "ge röst" till 19 relativt nyanlända personer kartlägger rapporten perspektiv på social integration och vilken roll idrott och friluftsliv kan ha spelat under integrationsprocessen. Utifrån sina erfarenheter och livshistorier behandlas såväl möjligheter som utmaningar i att söka integreras i ett nytt land.

Baserat på intervjuerna presenteras ett övergripande förklaringsstema och tre smalare teman. Dessa teman används som ett verktyg för att förklara vilken roll evenemang inom idrott och friluftsliv kan spela för nyanlända.

Begreppet friluftsliv visar sig vara svårt för många att förhålla sig till utifrån tidigare erfarenheter. Vidare konstateras att idrott och friluftsliv i sig endast i begränsad omfattning driver social integration, men likafullt utgör viktiga sociala broar där integration kan stärkas över tid. Resultaten i denna rapport kan vara användbara för arrangörer och planerare inom idrott och friluftsliv såväl för dem som hanterar nyanländas integration.

*Nyckelord:* Social integration, idrott och friluftsliv, evenemang, immigration, nyanlända, Jämtland.

## **Preface**

This report is based on a master thesis written by Parisa Setoodegan and supervised by Robert Pettersson. That thesis was written in the discipline of Human Geography at the Master program in tourism at Mid Sweden University during the autumn of 2020. The present report was finalized during an internship period on ETOUR Research Center during the spring of 2021.





# 1 Introduction

In countries with high levels of ethnocultural diversity, it is in the interest of everyone to have immigrants and ethnocultural minorities actively engaged in civic, social, and cultural spheres of their communities (Aizlewood, Bevelander, and Pendakur, 2008). The engagement of immigrants in recreational outdoor activities is an indicator of community engagement leading to social benefits, increasing interactions across diverse groups, and making a sense of belonging to one's community (Aizlewood, Bevelander, and Pendakur, 2008). Social integration is limited covered by sports and outdoor recreational researchers. It is hardly analyzed for instance because of a multidimensional nature of construct (Elmose-Østerlund, et al, 2019). For a broader and sufficient understanding of social integration in sports and outdoors different aspects of integration such as cultural understanding and acceptance leading to social interactions and identifications among local community and immigrants are needed to be addressed (Elling, De Knop and Knoppers, 2001; Esser, 2006; Elmose-Østerlund, et al. 2019).

Integration can take place during working time and during leisure time. In Sweden, much leisure time is spent in more or less organized form, not seldom out of doors and related to sport. Not least *events* are central activities where people can be spectators or participants. From a sports club perspective, these events constitute important sources of income. From a societal perspective, clubs and events create considerable economic impacts, foster public health and facilitate integration contributing with substantial social values (Pettersson and Wallstam, 2017; Brown, Getz, Pettersson and Wallstam, 2015; Wallstam, Ioannides and Pettersson, 2020).

It has been stated, (Armbrecht, Lundberg, Pettersson and Zillinger, 2021) that sports clubs and their related events act as major contributors to a heterogeneous society. This includes the incorporation by means of age, social and geographical background, gender and culture. Sports clubs, and their events, offer frequent opportunities for integration between children with different backgrounds. Coming together on a regular basis in a place where participants share a common goal is a great driver in this. This is obvious in the wake of the immigration wave during the last decade.

This report aims for a broader understanding the role sport and outdoor events might have in fostering social integration of newcomers. The study is undertaken in an area with a strong tradition in sports and outdoor activities and events, namely the county of Jämtland in Sweden.

## 1.1. Problem statement

The relationship between leisure activities and migrants' integration is an important social topic (Stodolska and Yi, 2003; Lee and Funk, 2011). Recreational activities provide migrant communities with opportunities to adapt to their new homeland (Lee and Funk, 2011). Sport and outdoor activities as global phenomena can be important arenas for integration into new societies (Hertting, Karlefors, 2013). New relationships can be created, and cultural learnings can take place through sport (Hertting, Karlefors, 2013). While it is well known that outdoor

recreation, use and perception are related to one's cultural background, social integration can be promoted by participation in outdoor recreation and leisure activities (Gentin, 2011).

Integration is defined as the state when there is an interest in maintaining one's original culture, while simultaneously engaging in daily interactions with other groups (Lee and Funk, 2011). Social integration is labeled as "the extent to which immigrants engage in social interaction with natives" (Martinovic, Tubergen and Maas, 2009, p.871). However, social integration is just one of the aspects of immigrants' integration next to such as structural and cultural ones, which respectively refer to the incorporation of immigrants in the job market and the adaptation of values and customs of the receiving society (Martinovic, Tubergen and Maas, 2009).

There are two main arguments indicating the importance of studying social integration of immigrants. First, contact between ethnic groups can improve intergroup relations; therefore, it decreases prejudice and conflict (Martinovic, Tubergen and Maas, 2009); and secondly, immigrants can get access to the "social capital of natives through such ties, which leads to their economic and cultural integration" (Hagendoorn, Veenman, and Vollebergh, 2003, p. 1). Also, through such ties, the immigrants can improve their language efficiency and make bigger networks which is a contributor for finding careers (Martinovic, Tubergen and Maas, 2009). Integration of immigrants can be demonstrated in both strong ties in a society as can be displayed by ethnic intermarriages or in weak ties as an indicator of social integration which represents a more common form of social interaction through casual friendship and contact (Martinovic, Tubergen and Maas, 2009).

Since late 19<sup>th</sup> century and 20<sup>th</sup> century, the notion that sport as a tool for social interventions is populated and highlights the point that sport participation is essential for the reproduction of societal norms, values, and institutions (Müller, Van Zoonen, and De Roode, 2008). The socially constructed nature of the cultural forms has produced not only a variety of ways of moving, playing, exercising, and competing, but also a range of values and meanings attached to such activities (Donnelly and Coakley, 2002). Moreover, after the Great Depression and World War II, outdoor recreation emerged as a major component of American and European lifestyles (Cordell, 2008). As the population of the world becomes more urbanized, particularly Europe, there are concerns for the health impacts of modern living such as lack of exercise, obesity, and mental health problem; therefore, access to the nature and the potential benefits of outdoor recreation has climbed higher on policy agendas (Bell, Tyrväinen, Sievänen, Pröbstl, and Simpson, 2007). As societies become more pluralistic, a major factor that managers of natural environment sites need to consider is the ethnic and racial background of site visitors because it is likely that recreation behaviors vary by ethnic groups' participation in outdoor recreations, perception of sites, and expectations of visitors (Baas, Ewert and Chavez, 1993). Previous studies focused on under-participation of minorities in most type of outdoor recreation utilizing possible explanations such as marginality, and ethnicity (Carr and Williams, 1993; Floyd, 1998).

The study of events, social integration and newcomers should be understood based on the last decades' waves of immigrants to Sweden since 2014 and onward. This during a time period when events simultaneously have become more and more popular as a motive to travel and

are today a common spare time activity for most Swedes (Wallstam, Ioannides and Pettersson 2020). This is true not least in the studied area where several local, regional, and international events are hosted every year.

Jämtland covers a vast forest and natural environment and is famous for outdoor recreational activities, winter sports, and host of some international outdoor events. Major sports events have had direct, indirect, and induced economic impacts in Jämtland contributing to the regional economy, and more job opportunities due to visiting the events. Among the social impacts of sports events can be positive sense of pride, effects on the quality of lives and social opportunities (Wallstam, Kronenberg, and Pettersson, 2019). Furthermore, the outdoors is popular among the Swedish people and has become one of the integral parts of their daily life among various age groups and genders. It is estimated that half of Swedish people are active in some sports (Sampson, 2015) and one-third of the population in Sweden is active in terms of outdoor recreation (Public Health Agency of Sweden, 2018). Referring to the importance of outdoor life (*friluftsliv*) in Sweden, year 2021 is supposed to be *The year of outdoor life*, which is large collaborative project between organizations and people who want to participate in the event (Stighäll, 2020).

The report starts by elaborating the multidimensional concept of integration by describing central theoretical framework. In the third section by reviewing the previous research, the concepts of migration, its causes and ethnic geography; also, an integrative role of sports and outdoor events leading to the research question is developed. Before the methodology section, case of Sweden and specifically Jämtland as the study area in relation with immigrants and sports and outdoors are reviewed. In the fifth section, the methods and analysis applied in the study to address each research question are elaborated. Finally, the study offers a discussion, conclusion, and directions for future research.

## 1.2. Objectives and research questions

Societies that accept migrants with diverse multicultural populations increasingly experience political, social, and economic challenges (Shiobara, 2005). Since European countries have become more ethnically and culturally diverse, the relationship between patterns of outdoor recreation and ethnicity and culture in Europe have been the focus of attention. Leisure scholars recognized the limits in a complex society and found out the intersection of race and ethnicity in relation to leisure and outdoor recreation (Gentin, 2011).

Social integration is a social phenomenon; however, research has demonstrated that while economic and spatial integration into another society is attainable, “social integration seems to be elusive” (Avenarius, 2009, p.26). Considering some assumptions that integration is improved by time passing (Martinovic, Tubergen, and Mass, 2009), or acculturation as a socially enriching experience (Leong, 2008) is linked to migrants’ physical activity patterns (Ryska, 2001), event organizers and host community residents calling for attention to be paid to social-integration value of sport participation and social value of events (Chalip, 2006). This not least to enhance the integration of newcomers (Müller, Van Zoonen, De Roode, 2008).

However, previous findings show that influencing factors such as race (Qian and Cobas, 2004), or cultural differences (Kalmijn, and Tubergen, 2006) affect cross-group interactions, while Avenarius (2009, p.26) indicates in a study that the “basic premise is that individuals are integrated into the society through social relationships”. Lack of social integration attribute to processes of individualization, secularization, and immigration (Elling, De Knop and Knoppers, 2001). Involvement in sports is considered as a highly effective solution to many of social issues and problems related to health, socialization, and social integration of citizens. It can be examined as a neutral instrument to restore and enhance social cohesion (Elling, De Knop and Knoppers, 2001).

The findings on the study of nature-based outdoor recreation motivations and site preferences show that there are some motivations including: discovering rare opportunities to interact directly with the natural world; improving personal health and fitness and overall well-being; enhancing social interactions and the sense of community as a social benefit resulting from spending time in nature; and finally affecting the levels of social contact and social cohesion. Therefore, sports and outdoors can present powerful drivers of nature-based outdoor recreation behavior among individuals from various racial and ethnic backgrounds (Whiting, Larson, Green, and Kralowec, 2017).

Events produce experiences. Such event experiences are perceived as being situated in time and space; therefore, the time and place are important for experiences of visitors. Having access to the information regarding experiences the visitors run across can help forecasting event impacts and understanding the event trends and potentials (Pettersson and Zillinger, 2011). However, studies that combine types of event experiences and integration of immigrants have not been seen. Despite years of research, it is apparent that more studies are needed to understand the complex factors and mechanism influencing the sports and outdoors participation patterns and preferences of different cultural groups.

The concept of newcomer in this study is utilized for all non-Swedish citizens who have moved to Sweden and plan to stay in Sweden as their living country, and they are not limited to few nationalities or specific areas of the world. The central point in this study is the lifestyle connected to sports and outdoor events in Jämtland County, Sweden. The results of this study can be thoughtful for the sports and outdoor event planners and organizations involved with immigration themes and affairs.

