




© 2024 Habes et al. This article follows the  Open Access policy of CC BY NC under Creative Commons attribution license v 4.0.



Submitted: 14/04/2024 - Accepted: 14/05/2024 - Published: 26/06/2024

# Examining the Challenges of Integration in Swedish-Speaking Ostrobothnia: Using the Structured Democratic Dialogue Process as a Tool

**Hasan Habes<sup>1</sup>**

**Kaj Björkqvist<sup>2</sup>**

**Andreas Andreou<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Department of Minority Studies, Åbo Akademi University, Vasa, Finland

<sup>2</sup>Developmental Psychology, Åbo Akademi University, Vasa, Finland

<sup>3</sup>Cyprus Neuroscience and Technology Institute, Nicosia, Cyprus

Email: hhabes@abo.fi

DOI: 10.26417/ejser.v6i3.p7-22

## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate ways to identify the challenges of integration of minority groups, such as migrants, ethnic/racial minorities, and refugees in Swedish-speaking Ostrobothnia by using the Structured Democratic Dialogue (SDD) as a participatory methodology. This particular method was selected for this study with the purpose to bring all identified stakeholders in the society together to collaboratively and collectively identify and further discuss the challenges and obstacles they face. The Collaboratory brought together twelve participants with a diverse socio-economical and educational background in Vasa, Finland. Based on the influence map generated by the participants as a result of the workshop, social inclusion was revealed to be one of the most important indicators hindering the integration of minority groups at the local level. In particular, silent acceptance of racism or racist comments were according to the participants the most influential factor preventing the successful integration of ethnic minorities in Swedish-speaking Ostrobothnia.

**Keywords:** Integration, Minorities, Social connection, Structured Democratic Dialogue (SDD)

## Introduction

The integration process of minority groups such as migrants, ethnic/racial minorities, and refugees has long been a challenge, but after the migration crises in 2015, it becomes more crucial than ever to establish social cohesion in communities and societies.

According to Robinson (1998), integration is a chaotic term because when it is used, most of the people understand it differently than how it is meant. A similar view has been addressed by Castles et al. (2002); since there is no single definition, theory, or model about immigrants and refugee integration, it creates ambiguity and further controversial debate.

Roder and Lubbers (2015) argue that in earlier decades, economic integration was considered equal to successful integration. However, the lack of social and cultural integration are the reasons of the failure of the creating of a harmonic multicultural society today, due to the adopted repressive civic integration policies in Europe (Joppke, 2007).

Based on the definition by the Council of the European Union (2004, p. 17), integration “is a dynamic, long-term and continuous two-way process of mutual accommodation, not a static outcome”. Indicators used to measure the integration process and progress vary, since different approaches emphasize different sets of indicators for a successful integration. In particular, the inclusion or exclusion of specific indicators will affect the outcomes when it comes to measure the process of social inclusion, because the social and economic status of migrants and minority groups is the key indicator of their integration into the society (Rudiger & Spencer, 2003).

Employment, housing, education, and health have been the most researched areas as far as integration is concerned, and they are identified as the key factors of integration (Ager & Strang, 2008). Nevertheless, Strang and Ager (2010) found that social connection plays a fundamental role in the process of integration at the local level. The frequency and quality of interaction between immigrants, minority groups, and other residents are the essential factors of successful integration.

This social connection includes establishing social bridges with the other groups to support social cohesion and to understand cultural differences; having social bonds in order to foster the sense of belonging to a group instead of feeling assimilated; and having social links provided by both governmental and non-governmental services and activities (Ager & Strang, 2008). According to the conceptual framework put forward by Ager and Strang (2008), integration is not only a two-way process, it is

also multi-dimensional. In order to have a successful integration process, full economic, social, cultural, and political participation of both immigrants and minority groups is a necessity and should be supported by the host society (Ager & Strang, 2008; Council of the Europe Union, 2004; Rudiger & Spencer, 2003).

The Council of the European Union's integration policies (2004) provided the EU member states the common basic principles according to which individual member states can tailor their policies according to the needs of their society and their integration strategy. Thus, the current study will expand on the challenges of integration research at the local level. It will investigate ways to identify the challenges of integration of minority groups of migrants, ethnic and racial groups as well as refugees in Swedish-speaking Ostrobothnia in Finland. For this purpose, the study employed a Co-Laboratory based on the Structured Democratic Dialogue (SDD) methodology. The Co-Laboratory reported here focuses on the challenges faced by minority groups during their integration process in Swedish-speaking Ostrobothnia.

Ostrobothnia is a region with a 51.2% Swedish-speaking majority of the otherwise 5,5% Swedish-speaking minority population in Finland (Statistikcentralen, 2018a). Comprised of both bilingual and purely Finnish-speaking municipalities, the region is the third highest among others in terms of receiving migration in Finland (Statistikcentralen, 2018b). Vasa, a coastal city with the population of nearly 67.000, 70% of whom speak Finnish, 23% Swedish, and 7% other languages as their mother tongue was chosen as the locality for this study.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The workshop brought together twelve (12) participants from different sociocultural and educational background, all knowledgeable about the topic of discussion. Two of the participants were Finnish and two were Swedish-speaking Finns. The rest of the participants were American, British-Finnish, Iranian, Lebanese, Lithuanian, Russian, Serbian, and Turkish. The participants had also diverse educational background such as education, computer engineering, business and economics, hospitality, psychology, peace research, and international relations. Some of them were also representing different occupational sectors, NGOs, and political parties, and some were post-graduate students, volunteers, and unemployed persons belonging different communities such as the LGBTQ community, a feminist group, Muslim and Christian communities, and an African community. The age group was between 25 – 40 with 30 as a median age. Seven of the participants were female and five were male.