Based on the societal challenges and the role of sports, outdoors and events, this report starts out from the main research question: *What is the role of sport and outdoor events in social integration of new Swedes?*

## 2 Literature review

There is a considerable wealth of scientific literature on events, sports, and sport events covered on event management, event tourism, volunteering, event policies to consumer behaviour and societal participation induced by sport events (Getz and Page, 2020). However, there is less academic focus on social challenges of immigrants' integration in the context of sports and outdoor events. The aim of the literature review is to present an overview of the research on the integrative power of sports and outdoor events as drivers for socially integration of newcomers in Jämtland County.

### 2.1 Immigrants and integration

One of the greatest challenges that European societies have faced since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is immigration. The movement of people around Europe and the arrival of new people to Europe has accelerated and reinforced since the 1990s (Kennett, 2005).

Sweden also granted protection to more asylum applicants per million of the country's inhabitants in 2016 than any other European Union Member state. In total, Sweden made the second highest number of positive decisions on applications for protection from any EU Member State in 2016; double the number of 2015 (Roden, 2017). As a result of these movements, immigration has become a high profile political and social issue (Kennett, 2005; Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup, 2008; Goldschmidt, 2017).

A conceptual framework defining core domains of integration is proposed through a study done by Ager and Strang (2008). This framework is deduced from inductive methodology comprising four discrete elements: data of documentary, conceptual analysis, fieldwork in refugee impacted settings, and secondary analysis of the cross-sectional survey to provide the rationale for the proposed framework (See Figure 1).

The review of potential indicators highlights a number of key areas of activity in public arena which can be indicative of successful integration. However, it is problematic to see achievement in these areas purely as a 'marker' of integration. They may serve as potential means to support the achievement of integration (Ager and Strang, 2008).

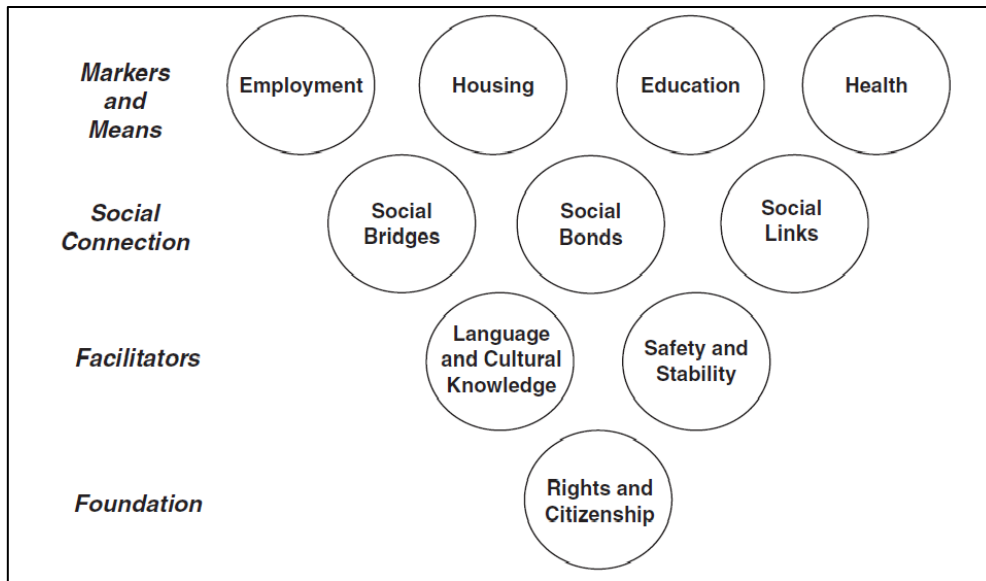


Figure 1. Conceptual framework defining core domains of integration.  
 Source: Ager and Strang (2008), p. 170.

The ten domains of the framework were broadly established by passing through four considerations for selecting each indicator; these are: the indicators' 'comprehensiveness' which represents all important sub-issues within each domain; 'flexibility' which enables users of the framework to choose the indicators that reflect the focus of study; 'comparability' providing opportunities for benchmarking and the collection of coherent data sets; and 'feasibility' of indicators which are readily available or feasible to be collected (Ager and Strang, 2004).

The areas of employment, housing, education, and health are thus widely acknowledged by diverse stakeholders to be key aspects of integration into a new society. Employment has consistently been identified as a factor influencing many relevant issues such as economic independence, planning for future, and meeting the host society. Vocational training and higher education are considered as key aspects of integration which can advance employability either in general terms or through enhancement of specific work skills or language skills. Housing affects refugees' overall physical and emotional well-being. Education provides not only skills and competences in support of employment, but also schools as the most important place of contact with members of local host communities play important roles in establishing relationships supportive of integration. Health cannot be mentioned as a core factor in the integration, but good health is generally seen as an important resource for active engagement in a new society. These elements can be included in the operational definition of integration. This is also a discussion of 'citizenship and rights' as a necessary *foundation* for understanding what integration is and how it may be measured. To develop an effective policy on integration, governments need to clearly indicate policy on nationhood and citizenship and thus the rights accorded to refugees. There is clear understanding of citizenship and rights and responsibilities associated with it. Rights determine the foundation of integration policy and might include human dignity, equality, freedom of cultural choice, justice, security, and independence. These rights do not in

themselves define integration, but they underpin important assumptions about integration (Ager and Strang, 2008).

This question arises here that what processes are seen to mediate or provide 'connective tissue' between fundamental principles of citizenship and rights on one hand, and public outcomes in sectors such as employment, housing, education, and health on the other side? Based on Ager and Strang's analysis (2008), two main groupings of factors are relevant. 'Social connections' have a fundamental role in driving the process of integration at a local level. 'Facilitators' also are understood as removing barriers to integration such as a language barrier, or lack of familiarity with their surroundings in the next level. Three differing forms of social connections have been distinguished: social bonds (with family and co-ethnic, co-national, co-religious or other forms of group), social bridges (with other communities) and social links (with the structures of the state) (Putnam, 1993 as cited in Ager and Strang, 2008). Zetter et al (2006) claimed that these concepts offer significant values in the context of local integration.

By the social bonds, refugees may feel settled through connection to families because this enables them to share cultural practices and maintain patterns of relationships. The establishment of connection with 'like-ethnic' groups is seen to have various benefits contributing towards effective integration. Pointing to the importance of refugee community, Duke, Sales and Gregory (1999) indicate that these provide 'voice for refugees', contact more isolated individuals, respond to their needs, provide cultural and social activities to maintain their own customs and religion, keep in touch with their own language, celebrate their traditions and exchange news from their home country. Relationships with like-ethnic group also have health benefits (Ager and Strang, 2008).

Focusing on social bridges, Ager and Strang (2008) point out in the literature that the consideration of the relationship between new residents and host community is generally represented by issues related to social harmony or references to participation in the host society. Robert Putnam's research highlights the different roles of 'bridging' and 'bonding' social capital (Cheong, Edwards, Goulbourne, and Solomos, 2007). "Bridging social capital concerns voluntary associations and horizontal ties based on common interests that transcend heterogeneous differences of ethnicity, religion and socio-economic status. In contrast, bonding social capital refers to exclusive social ties that people build around homogeneity" (Cheong, et al, 2007, p.29). Based on Ager and Strang's (2008) study results, integration can be discussed in terms of participation of people from different groups in a range of activities including sports, college classes, religious worships, community groups and political activity as social bridges. "Integration depends on the complementary development of social bridges as well as bonds in order to avoid the emergence of separate, very bonded but disconnected communities" (Strang and Ager, 2010, p.598).

While 'social bonds' describe connections that link members of a group, and 'social bridges' connections between such groups, 'social links' refer to the connection between individuals and structures of the state, such as government services. It recognizes that while refugees face circumstances (such as lack of familiarity with environment or language) which lead to barriers, it requires effort from both newcomers' side and host community to achieve equal



access to the services. Facilitation of access connect refugees to relevant services which supports integration (Ager and Strang, 2008).

This approach would have inevitably shape understanding with respect to ideas of integration as 'insertion' of one group amidst another, but since integration is 'two-way' process (ECRE, 1999), this points to the importance of a social connection between refugees or immigrants and those other members of the communities which they settle in. "Integration, in a sociological context, refers to stable, cooperative relations within a clearly defined social system. Integration can also be viewed as a process that of strengthening relationships within a social system, and of introducing new actors and groups into the system and its institutions. The integration of immigrants is primarily a process: if this process succeeds, the society is said to be integrated" (Bosswick, 2006, p. 2). The integration is concluded when a refugee or an immigrant becomes an *active* member of the society from legal, social, economic, educational, and cultural perspectives (ECRE, 1999).

The level of expectations in terms of depth and quality of relationships are worth paying attention. At the 'basic' level, absence of conflict reflects integration. But mostly the communities expect a 'mixing' of people from different groups. And finally, by feeling 'belonging, it would be the ultimate mark of living in an integrated community. This involves links with families, committed friendships, and a sense of respect and shared values; however, this does not deny diversity within a particular group (Ager and Strang, 2008).

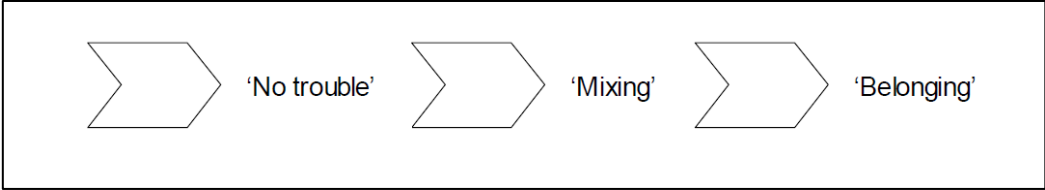


Figure 2. Continuum of expectations.  
Source: Ager and Strang, 2004. P. 3.

Based on Gibbs and Block (2017), the framework suggested by Ager and Strang (2008) in Figure 2, effectively represents the multidimensional and interactive nature of domains that constitute inclusion or exclusion. Education, employment, housing and health are described as both 'markers' and 'means' of integration. The model incorporates theories of social capital by positioning binding, bridging, and linking connections as key mediators of inclusion. Facilitators of integration comprise social capabilities represented by language and cultural knowledge, having a sense of safety and stability.

Social integration, on the other hand, is widely used and debated; however, it is seldom defined in any specific or explicit way in public discussions and academia (Alpert, 1940). Social integration refers to the inclusion of individuals in a system, the creation of relationships among individuals and their attitudes towards the society. It is the result of the conscious and motivated interaction and cooperation of individuals and groups" (Bosswick, 2006, p. 2). The term is controversial because it "lacks criteria for operationalization and measurement" (Peters, 2011, p.59); also, what constitutes a social or cultural norm is inherently subjective and is

defined in relative terms (Algan, Bisin, Manning, and Verdier, 2012). Definitions are mostly grounded in “normative presumptions” about what an integrated society look like (Blokland and Van Eijk, 2010, p.314). This term in the arena of immigration and ethnic diversity encompasses a range of targeted strategies for the inclusion of various groups of migrants in order to develop a more inclusive society, refer to equal citizenship and participation in the society (Peters, 2011). Therefore, the policies have begun to include sport and outdoors as vehicles for the integration of immigrant groups (Gramann, 1996; Stodolska and Alexandris, 2004; Kennett, 2005).