### **Structured Democratic Dialogue (SDD)**

The workshop was executed based on the methodology of the Structured Democratic Dialogue (SDD) (Christakis & Bausch, 2006; Schreiberman & Chirstakis, 2007). SDD is a methodology that supports democratic and structured dialogue among a group of

stakeholders. It is especially effective in harnessing collective intelligence and collective wisdom to solve complex problems (Laouris, 2012). SDD enables the authentic engagement of individuals with diverse views, backgrounds and perspectives in developing a common framework of thinking based on consensus and shared understanding of the current and a future ideal state of affairs (Laouris, 2012).

The SDD methodology (Laouris & Christakis, 2007) uses the Nominal Group Technique which gives equal time and importance to each idea/view, and protects the authenticity of every idea in order to prevent the Groupthink phenomenon (Janis, 1982; Whyte, 1952) that often appears in meetings, in which some participants support views that represent the majority of the group, and the agreement reached between the participants represents only the most powerful opinions as they do not want to go against the group.

According to Dye (1999), solving all individual sub-problems is not enough to solve the complex problem. It also requires examination and identification of relations between the sub-problems. The Erroneous Priorities Effect phenomenon (Dye, 1999) demonstrates that when different stakeholders propose actions to solve a complex problem, the actions that majority sees as important are chosen. This leads the stakeholders to try to solve sub-problems that at first seem important for the majority, although in reality, they might not be significant. Nevertheless, if the stakeholders are encouraged to examine the influence of an action to solve a sub-problem over another one, different actions would be chosen.

The SDD methodology employs Interpretive Structural Modelling, which is incorporated in the Cogniscope™ system (Christakis, 1996) which eliminates the Erroneous Priorities Effect phenomenon by using mathematical algorithms in order to guarantee that the influence the actions have on each other are prioritized (Flanagan & Christakis, 2009; Laouris, 2012; Laouris & Michealides, 2017).

The SDD methodology is regarded as particularly effective in resolving multiple conflicts, values and interests, and bringing the participants closer to agreement on a common understanding and having a strategy for resolving the issue (Christakis, 1996). The implementation of SDD is employed in six well-defined phases and 10 steps. It provides a deeper understanding of the topic and solutions to be identified and agreed upon. In this way, a common understanding of the different dimension of the topic can be developed, and importantly, the influence of the ideas over each other can be prioritized. The SDD method allows the participants to recognize and rewrite a complex topic in order to intervene and change with solutions.

A complex problem is identified and a Triggering Question (TQ) is formed with steps 1 and 2 during phase 1, before the beginning of the Workshop. During phase 2, step 3, each participant is invited to deliver possible ideas as a single statement for the Triggering Question, one by one. During step 4, the participants are asked to clarify their ideas to all other participants. The ideas are recorded in Cogniscope™ exactly as

they are uttered, and the clarifications are videotaped. It is important that other participants only seek clarification if the explanation is not clear enough, without criticism.

In phase 3 including steps 5 and 6, the participants are encouraged to discuss the similarities and the common features of all ideas in order to group them into clusters. The bottom-up approach is used during this process, which enables the participants to discuss in-depth and to create a common understanding about the topic discussed. Then, the generated clusters, which are registered in the Cogniscope™ tool, are printed and displayed on the wall.

After the clustering, participants individually are invited to vote for five out of the total set of ideas which they believe to be the most important ones, and help to solve the Triggering Question as step 7 in phase 4. The ideas which receive at least two votes move to the next and most important phase.

In phase 5 including steps 8 and 9, the participants are collectively invited to examine two ideas at a time in terms of whether one idea can affect significantly another idea. In step 8, the participants are asked the particular question: “if idea/challenge A is overcome, will it significantly help to overcome idea/challenge B?” for each idea. The impact or relation is recorded and added to the influence map, when a 75% majority supports the idea with a yes vote. If there is an even voting with 50/50, the participants are invited to discuss the significance in-depth and to revote. During this process the connections among the ideas recognized and voted on by the participants are used to build an influence map. The ideas/challenges which are located at the bottom of the influence map are the root causes of the problem. They are the ones with the greatest influence over others, which must be overcome at the first place in order to tackle the rest of the ideas/challenges. In this way, participants are encouraged to prioritize the causative factors by use of the influence map.

In phase 6 including step 10, the influence map is discussed in a greater detail, in order to define SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time Specific) actions to address the root causes of the problem.

## Results

During the idea generation phase, 67 challenges were generated by the participants as a response to the Triggering Question: ‘What challenges (political, economic, educational, sociocultural, religious, linguistic) do the minority groups in Swedish-speaking Ostrobothnia face to integrate in the local community?’