It is important to understand the notion of integration as a process of re-socialization which includes all aspects of the relation between individual migrants and their host society (Peters, 2011). The opposition to migration and migrant integration can be evidenced by the impact of economic factors, attitudes do correlate with age, level of education, rural or urban living and pace of change. Contacts usually make attitudes more positive but negative encounters can produce powerful negative generalizations. The impact of media (Crawley, 2005), hostile attitudes and discrimination as the outcomes of negative attitudes or institutional structures and procedures are considered barriers to integration (Spencer and Cooper, 2006). Therefore Algan, et al (2012, p.173) indicate that “although cultural integration is a process of adaptation in both the majority and minority groups, due to the asymmetry in size between the groups, the bulk of adaptation is likely to be on the side of immigrants”. Removing barriers’ is a key to integration. Based on this ten-domain framework, the barriers to integration exist in two major areas: language and cultural knowledge; and safety and security (Ager and Strang, 2008). Moreover, Rublee and Shaw (1991) found out that there are some central concepts which are the main factors affecting the integration process; mobility including both social and physical mobilities (job and work training participation), community and leisure participation and general well-being.

## 2.2 Sports and outdoor events and their integrative power

The fact that different people comprehend the landscape differently is a humanistic approach in geography. This approach demonstrates the individuals’ values, meaning systems, intentions, and conscious act as the centers of analysis. Humanistic approach explores both the role of larger forces, such as culture, gender, and the state, and the ways in which these forces affect individuals’ lives. Cultural geographical work, therefore, conceptualizes the relationship of people and the environment as interactive and not one-way one. It also emphasizes the role of landscapes in shaping and reinforcing human practices (Knox and Marston, 2013, p.193).

Sports landscapes and sports events are examples of cultural landscapes (Ramshaw, 2006). Ethnic backgrounds affect recreational behaviors and landscape perception through a set of cultural norms and values. Therefore, there can be different perceptions of green spaces and different priorities on how to spend leisure time between natives and newcomers of different nationalities (Bruns, et al, 2015). Buijs, Elands and Langers (2009) discovered extensive differences between immigrants and native Dutch people in the appreciation of different landscape types; and the image of nature that they have in their mind relate to the landscape

preferences. Recreational use patterns of immigrants can be influenced by factors such as confidence, a feeling of acceptance (a feeling out of place), cultural attitudes and by having various leisure preferences. Importantly lack of social contacts can limit recreational behaviour (Morris and O'Brien, 2011). However, "leisure activities can promote cross-cultural integration processes" (Bruns, Kühne, Schönwald, and Theile, 2015, p.130). In sharing leisure traditions, societies hosting different cultures may benefit by making new experiences and by providing leisure lives; presupposing that newcomers from different countries are open to experience other traditions and activities (Bruns, et al, 2015). As participation in sport events can yield people to socialize, develop contacts, friendships, and networks, the outcomes can improve "community spirit and pride, enhancement of cultural traditions, attitudes, beliefs, values intercultural learning and potentially enhanced social capital" (Rich, Misener, and Dubeau, 2015, p.130). On the other hand, sports and outdoor in general and sport and outdoor events in particular have important economic, social and environmental consequences (Getz and Page, 2020). These events drive and shape practices by acting as meeting places, markets, and celebrations of activities for a multitude of actors, such as professional and amateur athletes and other participants, spectators, fans, tourists, locals, associations, and corporations.

"Leisure is important in building and maintaining a social group" (Horolets, 2012, p.5). Apart from maintaining individual and group identities, leisure plays a role in migrants' adaptation to the receiving society by opening up further opportunities of contact with the mainstream population and ethnic group members (Horolets, 2012).

Furthermore, sports participation can confer a range of physical and psychological benefits for the refugees and immigrants and even act as a critical mediator for achieving a positive settlement and meaningful engagement. Sports can be seen as an important instrument in social policy that reduces anti-social behavior, improves community cohesion and safety, and reduces health inequalities (Gibbs and Block, 2017). Sport activities offer opportunities for socialization and cooperation, provide an environment which offers equal opportunities and assists racial equality (Elbe, et al, 2018). Sports strengthen migrants' positive formation of their identities and promote the process of social integration (Donnelly and Coakley, 2002). It is indicated that participation in enjoyable group activities, even short term or one-off events strengthens bonding and linking connections (Gibbs and Block, 2017). Numerous soccer leagues, matches and tournaments have been organized around the world with the goal of questioning violence, racism, social exclusion and even environmental issues (Müller, Van Zoonen, De Roode, 2008).

Lee (2005) studied migrant students in USA and discovered that students improve their interactions with dominant culture, receive social support and integrate more easily through participating in sports. Cote' (2002) in Hatzigeorgiadis, Morela, Elbe, Kouli, and Sanchez (2010) focused on the effects of sports at the individual level and the development of competencies and skills. While Elling and Claringbould (2005) demonstrate that at community level, sport participation can stand against social exclusion, facilitate inclusion and integration of various minority groups.

Stodolska and Alexandris (2004) studied both Korean and Polish migrants in the USA supporting the dual role of sport activities which can facilitate the communication with both

members of dominant culture and members of their own community. Hatzigeorgiadis, et al (2010) reviewed the integrative role of sport and described that all the existent findings support the role of sports in promoting integration; however, there is evidence that sport can promote interaction among people from different cultures while also helping individuals to maintain ties with their own culture groups. On the other side, sport participation can highlight cultural differences and thus evoke tensions. In the study conducted in the city of Rotterdam, Netherlands, it is found out that inter-ethnic interactions do not occur spontaneously in sport activities and these encounters are not trouble-free (Krouwel, Boonstra, Duyvendak, and Veldboer, 2006).

In previous studies regarding the connection between integration and nature, it is perceived that nature is a platform for social integration. Germann-Chiari and Seeland (2004) stated that green spaces are potential to be platforms for social encounters. Gentin, et al (2018) found out that nature has a positive effect on the language learning and social interactions. Also, Stodolska, Peters, and Horolets (2017) emphasize that urban green spaces are important places for children and youth to make contacts and friends across cultures. Therefore, the outdoor recreation activities that people undertake out of doors and have access to the nature or green areas can be the source of many important friendships, personal development and fun and an important part of a country's culture and tradition (Blattel, 2011). "Often sports and outdoor recreation focus on participating, socializing and having fun rather than competing" (Gentin, et al, 2018, p. 49).

There are many connections between festivals, events, and specific cultural manifestations of ethnicity in 'an era of global migration'. Ethnicity can be manifested through performances, consumption of food and drink, literature, language, and religion (rites and rituals) (Getz and Page, 2020, p. 231). Social and cultural impacts are less understandable than economic impacts of events thus it is more difficult to assess them. "Sport events are more than an entertainment, they are social events that allow for social leverage" (Balduk, Maes, and Buelens, 2011, p.93). Chalip (2006) also argued that more attention is needed to be given to the social value of major sport events. Sport events are not only for entertainment, but also, they are social events that allows more additional values to the events. Through the study of residents' perceptions of events, 'cultural interest' and 'consolidation' are as the positive impacts and the negative ones are 'excessive spending' and 'mobility problems' (Balduk, Maes and Buelens, 2011). Indeed, the social impact of sport events should not be left to chance. "Sport events should be leveraged to obtain long and lasting positive outcomes" (Balduk, Maes and Buelens, 2011, p.92).

While authors such as Rojek (2013) or Horne (2015) use the concept of economic and political power which events create, there is a keen focus on three fundamental concepts on societal issues. These concepts are 'accessibility' which define as the measure put in place to address participation by those with impairments, both permanent and temporary, as well as both physical and mental, including perceived class and cultural barriers. 'Inclusion' emphasizes removing barriers to participation and addresses equality within a civil society paradigm, where all people are encouraged to participate in society. And 'diversity' which is defined as individual and community diversity, such as those relating to gender, sexualities, ethnicity, age, religion, and so on (Getz and Page, 2020).

Understanding how and why people interact with space necessitates exploring how gender, class, sexuality, and race produce place and how power relations plot leisure spaces (Lovelock, Lovelock Jellum, and Thompson, 2011). There is a large body of research addressing social space which clearly demonstrates that place is not a “neutral or benign backdrop to leisure activities, rather, it is central to the production and reproduction of social inclusion and exclusion” (Knowles, 2008, p.170). Also, culture influences preferences and beliefs which affect people’s trust, risk attitudes and social preference, thus differences in preferences and beliefs further touch the behaviors and choices of immigrants (Laurentsyeva, and Venturni, 2017).

People also need events because of socializing, relaxation, or escapism that events offer. People need to discover, learn, and fulfil their aesthetic ambitions in which can be obtained by attending events. Humans need to recreate, leading to sport events. Events of all kinds can be successful because they touch so many fundamental personal, social, cultural, and economic needs (Getz and Page, 2020).

All events have impacts on host communities, participants, and other stakeholders, who are ‘impacted’ by the outcomes of events, whether impacts are positive or beneficial. Every event is a unique activity, occasion or happening with unique objectives, and hence outcomes and impacts. However, all events share a common characteristic: ‘people’. It is the relationships and interactions between different groups that dictate the nature and extent of the social and cultural impacts of events (Page and Connell, 2012).

Social impacts of events are notoriously intangible, abstract, and difficult to grasp. One can argue that social impacts of events are undeniable; however, it is not answered whether these impacts are sustainable or not. In other words, they are ‘easy to see, but hard to prove’ (Wallstam, Kronenberg, and Pettersson, 2019).

Based on the study done by Wallstam, Ioannides and Pettersson (2020), the four most well-supported indicators of social impact are ‘quality of life’, ‘sense of pride’, ‘social capital’ and ‘sense of community’. Focusing on the social capital as one of the main concepts of this study, it describes the impact an event has on community residents’ social networks and networking opportunities, emphasizing whether the events offer opportunities to meet and interact with event visitors or other community residents. Social capital also refers to connections created within a community but also to connections made between members of one community with other communities. Social capital helps individuals to grasp the impact of an event on interpersonal relationships and group cohesion in the community (Chalip, 2006; Taks, 2013; Wallstam, Ioannides and Pettersson, 2020).

Events can contribute to social cohesion through involving communities. The unique feature of events communities is that it creates the relationships across age, gender, and social class categories in the fun atmosphere of events (Handelman, 1990 in Chalip, 2006). Within this context, sports events are often seen as a promising way to encourage communication and communal celebration, as they have a certain ‘intrinsic power’ to activate people, remove barriers between groups and change people’s attitudes and behavior (Hover, Dijk, Breedveld, Van Eekeren, and Slender, 2016). To involve the target groups of side-event programs in the development of events is another example of social cohesion. These target groups are normally

hard to reach and hard to involve in community projects (such as unemployed people or dropouts from school or newcomers), but when they are asked to play a role in the development of sports projects, they may show initiative. Additional social capital is enabled as new social relationships are created or existing relationships are strengthened by engagement in sports events or the side-event programs (Hover, et al, 2016).

Therefore, events can foster social integration. "Events can be catalysts to community development. Integration of diverse or conflicted social groups is the specific aim, all the way through social interaction and interpretation at events" (Getz and Page, 2020, p. 422). So far, less attention has been paid to the potential events to contribute to the development of social capital which leads to more relationships and interaction between group of people (Connell, 2021).

Considering the above mentioned integration theory, in this study, theories are chosen due to the research aim and because they cover the ideas of sports and outdoor events as a potential arena for social integration. The report's aim is fulfilled through giving voice to the immigrants. To discuss the role of sports and outdoor events in the social integration of immigrants to Jämtland County, we focus on sports and outdoor events as interrelated important tools and social bridges and investigate how they can be beneficial arenas for both newcomers and swedes to interact and have social relationships.

### **3 Migration, sport and outdoor in a Nordic context**

In this chapter, the study area and the Swedish migration trend throughout recent years as well as the status of sports and outdoor events in a Nordic context are discussed.

#### **3.1 Migration to Sweden**

The current ethnic diversity that can be found now in Sweden is the product of continuous flows of immigrants especially in 21<sup>st</sup> century representing the movement of nearly all the cultures and races of the world.

The welfare state that was established in Sweden after World War II can be seen as an integration project, the aim of which was to promote national cohesion and solidarity. Its logic was to have a common set of rights and resources “according to the standards prevailing to the society, so the basic idea was that equality promotes integration” (Brochmann, Hagelund, Borevi, Jonsson, and Petersen, 2012, p. 25). In the 1970s, the major contributors to the immigrant population in Sweden were primarily refugees from Chile, Poland, and Turkey. In the 1980s, the big share of this new immigration came from Chile, Ethiopia, Iran, and other Middle Eastern countries. Individuals from Iraq, former Yugoslavia, and Eastern Europe countries dominated the 1990s. These countries dominated immigration to Sweden in the first five years of the new millennium as well (Segal, Elliott, and Mayadas, 2010).

The next wave of migration was launched by the attack of Iraq on Iran in September 1980. Also, by 1990s, massive immigrants from former Yugoslavia besides 100,000 Bosnians and 3,600 Kosovo Albanians being granted as asylums. This was followed by another migration wave in Sweden occurred by joining the Schengen co-operation in 2001 meaning open borders between Sweden and other European Union members and continued until 2012. Refugees from active war zones continue to immigrate to Sweden. In 2014, more than 80,000 asylum seekers, moved to Sweden mostly from Syria, Eritrea and people without any state or country (stateless).

In 2014, among every fifth immigrant was from Syria but in 2015, almost every fourth was Syrian. More and more children without families came to Sweden and from ten countries shown in Figure 3. around 9 percent were called unaccompanied minors (Sweden.se, 2020).

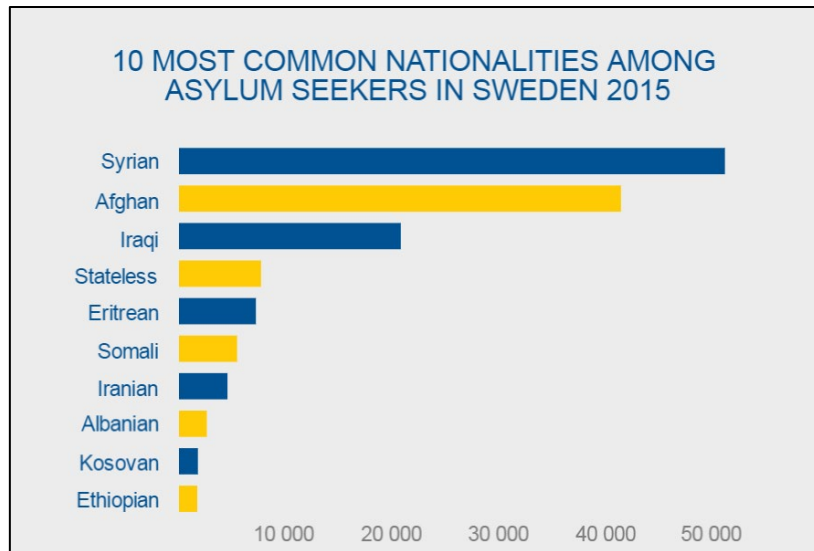


Figure 3. Nationalities among asylum seekers in Sweden in 2015.  
Source: Sweden.se, 2020.

Now, every sixth person of the current Swedish population is born in another country; therefore, integration of immigrants then became a hot debate. The main debate remains how best to integrate migrants from different countries into the Swedish workforce and society, how to provide them with opportunities and ensure they have equal rights.

Sweden faced a drop in immigration in 2018, but still migration and integration are top issues on the political agendas. Despite the immigration drop, the population grew around 125,000 people in 2017; Syrians still continue to make the largest share of immigrants. One of the reasons for the decline in asylum applications from 2015, was that Swedish government has taken some measures to limit immigration to be able to provide for those already in the country (Sweden.se, 2020). Figure 4. indicates the number of asylum seekers to Sweden between 2000 and 2018.

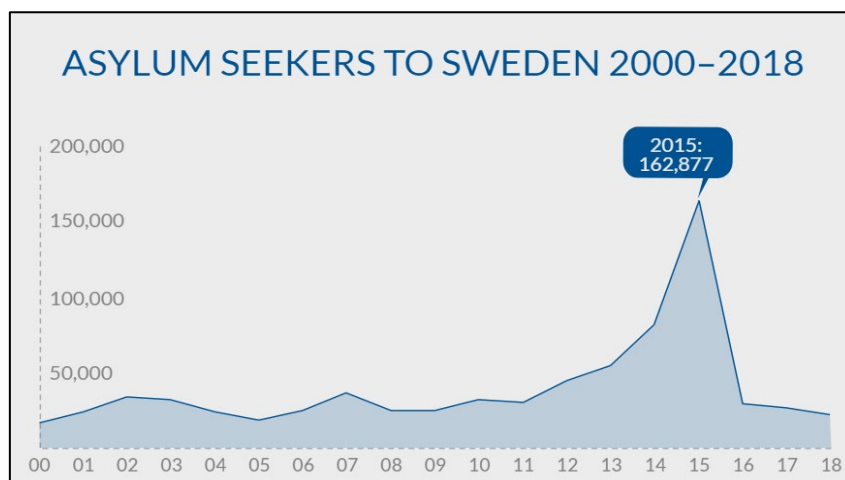


Figure 4. Asylum seekers to Sweden from year 2000 to 2018.  
Source: Sweden.se, 2020.



Sweden as one of the first countries that recognized the importance of immigrant integration “enacted integration measures more than 30 years before officially proclaiming to shift from immigration to integration” (Wiesbrock, 2011, p.50). In Sweden, the main objective of integration measures is to promote the socio-economic inclusion and independence of immigrants based on the principle of diversity in a new society (Wiesbrock, 2011).

Based on the Eurobarometer and European Social Survey (ESS, 2003) in Spencer and Cooper (2006), attitudes of the majority population towards minorities according to the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with certain statements related to immigration and asylum policies, multicultural societies, the granting of civil rights for migrants, repatriation policies and other related issues were assessed. Sweden stands out as the most tolerant country with only 15 percent of respondents resistant to immigration.

In Nordic countries hosting large numbers of refugees, only a small minority of respondents expressed resistance to them (11 percent in Sweden and 19 percent in Denmark). Among historical migrant host countries, Belgium and Germany are significantly more hostile than the European average (37 percent and 34 percent respectively) while Sweden seems more open to multiculturalism (only 13 percent are against it).

### 3.2 Sport and outdoor in Sweden

Sports and outdoor life are important factors in Swedish lifestyle. In 2012, the Sweden government decided on ten objectives for outdoor recreation to be attained by 2020. The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency has responsibility for coordination and follow-up of these ten objectives. The Public Health Agency of Sweden has responsibility for coordinating objective nine regarding outdoor recreation for good public health (Public Health Agency of Sweden, 2018).

Approximately one-third of the population in Sweden is active in terms of outdoor recreation; moreover, different age groups have different shares of participation. For example, the age group of 55-74 is the largest share of individuals active in outdoor recreational activities, where two-fifth perform outdoor recreational activities frequently. Among the youth of 16 to 24 years old, one-sixth are active in outdoor recreational activities and only the oldest group (85 years and older) has a lower share of individuals who are active in outdoor recreational activities (Public Health Agency of Sweden, 2018).

Based on the Public Health Agency of Sweden, more women perform outdoor recreational activities than men in the age group of 16-54 years, but more men of 65 years are active in outdoors. Persons born in Sweden are active in outdoor recreational activities to a higher degree than persons born outside Sweden. Additionally, a large share of those who live in rural areas are active in outdoor recreational activities than those who live in large cities and city suburbs (Public Health Agency of Sweden, 2018)

### 3.3 Jämtland County, migration, and outdoor life

The population number in Jämtland has been decreasing since the 1950s, while the population in Sweden in general has increased with more than 2.8 million (approximately 7 million in 1950, and 9.8 million in 2015). “At the same time, Jämtland has the second lowest share of foreign-born population, only 8.6% compared to the average on 17% in Swedish counties” (Statistics Sweden 2016 cited in Costa, 2017). Thus, one way for the region to steer the population development in and get more inhabitants in working age is through receiving a greater share of the international influx that has been coming to Sweden in the past years (Costa, 2017).

In 2015, more immigrants than usual were coming to Jämtland due to the inflow of people seeking asylum at that time. The majority of 1559 immigrants have Syrian (24%), Eritrean (23%) or Swedish (11%) citizenship. The fourth and fifth largest groups were from Afghanistan (7%) and Somalia (4%). By receiving more quota of refugees, Jämtland County received between approximately 150-300 yearly refugees during 2011-2014. Since 2012, the county built up the institutional capacity and infrastructure to receive asylum seekers. It was a chance to increase the population growth, so there was an agreement between the county administration and the Migration Agency to receive a number of newly arrived persons, which is called assigned accommodation (ABO). There is also an increase in the number of newly arrived that themselves chose Jämtland as their region to reside in (EBO), as well as the number of persons that comes for the reason of family connection. The share of foreign-born living in the region has increased in the past fifteen years, even though it is still quite much lower than the average. However, in December 2016, the share of foreign born in the region had risen to 9.5 percent (Statistics Sweden 2017 in Costa, 2017).

In general, among the most population of Jämtland, most activities are in relation with outdoor life and nature. The six-month winter season is particularly important to the region. Among the most well-known winter destinations are Åre, Vålådalen, Bydalsfjällen, Klövsjö-Storhogna (marketed as Vemdalen) and Östersund, where first and foremost skiing is the number one activity (alpine, cross-country, biathlon, and backcountry skiing). Other common winter activities include ice-skating, snowmobile safaris, dog sledding, ice fishing, riding, ice climbing, reindeer sleigh rides, paragliding and snow kiting. In the summer, hiking in the mountains is the most popular activity followed by visiting sights and events, and fishing. Other common activities are biking (downhill and cross-country), canoeing, mountain climbing, bear, beaver and elk safaris, riding, golf, paragliding, and other adventure sports. Jämtland prides itself on being good at arranging large national and international events. There are in fact plenty of them – the IBU World Cup Biathlon in Östersund, the FIS Ski World Cup in Åre, the Storsjöcupen soccer tournament in Östersund, the Jamtli Christmas Market in Östersund, the Storsjöyran music festival in Östersund, and the Västgård Game Fair (previously Fäviken Game Fair) in Östersund to mention a few of the more well-known ones (Travel Guide and Booking Portal, n.d.).

Based on the regional development strategies and revision work with Jämtland Härjedalen’s regional development strategy, the region is establishing the structures for future sustainable

regional development based on the entire country's conditions. This is to focus on the strong points of the area and develop for future competitiveness. The work has a time horizon in 2050 which strategically plans for the future and future generations. The target is to focus on how future innovations create the future conditions for community building and how they can be used on the best way to create the Jämtland county for all and become an attractive place to live and work on; to think about what it looks like and what long-term societal goals are needed to consider reaching the future and future goals (Kumpula, 2019).

## 4. Methodology

This study aims to 'give voices' to some immigrants by admiring and incorporating these voices into the key themes to best describe and then interpret the immigrants' narratives and life stories. Using a series of in-depth interviews with a selected number of immigrants from diverse nationalities, this study examines how and to what extent outdoor events may help immigrants to integrate socially to a new life environment.