When all challenges were defined and displayed, participants proceeded to the clarification phase where they started to explain/clarify their ideas one by one. Sufficient time was allocated for further clarification and explanatory questions by the other participants in this phase. This allowed all participants to reach the same understanding and interpretation of the idea/challenge generated by its own author.

The clarifications of all ideas, however, are not included in this paper due to concerns about space, but they are available upon request.

The third main phase of the workshop was to categorize the proposed ideas in clusters according to similarities and common characteristics. To achieve this clustering, the participants discussed and compared the ideas in pairs to identify whether they share enough characteristics to be clustered into the same category. The participants mutually and collaboratively identified eight clusters (Figure 1 & Figure 2), namely: Cluster 1: Culture; Cluster 2: Social Inclusion; Cluster 3: Work & Education; Cluster 4: Language/Linguistic; Cluster 5: Legal/Governmental/Bureaucratic Issues; Cluster 6: Discrimination; Cluster 7: Perceptions; Cluster 8: Identity.

Overall, "Culture" was the cluster with the most ideas (14), followed closely by Social Inclusion with 13 ideas. A considerable number of challenges were also categorized under Cluster 7: Perceptions, which received ten ideas in total. Cluster 6: Discrimination, and Cluster 3: Work & Education received eight and seven challenges accordingly, while six ideas were distributed to Cluster 5: Legal/Governmental/Bureaucratic Issues, and Cluster 8: Identity. Finally, three challenges were sorted into Cluster 4: Language/Linguistics being the cluster with the smallest number of challenges of the workshop.

After the clustering, the participants were invited to read all challenges and to vote for the five most important/influential challenges out of the total set of ideas, in order to receive an answer to the triggering question in the best way possible. It should be noted that participants were voting for the challenges they thought would facilitate the resolution of the triggering question best, rather than supporting their own ideas.

The fact that only 16 challenges received at least two votes during the voting phase would not have allowed the development of a so called rich influence map, according to the SDD theory. For this reason, the facilitators of the workshop agreed to proceed to the Mapping Phase with all 24 challenges which received at least one vote, thus guaranteeing the enhancement of the final map of influence demonstrated in Figure 3. For that reason, only the challenges that received at least one vote continued to the next phase (see Table 1 & Appendix I for the clarifications). The voting results are listed in descending order based on the votes that each idea received.

Cluster 2, entitled "Social Inclusion", which received the highest number of votes, was perceived the most important by the participants. Under this cluster, 14 votes were distributed among the challenges with an average of 1.08 votes/challenge, and six out of these 13 challenges have been included in the influence map. It can be perceived that the cluster brings together challenges related to social connection. This fact is also reflected in Challenge #67: Not including Finns in the integration process (4 votes), which received the highest number of votes during the voting procedure, Challenge #60: Slow integration process (3 votes), Challenge #4: A tight community

(2 votes), Challenge #61: Lack of local involvement (2 votes), Challenge# 66: Lack of follow-up integration plans (2 votes), and Challenge #58: Inadequate communication about rights and responsibilities (1 vote). In this cluster, these challenges in particular refer to the importance of the process that should be “two-way” in order to have a successful integration.

The second most popular cluster was Cluster 7: “Perceptions”, with ten votes distributed across its ten challenges. This cluster refers mainly to the popular attitudes and policies of the host society towards minority groups. This generates perceptions towards the others as the participants categorized and voted Challenge #23: Negative attitudes (3 votes), Challenge #22: Ignorance (3 votes), Challenge #7: Assumptions of inferiority (2 votes), Challenge #14: Fear of foreign culture (1 vote), and Challenge #34: Lack of trust in foreigners (1 vote) under cluster 7.

Despite being the richest cluster bringing together a total of 14 challenges, Cluster 1: “Culture” received nine votes, thus being the third most important cluster following the completion of the voting phase. Challenge #1: Clashing values (3 votes), Challenge #28: How to accommodate for specific traditions/rituals (3 votes), Challenge #24: Cultural differences (2 votes), and Challenge #50: Condemnation of other’s beliefs or habits (1 vote) specifically refer to cultural competences.

The challenges categorized under the Cluster 3: “Work & Education” received eight votes. The challenges under this cluster refer to the employment and educational issues such as Challenge #53: Immigrants are seen as economic drain in the society (3 votes), Challenge #2: Lack of education (3 votes), and Challenge #39: Lack of connections in professional area (2 votes).

Cluster 6: “Discrimination” received seven votes by the participants. Especially Challenge #45: Silent acceptance of racism (1 vote), which belonged to this cluster, was the most influential factor hindering the integration of the minority groups in Swedish-speaking Ostrobothnia. Under this cluster, the participants also categorized and voted on Challenge #54: Structural violence (3 vote), Challenge #59: Bullying/violence (2 vote), and Challenge #33: Xenophobic behavior towards certain ethno-religious groups (1 vote).

Cluster 4: “Language/Linguistic” received only one vote for the Challenge #20: Language barrier (1 vote). Cluster 5: Legal/Governmental/Bureaucratical Issues which is related to the social cohesion provided by the organizations of the government also received one vote from the participants for the Challenge #41: Lack of help to integrate (1 vote). However, Cluster 8: “Identity”, which relates to challenges regarding to nationality, received no votes.

Table 1: The Number of Votes for Challenges

#	Votes	Challenge
67	4	Not including Finns in the integration process
1	3	Clashing values
2	3	Lack of education
22	3	Ignorance
23	3	Negative attitudes
28	3	How to accommodate for specific traditions/rituals
53	3	Immigrants are seen as economic drain in the society
54	3	Structural violence
60	3	Slow integration process
4	2	A tight community
7	2	Assumptions of inferiority
24	2	Cultural differences
39	2	Lack of connections in professional area
59	2	Bullying / violence
61	2	Lack of local involvement
66	2	Lack of follow-up integration plans
14	1	Fear of foreign cultures
20	1	Language barrier
33	1	Xenophobic behaviour towards certain ethno-religious groups
34	1	Lack of trust in foreigners
41	1	Lack of help to integrate
45	1	Silent acceptance of racism
50	1	Condemnation of other's beliefs or habits
58	1	Inadequate communication about rights and responsibilities



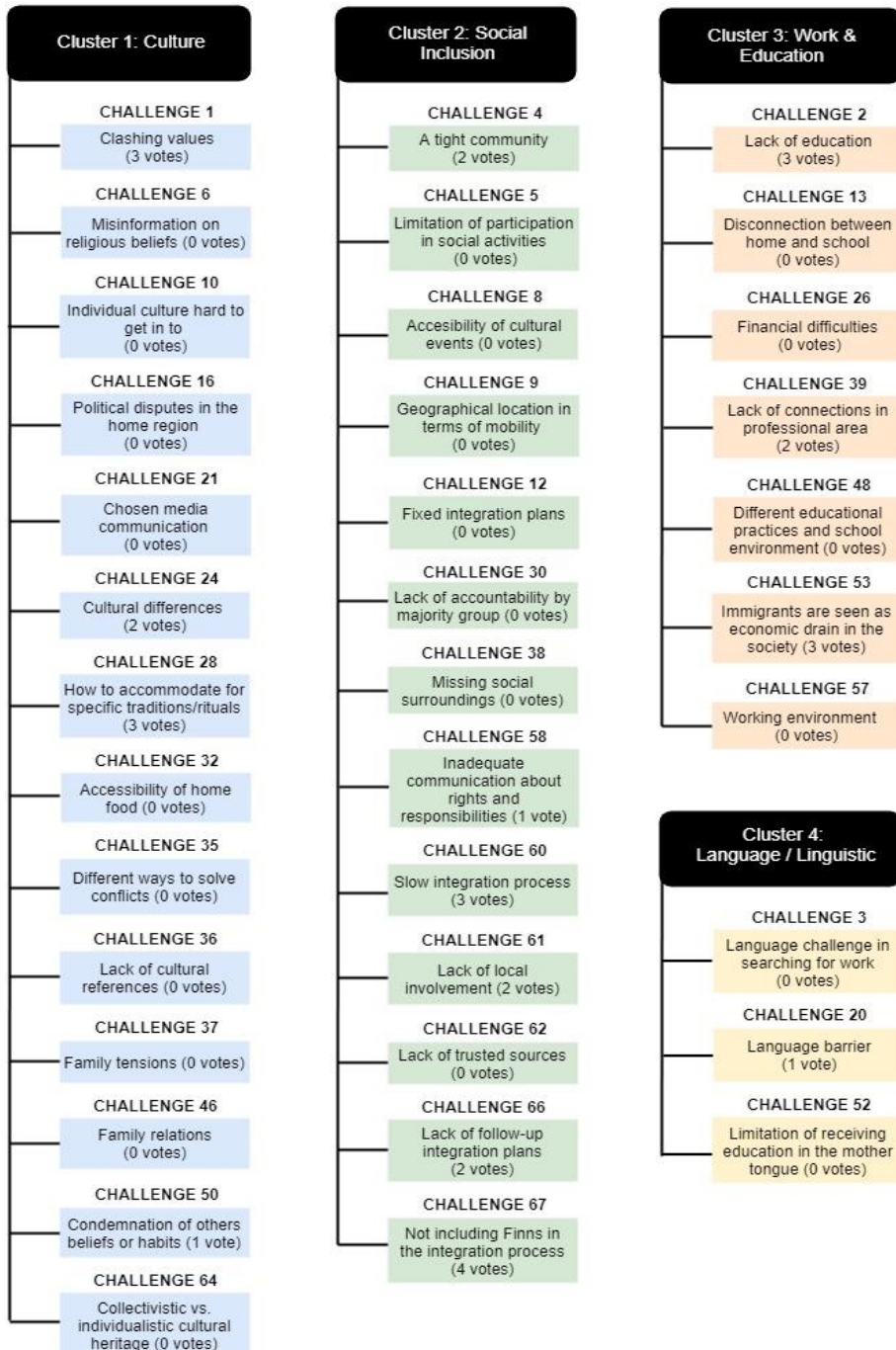


Figure 1. Clusters 1-4, presenting proposed challenges.