The focus of this work is not based on measuring the level of integration achieved; but rather to discover how immigrants and refugees judge the extent to which integration has been achieved or can be achieved through participatory role of sports and outdoor events. Their views are clearly important in this. Therefore, the specific goals are firstly to identify local understanding of the immigrants' perception regarding the importance of social integration into the new society and the solutions to achieve. And secondly to identify the role of sports and outdoor events seen locally to support and disrupt the process of social integration and to use such information to shape the conclusion for understanding refugee integration through sport and outdoor context.

All the interviews were done by one of the authors, herself a newcomer to Sweden. Each interview was divided into three main sections. In the first section, the interviewees were asked about the general characteristics, the reasons of their immigration, the date of immigration, age, employment, family status, education, and living place in Jämtland.

In the second section of the interview, the questions focused the activities that the immigrants did before immigration and after immigration in their free time, comparing the activities in the early days of arrival to Jämtland with what they do now as well as their future decisions. To also understand their level of acquaintance with types of sports, outdoors and events in Jämtland, their preferences and motivations to be involved where asked for.

In the third section, the focus is on the effect of sports and outdoor in the immigrants' lives to integrate better in the Swedish society with attention to the importance of these activities among people of Jämtland and also the priorities in their lives to make the process of integration smoother.

Based on Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) cited in Creswell and Poth (2018, pp. 164-165), seven logical sequence of stages are used as starting points in this paper: "from thematizing the inquiry, to designing the study, to interviewing, to transcribing the interview; to analyze the data, to verifying the validity, to reliability, and generalizability of findings; and finally reporting the study."

### 4.1 Respondents

A series of in-depth interviews were conducted with 19 Immigrants from different nationalities in Jämtland County (outlined in Table 1.).

Table 1. Characteristics of respondents (Total N=19)

Characteristics	Categories	N
Gender	Men	6
	Women	13
Age	20-30	9
	31-40	5
	41-50	2
	51-60	3
Nationality by continent	Africa	3
	Asia & Middle East	10
	Europe	3
	South America	3
Immigration period	Less than 1 year	4
	1-3 years	7
	3-5 years	4
	5-8 years	4
Employment status	Unemployed /job seekers	7
	Employed	5
	Government-assistant Swedish SFI courses	6
	Student	1
Reasons of immigration	Refugee	7
	Studying purposes	3
	Marriage to Swedish/ non-Swedish spouses	6
	Family union	2
	Work opportunity	1
Education	High school diploma	4
	Institutional degree	2
	Bachelor	6
	Master	5
	Doctor of medicine	2
Marital status	Single	5
	Married	10
	Divorced	1
	Engaged	1
	Partner (Sambo)	2
Family status	Families with children (live in Sweden)	5
	Families with children (live in home country)	3
	Families without children	6
living status prior to immigration	Had lived in their homeland	14

	Had lived in another country	5
Living places in Jämtland	Lives in Östersund	15
	Lives in other places in the region	4

The participants consist of 13 women and 6 men ranging in age from 21 to 57 years old. Among the interviewees are 7 unemployed or job seekers, 5 out of 19 were employed and 7 of them study SFI (Swedish Language education for immigrants) courses or degree courses. 15 out of 19 participants live in Östersund municipality and 4 of them live in other places in the region. Since there has been no previous study regarding the relationship between the sports or outdoor events and integration, the interviewer did not intend to focus on one specific nationality or a specific area in the world, therefore the outcomes of the study can present a broader information regarding the issue of integration among immigrants of different nationalities.

The population was accessed with the assistance of several organizations and individuals through initial contact with Hermods, Jämtland Folkuniversitetet, Hej Främling association, and Konstruktiva Konsult Projekt- and Idékontor Sverige. Contacts were made through physical contact, email or phone. The interviewer referred to Hermods in person, met a few of SFI students and asked for interview; further the interviewer could connect to a group of more students through WhatsApp Messenger group of the Hermods SFI students and invited them for voluntary interview. Due to Covid-19 lockdown limitations; it was not possible to meet the students in Korta Vägen in person but Korta Vägen could arrange meetings through Microsoft Teams. Through the same interview request to 'Hej främling' association, the accessibility to its members was limited because of Pandemic situation, so in the end, one participant was introduced to interview. Moreover, four immigrant participants were introduced by the head of Konstruktiva Konsult.

Also a 'snowball' or 'chain sampling' technique was used. This type of purposeful sampling identifies cases of interest from sampling people who know what cases rich information have, that is, good examples for study and good interview participants (Patton, 2002). The individuals made the initial contact with the potential participants and the purpose of the study was explained to them and if they voluntarily agreed to take part, they granted permission for their contact information to be given to the interviewer. The criterion and ethical issues were explained to them. 'Maximum variation sampling' was determined by the interviewer because the differences in sample data increase the likelihood that the findings will reflect differences or different perspectives which is ideal in qualitative research (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Besides maximum variation sampling, it was considered to limit the participants as immigrants who have been in Jämtland from six months to eight years to evaluate the time-dependency of integration issue. No specific nationality or geographic area was considered for interviews due to this reason that any person from any country who is placed in Jämtland by choice or under forced reasons can be considered as an immigrant or a refugee.

## 4.2 Data collection

Data were collected using semi-structured one-on-one interviews with 19 immigrants residing in Jämtland County, Sweden. A semi-structured interview technique helped not only to main an overall structure of the interview sessions, but also allowed for some flexibility in probing answers given by respondents, it helped to maintain some consistency over the concepts that are covered in each interview.

Corbin and Strauss (2015) believe that in semi- structured interviews, the same topics are covered in each interview and the participants are free to add anything else if it is relevant. The additional questions are also asked to clarify the certain points and delve further into a topic. Creswell and Poth (2018) also confirm that what are asked depend on the purpose of the study and research questions in a way that can be understandable for respondents, these are seen as the core of the '*interview protocol*'.

The interviews were conducted in English and Persian language. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed and were confirmed by the respondents at the end of each interview. Three of the interviews were conducted via interpreter/translator. Because of the need for interpretation, a fairly lengthy interview guide was initially developed and translated into Swedish and Persian. The presence of the interviewer meant that the new questions could be added during the interview and ideas or issues arose and followed up where appropriate. The interviewer was able to ensure that questions were understood correctly and was able to provide clarification if necessary.

The one-on-one interviews were based on face-to-face technology in all cases. The interviews were done in the four different locations which were suitable and accessible to the interviewees including the library of Östersund (Jämtlands Läns library), Library at Mid-Sweden Campus in Östersund, Tingshuset Café in Östersund and interviewees' houses. Additionally, first due to Covid-19 pandemic limitations and secondly because some interviewees live in other cities and villages far from Österund, few of the interviews were done through Microsoft Teams Platform. The average time for each interview is 54 minutes. A script of instructions and open-ended questions based on an interview guide was used during the interviews. The interviewer began each session by explaining the purpose of the study and ethical issues including confidentiality and anonymity of information gained from interviews. The interview questions were developed to be consistent with the study aim and main research question. Specifically, the interview questions were: (1) Can you describe the activities that you were doing in your free time when you were in your home country/living place? (2) Can you describe the activities that you do in your free time in Jämtland? How different they are from those you did before immigration? How different they are not in comparison to the early days that you came to Jämtland? (3) Are you familiar with sports and outdoors in Jämtland? How different they are from your home country /previous living place (4) Whom do you prefer to spend your leisure time with? (5) Have you started participating or visiting any sports and outdoors which were unknown to you in Jämtland? Have you liked it then? How? (6) To what extent the sports and outdoor activities you did have been a part of an event in Jämtland? Do you know the meaning of events? Have you experienced any events (7) Do you like to experience a typical Swedish sport or outdoor event, if no, explain why? (8) Are you familiar

with outdoor life? How much do you think outdoor life is important in Jämtland for its residents? Does it have any role in your life? (9) How do people of Jamtland feel when you are involved in sports and outdoors? (10) Do you feel there are any benefits to be involved in sports and outdoor events for you, explain why. (11) Have you been informed or invited to any sports or events through SFI organizations/ university/ job environment in Jämtland? (12) Based on your experience, what role any sports and outdoor events had in helping you adapt in Jämtland society as an immigrant? (13) Could you make any friendships with a Swedish person by being involved in sports or outdoor events? (14) Have you faced any problem or trouble while participating / visiting in any sports or events? (15) For you being involved in a sport or event is an individual choice or a social responsibility? (16) Do you think that Swedish people expect you to be involved in sports and outdoor events? How? What are their expectations from you?

### 4.3 Data analysis

Going through the narratives of the participants, a phenomenological approach was used to analyze the interview data in order to gain insights into the meanings of life and lived experiences of immigrants with a specific focus on the role of sports and outdoor events in the immigration period. "Phenomenology is not only a description, but it is also an interpretative process in which the interviewer makes an interpretation of the meaning of the lived experiences" (Creswell and Poth, 2018, p. 78). The interviewer started with the acknowledgment of "epoche, or bracketing in which investigators set aside their experiences, as much as possible, to take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination" (Creswell and Poth, 2018, p.78) and assured that the themes should be emerged from the narratives and stories of life, exactly what the participants said (Stack and Iwasaki, 2009).

It must be noted that one of the authors of this study is from Iran and have lived the whole life in that country before moving to Sweden, Jämtland, in 2019 for study purpose. This author's mother tongue is Persian and has efficient English language knowledge. This author has found integration of immigrants in the host society as "an abiding concern" (Creswell and Poth, 2018, p.77). Therefore, being a voluntary immigrant who has faced the immigration challenges and is also interested in remaining in Jämtland with her family, this author's perception and personal concerns have impacted selecting this research topic as well as focusing on the importance '*giving voice to immigrants*'.

While keeping the notion of bracketing (Creswell and Poth, 2018) in mind through the data-analysis, in the first step by going through the interview transcriptions, the data horizontalization was done, it means that the significant statements, sentences or quotes that provide an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon were extracted. In the second step, clusters of meaning from these significant statements into themes were developed. In the data analysis, the transcriptions were reviewed several times to ensure that statements are consistent with what interviewees said. In this process, all meaning units are grouped with a description of each cluster and direct quotations were selected to support each description. Based on the descriptions, themes were identified, and key ideas expressed by interviewees were summarized.



## 5 Results and findings

Data analysis based on interviews from 19 immigrants from different nationalities led to the identification of three key themes that demonstrate the role of sports and outdoor events in helping the immigrants to get socially integrated into Jämtland society. These themes were identified based on what the participants narrated concerning the scopes of activities they did before immigration in comparison to the initially arrived days in Jämtland and how they are engaged currently considering their immigration period. The three following descriptive themes (Creswell and Poth, 2018) are supported by the direct quotes and narratives of participants, followed by an overarching theme (Stack and Iwasaki, 2009, p.247) which interprets the three descriptive themes and conveys the roles of sports and outdoors in the integration process.