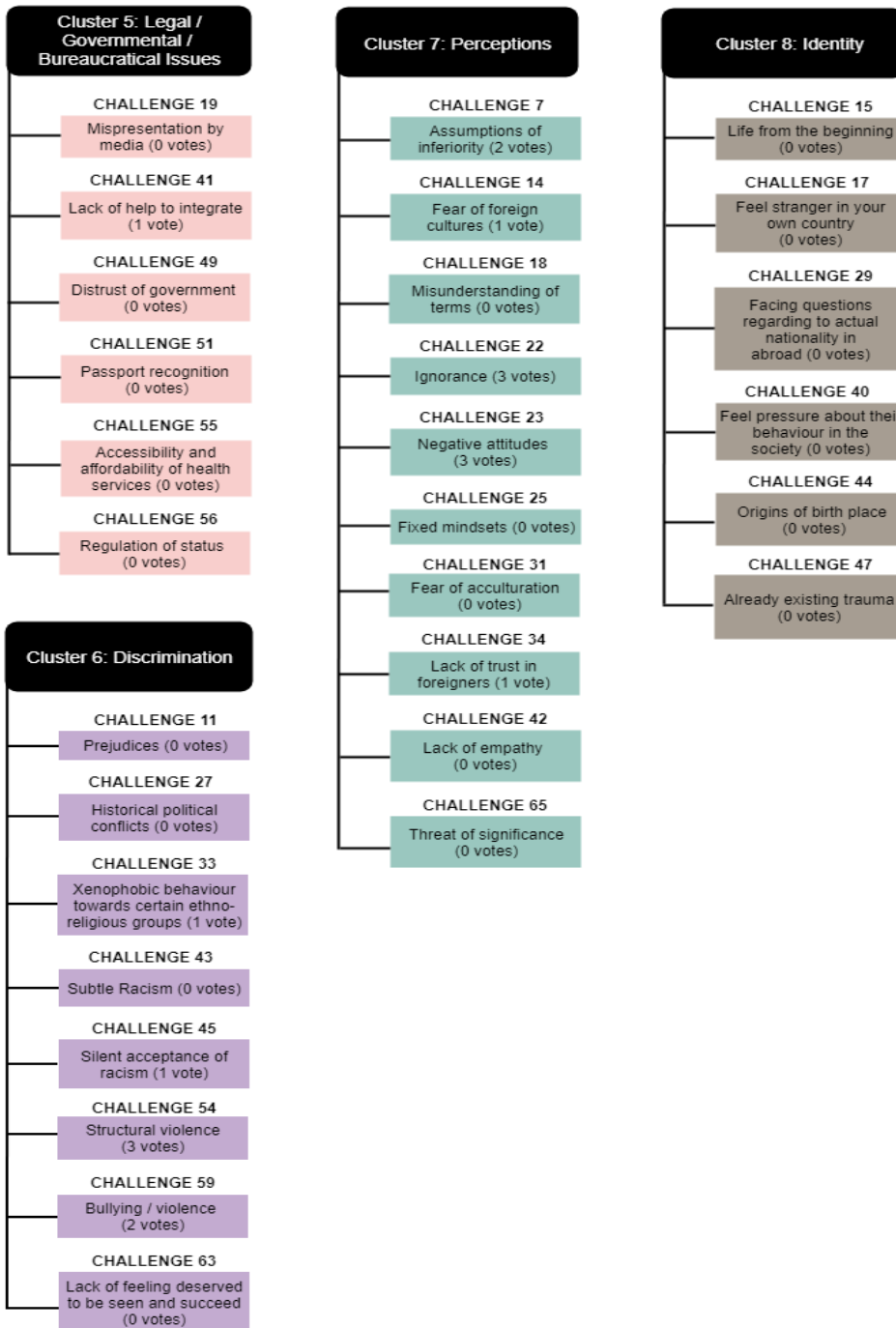


Figure 2. Clusters 5-8, presenting proposed challenges.

## Influence Map

The process for defining the map of influence is as follows: Two challenges are randomly selected and presented together in a question form to find, whether one factor significantly influences the other or not. After the discussion of the influence of the two ideas over each other by the participants, the influence of the first challenge on the second one is determined and recorded when 2/3 of the votes (75%) are positive. Gradually, the influence map (see Figure 3) is structured after in-depth discussions and assessing all the pair of challenges in this manner.

The influence map incorporates five different levels. The root challenges, which are situated at the lower levels of the map, in particular at levels IV and V, are the most influential challenges. These have the greatest influence and must be resolved first in order to tackle the subsequent challenges, as the latter rely on the former. This means that the overcoming of Challenge #45: Silent acceptance of racism (which received only one vote), which is located at the base of the map, still would significantly influence or ease the overcoming the challenge reaching the highest vote, Challenge #67: Not including Finns in the integration process. The overcoming of Challenge #67, which are found at Level IV of the map, would significantly influence the overcoming of challenges #22: Ignorance, and #54: Structural Violence, identified at Level III. Therefore, to facilitate the integration of minority groups in Swedish-speaking Ostrobothnia, it is pivotal that the following challenges, derived exclusively from the root levels V and IV, shown as [Challenge, Votes, Cluster, Level], are overcome firstly:

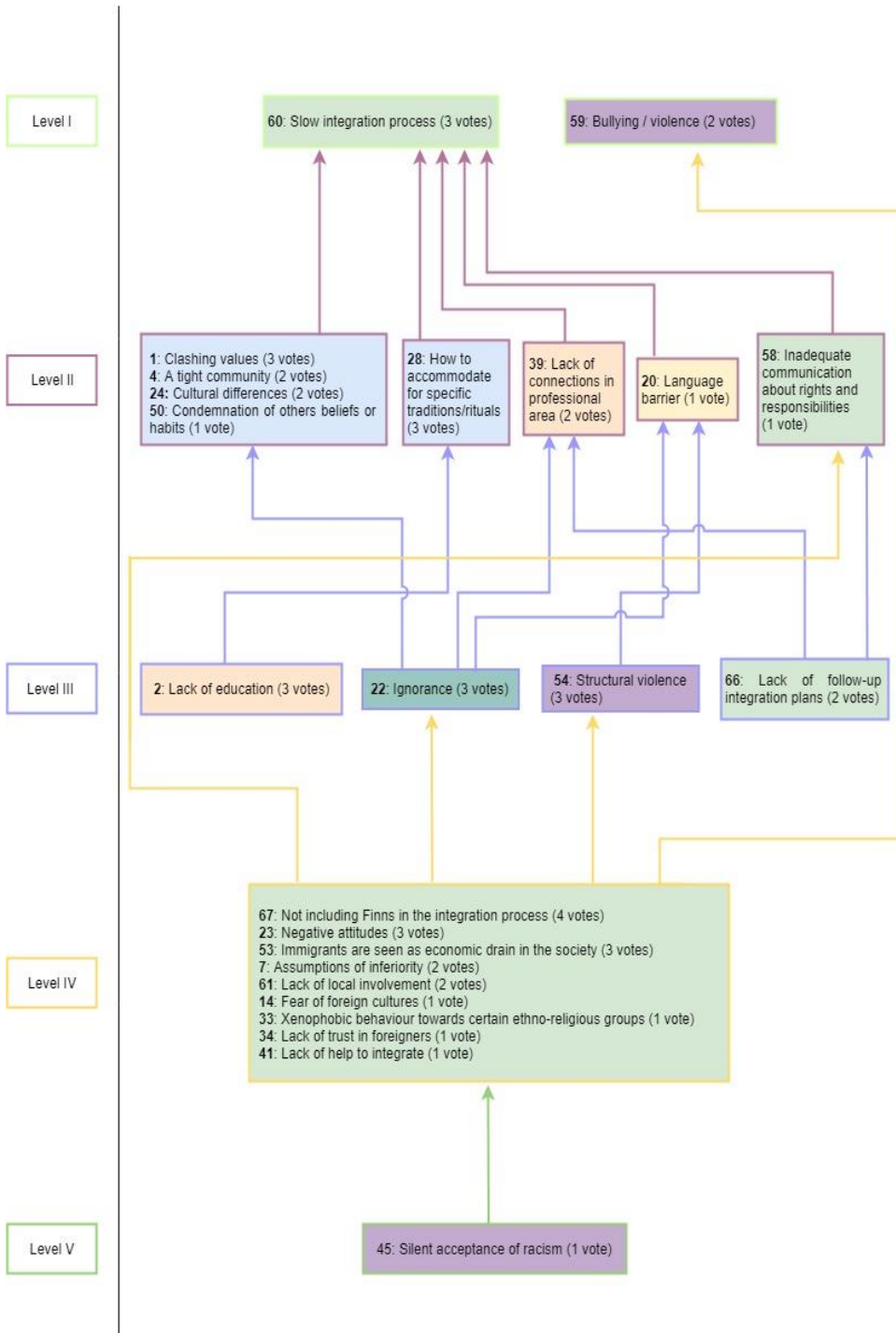
- Silent acceptance of racism (Ch45, V1, C6, L5)
- Not including Finns in the integration process (Ch67, V4, C2, L4)
- Negative attitudes (Ch23, V3, C7, L4)
- Immigrants are seen as an economic drain in the society (Ch53, V3, C3, L4)
- Assumptions of inferiority (Ch7, V2, C7, L4)
- Lack of local involvement (Ch61, V2, C2, L4)
- Fear of foreign culture (Ch14, V1, C7, L4)
- Xenophobic behaviour towards certain ethno-religious groups (Ch33, V1, C6, L4)
- Lack of trust in foreigners (Ch34, V1, C7, L4)
- Lack of help to integrate (Ch41, V1, C5, L4)

The analysis of the demonstrated map of influence indicates that Level V has the greatest influence on the all other challenges. This means that the overcoming of Challenge #45: Silent acceptance of racism, which is located at the base of the map,

would significantly influence or ease the overcoming of the challenges on Level IV and those on upper levels.

Level IV is the level with most challenges, with its nine challenges. It should additionally be observed that all challenges of this particular level share the same box unlike other challenges, as for example the challenges on Level III (e.g. Challenge #22 and #54), all having an independent box. This means that the challenges of a shared box are equally influencing each other as well as influencing the challenges positioned at the upper levels of the map. In other words, the Challenge #53 and Challenge #7 are equally influencing each other, and in turn they equally influence Challenge #58 and Challenge #59, positioned at Level II and Level 1 accordingly. In particular, the participants agreed that the overcoming of Challenge #53 could significantly influence the overcoming of Challenge #7, and that the overcoming of Challenge #7 would significantly influence the overcoming of Challenge #59. However, the participants opined that the overcoming of Challenge #58 could not significantly influence the overcoming of Challenge #59, therefore Challenge #58 is not put together with Challenge #59.