### 5.1 Theme 1: Perceived benefits associated with sports and outdoor events

Interviewees were mostly enthusiastic about sports and outdoor activities and find it beneficial for physical and mental health. Moreover, they find it an effective way to meet new people, especially Swedish people. Sports, recreation, and leisure seem important in the creation of social groups. As they find it a social and cultural platform, being engaged in sports and outdoors provides an opportunity for getting further social and cultural knowledge; a way to socialize and a good place for interaction with different people. Previous study done by Stodolska and Alexandris (2004) supported this idea that recreational sport participation acted as a factor promoting Korean and Polish minority acculturation to the culture of the mainstream American Whites. Those who participated in 'mainstream' activities developed interpersonal contacts outside their ethnic group, became exposed to cultural patterns distinct from the ones of their own culture and thus adopted to the values of the American society. One of the participants believed: *"You can meet other people [in sports and outdoors], speak Swedish and practice. When you are in Sweden, you need to meet other people."*

Among some of the respondents, *Innebandy* (floorball) is a known word especially because it is full of fun and joy, a free option, and new for them; therefore, they recommend it to each other to participate. *"I mostly recommend Innebandy because somebody may like to come, so we can meet each other there, I really enjoy it."*

Besides a good chance to practice speaking Swedish, and having fun and joy, immigrants feel sense of achievement and find an opportunity to develop and display personal competences. One of the participants claimed strongly *"to show to the Swedish people that immigrants can do these activities."* A refugee mentioned that *"But I got a feeling that you should try this [sport] and I did it. Next time that I tried I felt better and after three years I became serious and liked to continue. Do it again and again and again! People do it here from early ages but I was 18-19, you know. So it was different."* *"Because experience is not what everyone knows. It is different because each person sees the world from his own part (eye)."*

Engaging in sports and outdoor activities enriches well-being among immigrants by increasing their self-esteem and self-confidence, creates positive self-esteem (Gibbs and Block, 2017) and helps them to set the goals, feel sense of achievement in new experiences and regain

a sense of identity (Strang and Ager, 2010). The previous studies confirmed this issue that social interaction which occurred in leisure places increases well-being and as a result the possibilities for social integration increase (Ruble and Shaw, 1991).

A boy from Africa confirmed it like this: *"I cannot see and waited for something. I am moving and trying to find new things. When people sit and do nothing, then that is when stress come in. Everybody has the right to move and engage with sports and find new things and find people. In my view, we have to know Swedish people like outdoor sports and do it a lot, and even we newcomers in Jämtland have to settle with that, we have to find this sports and energy and at least do something."*

Another participant confirmed this issue like this *"definitely it helps the confidence level. By knowing culture and people, the confidence goes higher and that helps to integrate more. We came from different countries with different cultures, so definitely things are new to us, so we should benefit such an opportunity"*.

For some immigrants especially those who came recently to Jämtland, being involved in an activity is an escape from daily routines, a compensation to loneliness, an opportunity to spend time with family members and friends, a step to make friends, a hope for future opportunities such as finding a job and an effective arena to find better and wider understanding of the native community. *"Because to have something to do. We are so lonely here and we are just three here [a family of three persons], so maybe it is a good way to meet new people and to do some exercise too"*. However, besides all the personal benefits, it is not hidden to the newcomers that how 'friluftsliv' can be an important and inseparable aspect of living in the region. *"Friluftsliv is a big term here. I have not read anything about it but I feel it is important here."*

For an immigrant who wished a pre-Pandemic work condition- the direct and indirect economic impacts as results of many outdoor events in Östersund and Jämtland- experienced another dimension of its advantage. *"Because it brings a lot of economy to the city and brings a lot of people to the city. As I said that I was working at a hotel, it was easier for me to get a job and I lost my job now."*

The weather condition has a dual role. In one way, it is the creator of new, interesting, and various types of sports and outdoor activities especially winter ones and on the other side, it has a prohibitive role in the nature-based integration of immigrants. Being placed by force or choosing Jämtland as a living place, engagement in sports and outdoors can be a contributor to climate adaptation as illustrated by these narratives from three participants: *"I am familiar with activities, and the nature is also amazing. But the only issue is that I am not fully adapted here, and I am not very happy with very cold weather. It is a serious factor indeed. If you come from Mediterranean place and not fully adapted, you need to pull yourself a lot."* *"If I do not do anything to be adapted, I become sad and depressed with this kind of weather. It is better to find something good for your health and find new people and to have a real life because the real life is with all people not just my family."* The cold weather in Jämtland requires to be prepared more physically for some sports and outdoors specifically winter ones *"the weather is of course very different and needs more effort [for sports]. You should be much stronger."* *And another reason is the cold weather in winter, it is difficult for the people like me. The Swedish people learn it from childhood."*

The unique climate condition and various types of outdoor activities are ingrained in the lives of Jämtland people from childhood; therefore, it would be a golden opportunity for newcomers to share common interests with local community, develop a common topic to chat and exchange ideas which can lead to social integration over time. The immigrants narrated this benefit in these ways: *“Because most of the Swedish born with sports and if you have a common sport, it makes you closer to each other for sharing time and experiences.” “Because they start from 3 years old and they are very into winter sports, so an African person it is not common but having an interest make them closer to each other.” “They usually ask whether we skied yet or not. They are interested that when we learn, we share this with them.” “There is no ‘should’ but when they see that people are trying to do just stuff, then it is something to talk about in common.” “This is a human trait that we accept those people who are more similar to us. Definitely without having a common interest, the mutual understanding is low.”*

Overall, the theme of *perceived benefits associated with sports and outdoor events* emphasizes increasing possibilities of making social bonds (with the people of their own ethnicity) and facilitating the connections to the family, friends, and community through sports and outdoor context. The context of sports and outdoor events focused on the social and cultural knowledge which can be obtained through motivated interactions and networking cross-culturally as well as developing personal and interpersonal skills in order to achieve well-being.

## 5.2 Theme 2: Factors influencing participation and engagement

Whether the minorities are involved in sports and outdoor events in Jämtland depends on the understanding of characteristics of the person on the one side and the characteristics of the activities and environment on the other side.

By entrance to Jämtland, the newcomers are guided to start learning Swedish through SFI courses. Learning Swedish language, and making immigrants become acquainted with job environments, job rules and policies; supporting immigrants to find appropriate internship places leading to future jobs are the main course targets. Therefore, the immigrants’ first and main focus are learning Swedish and finding jobs. Referring to the Ager and Strang’s theory (2004, 2008), unemployment is a big concern for immigrants, prevents economic independence and meeting host society; therefore, as the main goal, the newcomers spend a lot of time and energy to achieve this goal.

Attending at SFI courses, the immigrants’ main contacts would be then with international immigrants of their own similar living status. Therefore, education as one of the means and markers of integration is establishing relationships with mostly non-Swedish people. This limited interaction has strengthened due to current Covid-19 Pandemic starting from early 2020 in a way that most of the language classes are online and no person-to-person interaction occurs. Moreover, reviewing the immigrants’ narratives, it can be understood that lack of information and unfamiliarity with the available facilities and channels of information in the region especially among the participants with less than one-year residence is a worrying issue. Therefore, participants feel that the bulk of collecting the information is on the immigrants’ side while they are struggling to settle down; and therefore based on this condition, the

relationship between new residents and host community is generally underrepresented by both sides. Different narratives by participants are as follows: *"Just now, I focus on my studying, so maybe later."* *"There is no main website page to refer, see the list of all events and activities and book if you are interested. I could not find it."* *"People are separate because of corona, they do not go out, so we can see them randomly. I do not have much knowledge, everything is stopped now."*

The environment is new and unknown to the newcomers, most of them do not have any relatives or friends known from their country or older times; all surroundings seem new to them, they struggle with new culture and norms, while they still feel ethnical minority constraints (Lovelock, et al, 2011). All these are primary but important factors that immigrants confront especially in first days of migration. Some of the participants declared as follows: *"I can say first do not bring your culture to Sweden because there is a big difference, so you will face trouble."* *"I thought that I do not understand Swedish and if I talk in English, they answer me in Swedish."* *"I wish my family was here. I am unhappy that those whom I love are not beside me here."*

However, some immigrants who live in Jämtland due to marriage to a Swedish spouse passed the initial challenges of immigration faster and smoother. One of the participants who got married with a Swedish man said: *"Because I got married with a Swedish man and we have a cabin, and we can go there and we can have a very nice time there and do snowboarding and skating in Åre where he is from. My husband knows them and if I came here alone, it is another issue because I did not know them. It is very difficult when I think about others who do not know these facts."*

Small cities, short daylight in 3-4 months of a year, unknown cold winter months, limited entertainment facilities in small towns and cities are uninviting and unbearable issues for some immigrants. One of the immigrants who came to Östersund as a student said: *"I know that mostly they do outdoors. But I am not a person who get used to that, I used to be in big cities.... I plan to move to the southern cities."*

Immigrants' background and personal orientations; however, have key roles to become involved in the sports and outdoor events of a region with the characteristics of Jämtland. It is assumed that if a newcomer has values 'foreign' to Swedish value orientations (Zwahlen, Nagel and Schlesinger, 2018), it is likely that this person has difficulties or be uninterested in being connected to sports and outdoors in Jämtland; this issue however is strengthened by the matter of age if the immigrants pass middle ages. The findings of Stodolska's study (2000) supported this idea that leisure-participation patterns of Chinese immigrants closely mirrored those of their ethnic community. Their leisure was found to be less organized, less expensive, less physically active, less skill oriented, and more easily accessible than many other types of activities. The findings suggested that immigrants are subject to certain constraints that is not found in general population, and the perceived level of importance of leisure constraints are negatively associated with assimilation level (Stodolska 2000, p.41).

A participant from Asia who entered Jämtland from seven months ago mentioned that *"I was meeting my family. After my full-time work, I was resting and meeting my friends. At weekends I was driving to my parents and meet them in another place far from us.... Here it is quite different, I watch*

*movies and play with my son or do shopping for food.” Or another one believes “...not that much, because it is enough for me to just to walk and biking, but not to raise.”*

Immigration as an event dealing with radical changes and restarting from zero builds up a feeling of fear to catch something new while the immigrants face scrimmage with the issues connecting to mobility barriers, including accessibility to private transportation, economic problems, and language ability. Looking at the weather from the frightening aspect, the immigrants find it hard, weird, and frightening to try winter sports and outdoor activities which at least cover six months of a year. Some narrations that support these reasons are as follows: *“At first, it was expensive. Some activities are needed to be paid. Another thing is that I like to have experience with snowboard, but it is necessary to have driving license and car. Also, some activities like to run and walk-in long-distance need time that I do not have enough time to do because I need to study Swedish.” “And the second reason is that during the winter it is very cold, so I chose to stay at home rather than going out. I need to wear more clothes.... I think you need to participate but I think it is hard. My friends suggested me ice hockey in indoor place, but I said it is hard for me.” “I am interested to go but first we have to pay for petrol to go there and then pay for the entrance fee. For example, for watching a basketball competition, at least 100 kr should be paid per person which is among the best rates I can say. Or I like to learn ski, but it costs 200 kr per hour to rent equipment and it costs high to learn.” “To walk in the mountain is very interesting because the mountain is different here from the mountain in Brazil because it is very cold and you need more resistance and needs more effort.”*

Apart from the above-mentioned benefits (See Theme 1) that engagement in sports and outdoor events have for the immigrants, Theme 2 describes that the newcomers confront with some barriers and obstacles that can be different from one person to another one. Personal motivation, orientation and background can be effective in the decisions and selections of immigrants; Gentin (2011) indicated that outdoor recreation patterns and preferences of landscapes are dependent on cultural background because culture influences the self's structure and processes. Additionally, there is no doubt that immigration causes lots of unpredictable and unwanted circumstances that affect the dreams and plans of immigrants. This should always be noticed that many of the immigrants are placed in Jämtland because of several reasons while they preferred to choose another place for living.

### 5.3 Theme 3: Immigrants' integration in a new environment

From different narrations and the stories behind each participant's life, it can be understood that the level and speed of integration for any immigrant is different and depends on the time and involvement (Elmose-Østerlund, et al, 2019). From some of the participants' perception, integration in a new country never happens because they are always considered as minorities. Although one of the participants got married with a Swedish person, she still thinks that *“...no matter. It is because of where I was born. It is not matter if you can speak Swedish, whether you are a good lawyer or mother, it is because you are an immigrant.”* And even being engaged in sports and events is not a path to that: *“what I saw is you can to do many sports with Swedish people, but it is very difficult to be integrated in the society.”* For some others, however, being a part of these physical activities can be a path to integration especially for those who have allocated a big

part of their daily life to this. But what is common between both opposite ideas is that bulk integration is on the immigrants' side.