Level III is comprised of four challenges, that is, Challenge #2, Challenge #22, Challenge #54, and Challenge #66. It should be noted that Challenges #22 and #54 are directly influenced by the challenges of Level IV in the sense that in order to effectively and appropriately overcome these two challenges, it is necessary to address at the first place the challenges identified at Level IV, namely, the challenges #67, #23, #53, #7, #61, #14, #33, #34, and #41.



**Figure 3. Final influence map produced by the participants.**

Eight challenges have been sorted into Level II of the map of influence, being the second most dense level of the map. The representation of cluster 1 is intense on this specific level, considering that all four challenges of this cluster and 50% of all challenges of this level have been positioned at Level II, namely, Challenge #1, Challenge #24, Challenge #50, and Challenge #28. As illustrated on the map, three of the aforementioned challenges are in a shared box, possibly as a consequence of being categorized under the same cluster based on their common attributes and results. For example, the overcoming of Challenge #1 can significantly influence the overcoming of Challenge #50 and vice versa. In addition, two challenges from cluster 2 are positioned at this level, that is Challenge #4, and Challenge #58. Finally, the level holds Challenge #39, and Challenge #20.

The top level of the map of influence, Level I, comprises two challenges: Challenge #60, and Challenge #59 which can be effectively overcome upon the overcoming of the challenges positioned at the lower levels of the map.

## **Discussion**

During the SDD process, the participants came up with a total of 67 challenges categorized into eight clusters, which they thought form the hindrance of integration of the minority groups in Swedish-speaking Ostrobothnia.

In total, 24 challenges (35%) received one or more votes and 16 challenges (24%) received more than two votes. This can be interpreted so that the participants shared the mutual understanding towards the common vision and action plan in this matter. The dispersion of the degree of votes was in a normal range among the participants. This shows that there was an agreement among the participant regarding the root causes of the issue. This corroborates that all participants' opinions are represented, and they are all involved in the process.

The "Social Inclusion" cluster was perceived to be the most significant one, in terms of the number of votes received by the participants. This cluster brings together challenges related to social connection. As Ager and Strang (2008) described in their study, social connection plays a fundamental role in the integration process, because it provides connection between the minority groups and the host community. It is the part of the integration process of mutual accommodation of both communities, as described by the Council of European Union (2004). This is also reflected in Challenge # 67: Not including Finns in the integration process. This challenge refers to the significance of a "two-way" process in order to have a successful integration. Unless the host community is ready and open to accommodate the other groups, it cannot be expected the minority groups to fit into the host community. The results of this study support the notion that social connection plays a significant role in the integration process in Swedish-speaking Ostrobothnia as well.

The "Perceptions" cluster refers to the popular attitudes and policies of the host society towards the minority groups. Although these minority groups have an active

role in the integration process, the process becomes slow and complex due to policies and legislation. For that reason, these groups are forced to take a passive role, and as Castles et. al (2002, p.113) states “/.../are expected to integrate into the existing culture or society without any reciprocal accommodation”. Thus, integration becomes a one-way instead of a two-way process, in which the minority groups are expected to accommodate themselves to the host society by discarding their own traditions, cultures, and identities. This generates negative perceptions of the others as the participants pointed out in the challenges #22, #23, #7, #14, and #34. According to the participants, the host community should provide access for the other groups to every level of society, in order to have a successful and positive integration process.

As the inclusion or exclusion concepts are associated with the removing or putting barriers during the integration process, culture is one of the factors that acts like a barrier for effective integration. Having a broader cultural knowledge about both minority groups and the host community, respectively, enables a positive integration process. Challenge #1: Clashing values, Challenge #28: How to accommodate for specific traditions/rituals, Challenge #24: Cultural differences, and Challenge #50: Condemnation of other’s beliefs or habits under the culture cluster specifically refer to these cultural competences. The results show that adapting to a different culture is not simple. For that reason, sharing their cultural values with the host community enables the mutual understanding and contributes to removing barriers which hinder the integration process.

The “Work & Education” cluster refers to employment and education, which are the key indicators of successful integration. According to Ager and Strang (2008, p.169), these indicators “clearly serve as potential means to support the achievement of integration”. Employment influences many other related issues such as economic independence, engaging with the members of the host society, improving language skills, and self-esteem (Ager & Strang, 2008). This can be seen in Challenge #53: Immigrants are seen as economic drain in the society. In addition, education in which necessary competences and skills can be gained helps individuals to become employed. This can lead the minority groups, especially immigrants, to become active members of the host society. Through education, it is also possible to increase the possibility of learning the language of the host society, as well as decreasing the impact of the isolation and exclusion, as is suggested in Challenge #2: Lack of education, and Challenge #39: Lack of connections in professional area. Based on the results, employment and education are two connected indicators which also have a significant influence on the other indicators.