Being acquainted with the other immigrants and refugees through refugee camps, SFI course platforms, and university international students in the initial levels, the newcomers make the first friendships and interactions with the international people, share their concerns, worries and life stories which lead to stronger interactions and connections. This creates cross-cultural friendships, and they can benefit the older immigrants as the best source of information. Through the interviews, all participants mentioned previous immigrants and refugees as the first source of information and guidance. Since it is hard to communicate in Swedish with each other, mostly they communicate in a shared language which is generally English language. *"They [other immigrants] pay attention to me, I do not know anything, who and where can pay attention to me....I need to talk to somebody who understands me. They [Swedish people] think to the things that we do not and vice versa."*

Although at least once, each of the participants felt or heard discrimination in different occasions, Swedish people look open-minded, helpful, and intellectual in the immigrants' mindset. It was recognized that perceived discrimination might be an important factor which influences outdoor recreation patterns (Flyod and Gramann, 1995). On the other hand, newcomers find it rarely possible to make deep interactions and friendships with them especially in short and first contacts. Depth and quality of relationships mostly remain in the 'no trouble' level (Ager and Strang, 2004). To build bridges, there needs to be opportunities for people to meet and exchange resources in ways which are mutually beneficial. This can occur where immigrants and the established community can share everyday lives. However, there are multiple factors which exclude immigrants from frequenting the same spaces such as poverty, no right to work, or lack of language skills. Another challenge is to involve the local community for whom integration may not be a pressing concern (Strang and Ager, 2010). Those with Swedish spouse or strong social bonds with same ethnical community could pass this step faster and smoother and can be more successful in interactive integration. Involvement in different activities such as sports and outdoors can be a proactive strategy to create spaces for meeting and exchanging ideas, where friendships and deeper interactions occur through years.

One of the participants believed: *"a lot of immigrants have found Swedish friends here for life and I met one of my Swedish friends for life here and I am thankful for this. Long term friendship happens here. In our activities you do not just come here to say "hej, hello" like gym. When you come to 'Hej främling', you already come here to meet, talk, and introduce yourself and hear about others. Also, there is a chance to practice Swedish, when you meet people, listening and talking would be good by meeting people. When we have walking meeting, when we finish, we come inside the café and have fika together and chat. Almost most of our activities are like this."*

Although various sociocultural characteristics of individuals hinder the processes of integration (Zwahlen, Nagel and Schlesinger, 2018), most of the participants expressed their tendency to socialize, interact and make friendships with the Swedish people. Isolation and separation are rejected perspectives; they are aware of having gaps if they do not interact with Swedish people or live without having any Swedish friends. Moreover, having a common

interest with local community is a point of interest for the Swedish people, especially if newcomers show interest and be engaged in sports and outdoor events which are integrated parts of life among people of Jämtland. *"I think even looking outside the whole event, there is human nature aspect that one moves to another country and shows humility by wanting to do what locals do is heart-warming. It makes the people feel good. They think that those who come to this country is not bad, they want to learn something. They are willing and came not only to take resources and their jobs. It is like a sort of compliment when somebody do the same thing as you."* On the other hand, respondents believe that Swedish people are not the first ones to start a conversation. *"They [Swedish people] are not comfortable to talk to strangers because they go deep and when go deep, it is to start about [all issues]"*. *"In my experience from my life, you can go everywhere and talk to every Swedish, but after that no more happens, they do not call you anymore. They do only do it if they have only one Swedish friend."*

It is assumed that Swedes prefer to be the host of immigrants who are active, influential, eager to be a part of society and to have shared values with Swedish culture. The participants investigate to understand what the local community expect. It is assumed that speaking Swedish, obeying the rules and regulations, and the economic and structural integrations are society's priority while integrating culturally and socially is greatly influential in the well-being of immigrants and their future especially for their children or next generation.

One Syrian participant narrated: *"Maybe they expect us to be Swedish. Speak Swedish, know traditions. I am not sure about this. [...] But the immigrants are afraid of changing their lives or open the doors and I suggest writing and talking about relation between Swedish people and immigrants. Some immigrants are afraid to open the doors, so they do not want anybody to see what they are doing. There was a contradiction between a family of Muslim who want their children to fast in Ramadan while the school ask the parents not to do it because they are so small. I think it is a question of identity, they want to keep it. To keep this with strong relation to their roots, they are afraid to lose their tradition, language. I know that some refugees are afraid of their future and they prefer to move out of Sweden after they get the passports because the tradition of Muslims, they do not accept the girls to swim, to go gym, to go to club, to have boyfriends. The other solution is creating their own society in the land of Sweden like small Syria, small Iraq, etc. It is like this in the south of Sweden, a lot of immigrants go to south of Sweden because they want to live in similar situation like their own identity and traditions."*

It is presumed by the foreign-born individuals that learning Swedish language is prerequisite to the integration into the new environment; while engaging in sports and outdoors are considered as optional leisure activities and not what the local community and society mainly expect. Being involved in sports and outdoors is not necessarily a competence to social integration, rather as a social and cultural context, the immigrants may be losers if they do not take advantage of that specifically in a region like Jämtland. There is no doubt that social integration can be achieved through different arenas in a new environment and there is no force to limit to one specific way or method; however, what was recommend or advised by the immigrants for better adaptation and integration is 'to come out and find what suits you the most'. Here are what some newcomers suggested for integration. *"Do not be afraid or have stress for doing new things." " Dare to ask and act! When people think a lot and want to be afraid, then they cannot start. I did not think and just started. I gave priority and I thought from the beginning that this (sports and outdoor) is the right thing to meet people and to come in the society when I was in*

*refugee camping. I thought I gonna get sick if I stay at my room.” “It is a pattern of willingness and get the information and when you get the information, you can easily pass it on or use it. once you know, easily do it. Just ask when you do not know, and when you know, just go ahead.”*

Overall, this theme indicates immigrants’ perspectives to be social actors and make a ‘home’ in their new environment and how they approach this two-way integration process. As Strang and Ager (2010) indicated that “there is confirmation of assertion that integration begins, for the refugee, on reaching the place that he or she considers as the destination.” From the narratives of the participants in this study, a clear message comes that they are motivated to contribute integration and avoid dependence.

#### 5.4 Interpretation of three sub-themes and one overarching theme

Based on this study, newcomers face different factors and barriers to settle down and integrate into the new environment, moreover, in a host society, there are lots of tools and arenas that immigrants can benefit to achieve integration. While leisure activities are the context for social integration in this study, sports and outdoor events can act as critical mediators for positive settlement and engaging meaningfully in the Jämtland Society. The minorities have lower participation rates however, with identified barriers including lack of language knowledge, lack of knowledge of mainstream sports and outdoor events, discrimination, lack of cultural sensitivity in outdoor environments, mobility issues, sociocultural backgrounds and personal attitudes or priorities.

Organizations in Jämtland however, have devised programs and strategies for addressing the immigrants’ barriers and make their participations more possible and accessible. ‘Hej Främling’ is an association founded in Jämtland but today has regular activities from Luleå in the north to Malmö in the south, in a total of seven different counties (Hej Främling, n.d.). The main targets of this association are to provide a society with vibrant people where everyone experiences good physical and mental health and has the opportunity to enter into relationships and networks that are valuable to both individual and society at large. ‘Hej främling’ dreams of boundless integration, where everyone lives in an economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable circle (Hej Främling, n.d.). Here the connection between individuals and ‘Hej främling’ can be described as a social link that is the connection between newcomers and structures of state. Considering how society aims to make the process of integration possible through the sports and outdoor activities, which is considered an integrated part of natives’ lives, there are still barriers and oppositions.

The key themes identified from this study highlighted the holistic and collective orientation to life of immigrants, derived from their stories about home, resettlement, and learnings to conduct what role sports and outdoor events play in immigrants’ life to integrate socially in Jämtland.

Based on the descriptions presented above, this section integrates these three specific descriptive themes to conduct an overarching theme in order to make a meaningful conclusion out of different narratives and this multi-dimensional topic (See Figure 5).



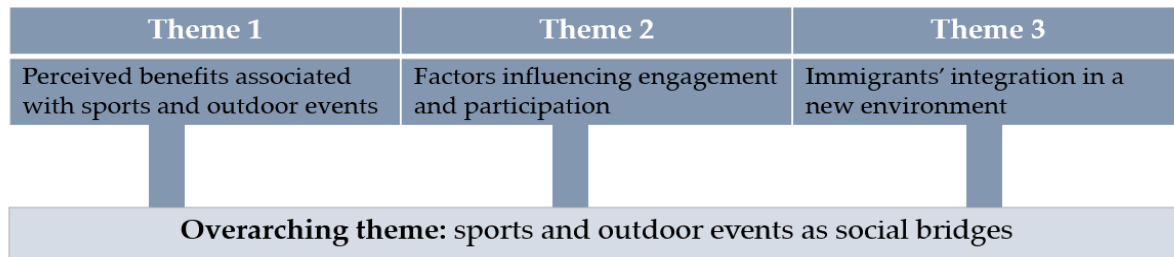


Figure 5. Themes presented in the report.

Before presenting the overarching theme, the key findings are summarized to gain more in-depth insights regarding these descriptive themes. First, the theme of *perceived benefits associated with sports and outdoor events* emphasizes the meaningful opportunities not only for having enjoyable experiences, but also for benefiting the mental and physical health resulted from physical activities; and to be far from immigration isolation and depression which occurs in new environment. Overall, this theme emphasizes both social and cultural platforms and the problem-solving aspects of sports and outdoors; and highlights the importance of culturally meaningful and purposeful social occasions to contribute personal and social challenges of immigrants. The second theme of *factors influencing participation and engagement* emphasizes the barriers for immigrant and refugee background reflecting the similar challenges as identified in literature review. Although the immigrants tend to participate in mainstream sports and outdoor activities in Jämtland, it is unlikely to be feasible for many. Various cultural backgrounds, focus on learning Swedish language, personal orientations, costs and to a lesser extent transport were seen as the key barriers to engagement.

Theme 3 titled *immigrants' integration in a new environment* extends the previous two themes to describe the specific perspectives that the immigrants experienced over time, and the ways in which they navigated through and integrated to these processes (specifically, via sports and outdoor events in Jämtland). Integration reflects the desire to maintain the cultural heritage while at the same time interacting with the host culture (Hatzigeorgiadis, et al, 2010). However, what is perceived through interviews is that this is unlikely to be feasible for all immigrants. Referring to Elling, De Knop and Knoppers (2001) three defined interrelated dimensions of social integration as 'structural integration' (different levels of participation); 'socio-cultural integration' (different degrees in the acceptance of multiculturalism); and lastly 'socio-affective integration' (different stages of social interaction) as interrelated reality, it can be discovered that sports and outdoor events and Jämtland society are inseparable. However, integration of immigrants is a complicated and long-term process which can never happen for some immigrants while some others are always progressing and make themselves closer and closer to the ultimate levels.

## 5.5 Sports and outdoor events as social bridges

The overarching theme that transcends all the three descriptive themes shows the fostering role of sports and outdoor events in achieving the social integration of newcomers to Jämtland, meaning that sports and outdoors are not strong enough to achieve anticipated social

integration especially in the short run, rather they can provide a common ground where integration can be cultivated.

Although some participants indicated that they underwent some changes through sports in the immigration process, some functions of sports and outdoors remained relatively unknown and uninviting in order to lead to social integration. As supported by the findings of this study, the roles of sports and outdoor events can be outlined and reflect:

- (1) The term 'outdoor' and 'outdoor events' and as a result the related activities are unknown to the immigrants' ears. In comparison to the international and popular term of 'sport', the participants did not have a complete and general understanding of what sort of activities are created and done as outdoor events. The interviewer explained this term to most of the participants except those who could engage in these activities throughout their immigration process. While events are considered as a vital source of economy to the Jämtland County, still the different activities remained hidden or unfamiliar to the newcomers, and they are also unfamiliar with related terms as such 'friluftsliv' (outdoor life).
- (2) Random and temporary participants and visitors in sport clubs, outdoor sports and similar activities have made the immigrants less willing to invest for interactive integration through these platforms. It is assumed that as social activities, people prefer to have these activities with their pre-shaped groups of friends; therefore, considering a two-way process, the social interaction on the activity location happens rarely or if occurs, it is superficial. Expecting deeper levels of relationships that are 'mixing' as relationship of people from different groups, and 'belonging' (Ager and Strang, 2004) as the ultimate level in an integrated society need more effort from both sides.
- (3) The first images that are shaped in immigrants' minds regarding sports and outdoor activity is the fun and entertainment and the personal satisfaction result out of that. They are aware that these activities bring happiness for them and have the physical and mental benefits. However, being socially integrated into the society does not outweigh the mentioned benefits in the first step. Due to this perspective, the newcomers are always looking for multi-sector alliances to achieve integration.
- (4) Indoor sports are more age, and ethnic-cultural background friendly for the adult immigrants in comparison to outdoor sports and events. As supported by the narratives, some immigrants find it inappropriate for the ages to be engaged in some activities and sports especially winter ones with higher risk. Moreover, the immigrants find the pre-arranged group sport classes more accessible and concrete for themselves especially who suffer from lack of language knowledge, supporting by this idea that the body language functions as an understandable interaction tool.
- (5) Serious, meaningful, and continuous participation in sports and outdoors can act as a social bridge to achieve stable and cooperative relations in long term which are the prerequisite factors to integration. These can be strengthened through learning Swedish language; understanding socio-cultural dimensions; increasing influential social connections and successful personal skills.
- (6) A degree of individualization (Bruns, et al, 2015) perspective regarding engagement to sports and outdoors is perceived among the participants' interviews. It can be stated that sport and physical activities that were not practiced in the country of origin will not also be performed in the host country without external influences and incentives.

Thus, if there is no personal orientation and preference, sports and outdoors are not considered as social connections and bridges in the new environment.

- (7) External incentives act as a pushing factor to promote participation in outdoor activities and sports. 'Hej Främling' association located in Östersund, for instance, arrange and plan different types of activities including indoor, outdoor and group events, and announce the weekly schedule throughout the Facebook Page. This association is mostly introduced to immigrants through Korta Vägen and also through Word of Mouth (WOM). As this association has both Swedish and non-Swedish members, it is a good driver for more interactions on both sides. Joining to these activities makes immigrants feel safe and confident because the knowledge and information gaps can be covered by the group help. Besides good feeling, they have more fun in group and take advantage of free teaching, free equipment's rents, and marginal free services. 'Hej Främling' association is a definite example of host Jämtland's integration plans and procedures that gives access to the states' structures in order to achieve social links.

As a result, participants' narratives and life stories constructed during a series of interviews suggested that sports and outdoor activities can be an instrumental meaningful arena to meet a variety of socio-cultural basic needs for social integration although it takes time and necessitates both sides' (immigrants and host society) attempt to achieve. Integration is a cultural and social background dependent phenomenon and is a multi-dimensional concern. However, leisure through sports and outdoor life represents an important component of life for immigrants and refugees (who are placed by force or have chosen to live in Sweden and especially Jämtland County) because it is a key contributor to the overall quality of life personally, culturally, and socially.

## 6 Discussion and conclusion

One of the cornerstones of social inclusion is 'proximity' meaning to share physical and social spaces to provide opportunities for interactions, and to reduce social distances between people. This includes shared public spaces such as parks and libraries; mixed income neighborhoods and housing and integrated schools and classrooms (Donnelly and Coakley, 2002). Based on the perception that sports and outdoor life have a significant status in the lives of Jämtland people, this study focuses on how sports and outdoor events as social bridges can promote the social integration of newcomers in Jämtland. Based on Ager and Strang (2004) theoretical framework, social connections have a fundamental role in the process of integration at a local level among immigrants. The study is based on a qualitative method using the narrative approach to emphasize the life stories of immigrants through in-depth interviews. By giving voices through interviews to the minorities, less established immigrants and refugees, the study has gained insights into the strengths and resilience of newcomers as well as sports and outdoor events role in integration.

### 6.1 Focus on the results

Through previous research, there has also been a growing interest in understanding leisure as a context for fostering social change, which reminds us that leisure is not merely a space in which dominant social relations are reproduced, but also a space in which there may be a struggle (Sharpe, 2008; Peters, 2011). In this study, the overarching theme is interpreted and concluded from three descriptive themes identified the role of sports and outdoor events as social connections in Jämtland society. Specifically, the findings suggest that sports and outdoors have cultivating roles in the integration of newcomers, can be conducive in establishing and re-establishing connections and networks with other foreign-born newcomers and local community and provide cross-cultural interactions.

One of the main purposes of participation and engagement in sports and outdoors is to socialize with others. It is important to stress that homogeneity of immigrants is not assumed because some interviews showed immigrants and refugees hold different preferences and priorities. The narratives showed that the individual-level variables, socio-cultural backgrounds and differences, immigration initial barriers were influencing factors to social integration in the context of sports and outdoors. The fact is that the differences in the effects of factors, benefits, and barriers to be engaged in these activities are great; they represent different dimensions of social integration as Elling, De Knop and Knoppers (2001) indicated: 'structural integration', 'socio-cultural' and 'socio-affective'.

Outdoor lifestyle (friluftsliv) has remained unknown and unfamiliar among newcomers. There is a lack of information about the possible opportunities and availabilities. Cultural differences in images of nature and landscape preferences are effective and there is an individualization point of view regarding engagement in sports and outdoors. Continuous and serious engagement flatten the interactions between the natives and newcomers by constant and steady participations and contacts. Apart from mental and physical health benefits, this can drive the adaptation to challenges of immigration and be a turning point to future opportunities and ultimate integration by time passing.

Based on the Ager and Strang (2004) theoretical framework, the outcomes of this study demonstrated that there are inter-relationships between domains (Strang and Ager, 2010). Considering that integration is a dynamic process, labelling of group domains shows at such interdependencies. Factors such as employment, housing, educations and health are noted as markers and means of integration; rights and citizenships signalled as foundations; language and cultural knowledge, safety and stability as facilitators; and various forms of social capital as providing social connections reinforce bi-directionality (Strang and Ager, 2010; Ager and Strang, 2008).

## 6.2 The method of giving voice to immigrants

Going through the narratives and findings of this study, it is obviously determined that it becomes unfeasible to get a clear and fixed YES or NO answers to questions regarding the integration of immigrants via sports and outdoors. It is also hard to prescribe the unequivocal methods or solutions in order to achieve the integration especially the social integration which includes some forms and layers.

Throughout the narratives, the authors could recognize that even under stable conditions, there is a lack of social integration among immigrants not only due to insufficient knowledge of lifestyle patterns and needs in host community but also because of lack of enough potentiality and strengths to discard major barriers and obstacles at each stage of the path. Here it is in this situation where the word 'minority' complements.

The minorities need to be heard and listened, no matter through a media, a friendly dialogue, conversation, or an interview. It is essential to understand the values and expectations attached to social integration before responding to the immigrants' needs. For newcomers as vulnerable groups, giving them voice is vital to generate the knowledge that informs policy and practice.

Although the participants were explained that the purpose of the interviews is a university study, throughout the narrations they found themselves in an equal level with the interviewer with familiar encountered concerns and problems; therefore, they willingly went deeper into more personal challenges, fears, plans and marginalized experiences.

However, whether a Swedish or non-Swedish person attempts to listen to what newcomers want to express is worth paying attention. *Giving voice* may have mutual advantages for both newcomers and the planners and related organizations. For the newcomers' side, it enhances the general knowledge especially regarding the unknown or hidden aspects of the new society. For instance, in this study, the concepts of 'outdoor' or 'outdoor events' were the core points that all were not familiar totally. This helps to discover more potentialities to undertake them. As a seen group, they will become more confident about their family's future; also strengthen their sense of responsibility as social actors and society members.

The planners and organizations can also recognize a broader, and more detailed perception of immigrants' concerns and problems in the integration process. Thus, appropriate, and well-

adapted integration strategies can be implemented based on what the immigrants speak out. By hearing immigrant' voices, a genuine and factual attitude may be shaped toward them and may reduce the bulk of integration responsibility on immigrants' side. Overall, it provides the opportunities to make social connections which is a facilitator to social integration of new Swedes.

### 6.3 Limitations and implications for future studies

Since the data applied in this research was collected from 19 immigrants and refugees that have lived mostly in Östersund (just 4 participants lived in other cities and towns), there is a limited variation at the county level, and our findings are likely to be generalized to newcomers in Östersund. Due to Covid-19 Pandemic unique situation, the accessibility to a larger group of participants was limited especially because the authors could not find the opportunity to meet some of them in person, give a brief explanation directly in the first meeting and get the acceptance in person. The short face to face meeting before the real interview session could be helpful to make the minds clear and ready for the interview. The English language was the native language of one participant and it causes understanding the questions blurry on some occasions. The interviewer tried to paraphrase the questions in the easiest language to make them understandable and get the most relevant answers out of the questions. In three of the interviews, translators acted as mediators in which the interviewer was cautious that the questions are conveyed in the correct ways, however, as the translators were not academic researchers or dominant on the research topic, there is no doubt that some shortcomings existed. It was not possible for the interviewer to travel to different cities and towns of Jämtland to make the interviews with participants because of some reasons such as time shortages of both sides but also due to Pandemic crisis that limited the freedom of travel.

Lack of similar studies focusing 'sports and outdoor events' in connection to social integration was a big limitation in this study; therefore, being a new topic needed more creativity and pre-study to design the interview questions. It also affected writing the literature review related directly to 'outdoor events' in comparison to other titles such as 'sports' or 'sport events'.

In this study, the main focus is on a small range of aspects relevant to the immigrants and refugees' stories. Yet, it is suggested that questions of social non-integration or ethnic differences ought to be studied in next research. It is also important to reflect the newcomers' next generation integration process in the next studies which can be vital and beneficial for the planners and organizations in Jämtland.

Considering the importance of term 'friluftsliv' in Sweden and long-term purposes to increase the awareness of the outdoor life values through the friluftslivets år 2021 (The outdoor life project 2021), social sustainability is a big issue to be considered. Thus, the next studies can be developed based on the findings of this study that how planners and related organizations in Jämtland can create immigrant-friendly outdoor events and sports; therefore, the newcomers invest more on being engaged to take advantage of sports and outdoors integration benefits and at the same time the local community can become acquainted with the importance of integration and be more involved in this two-way process.

Finally, in order to examine the process of integration between immigrants and natives, it seems essential to study immigrants' groups over time (dynamic study) and preferably over at least two generations to find how the gaps at one time develop due to changes in both the minorities and majorities.

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