Challenge #45: Silent acceptance of racism, which was considered to be the most influential factor hindering the integration of minority groups in Swedish-speaking Ostrobothnia, belonged to the “Discrimination” cluster. The participants also categorized and voted Challenge #54: Structural violence, Challenge #59: Bullying/violence, and Challenge #33: Xenophobic behavior towards certain ethno-

religious groups under this cluster. In order to have equal participation in all aspect of the society, including social, economic and political life, the equal treatment of minority groups is a prerogative. This right is supported by anti-discrimination legislation in the EU, in order to give everyone equal rights regardless of their background, including racial and ethnic origin, religion, and nationality (Council of the European Union, 2004).

As Rudiger and Spencer (2003) suggest, the European Commission in general, and each nation state in particular, should develop a monitoring system in order to address racism, xenophobia, and discrimination. They also suggest that organizations working to overcome these issues should actively promote integration by including minority groups in these processes. The result of this study also support that these challenges should be resolved in order to have a successful integration.

Being able to speak the host community's language is an essential factor in integration process. For that reason, not knowing the language of the host community will hinder the socio-economic integration of the minority groups. As it is reported by the participants in the Challenge #20: Language barrier under the Language/Linguistic cluster, there can be other barriers related to the employment and more advanced education, as well as social communication although the main language of the host community is learned. For that reason, it can be perceived that the language competence plays a very important role in the integration process.

Cluster 5: "Legal/Governmental/Bureaucratical Issues" with the Challenge #41: Lack of help to integrate is connected with social connection. As Ager and Strang (2008, p.181) described, this is the social links referring to "the connection between individuals and the structures of the state, such as government services" which provides a third dimension along with social bridges and social bonds. With the policies and practices of the government as links, the minority groups can access the activities and services supporting integration. In this way, accessibility to the specific services which is needed by the minority groups will be facilitated and reinforce the integration process.

Last but not least, although the national identity containing cultural norms and values forms how the integration process is approached in multicultural settings, the participants had not seen this as a serious threat for the integration process in Swedish-speaking Ostrobothnia in Finland. Thus, the Identity cluster, which is related to the nationality issues, did not receive any vote at all. It appears that nationalism was not experienced as a problem.

## **Conclusion**

Integration is a long, complex, and multi-dimensional process. In order to have a successful integration process, all aspects of integration should be taken into account. As Ager and the Strang (2008) point out, not only key factors such as economy, housing, education, health, rights, and citizenship, but also social connection should



be included and regarded as an essential element during the integration process. This adds to the other indicators for an accurate measurement of the process, providing a broader picture on how integration could be facilitated.

According to the participants, the most influential challenge among proposed 67 challenges categorized under eight clusters which prevents the successful integration of the minority groups is the 'silent acceptance of racism' under the 'Discrimination' cluster. Although there are specific policies on equality and non-discrimination like chapter 3 of the charter of fundamental rights of the European Union, it can be noticed that there are still more actions to be taken at the local level in order to prevent prejudiced attitudes and discrimination from taking place. This is also closely related with another challenge, namely, 'not including Finns in the integration process' under the "Social Inclusion" cluster, as discussed by the participants.

Including Finns in the integration process will not only promote tolerance towards others, understanding other cultures, and actual cultural exchange with the other groups, but also help the minority groups to feel accepted into the society they are trying to be part of. Thus, a dynamic and two-way process of mutual accommodation can be accomplished. Further studies are needed in order to find out what actions can be taken to facilitate the inclusion of Finns in the integration process of minority groups in Swedish-speaking Ostrobothnia.

### **Acknowledgements**

Svenska Kulturfonden (the Swedish Culture Foundation) kindly supported the first author with a grant for research leading to this publication. Dr. Yiannis Laouris at Future Worlds Center (Cyprus Neuroscience and Technology Institute) in Nicosia, Cyprus gave his support for the implementation of the Structured Dialogic Design methodology for the research, which is gratefully acknowledged.

### **References**

- [1] Ager, A., & Strang, A. (2008). Understanding integration: A conceptual framework. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 21, 166–191.
- [2] Castles, S., Korac, M., Vasta, E., & Vertovec, S. (2002). *Integration: Mapping the field*. Croydon, UK: Home Office.
- [3] Chirstakis, A. N. (1996). A people science: The CogniScope system approach. *Systems: Journal of Transdisciplinary Systems Sciences*, 1, 16–19.
- [4] Christakis, A. N., & Bausch, K. (2006). *How people harness their collective wisdom and power to construct the future in co-laboratories of democracy*. Boston, MA: Information Age Publishing.
- [5] Council of the European Union. (2004). 2618th council meeting: Justice and home affairs. Brussels: Council of the European Union.

- [6] Dye, K. (1999). Dye's law of requisite evolution of observations. In A. N. Christakis, & K. C. Bausch, *How people harness their collective wisdom and power* (pp. 166–169). Greenwich, UK: Information Age Publishing.
- [7] Flanagan, T. R., & Christakis, A. N. (2009). *The talking point: Creating an environment for exploring complex meaning*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.
- [8] Janis, I. L. (1982). *Groupthink: Psychological studies of policy decisions and fiascoes*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- [9] Joppke, C. (2007). Beyond national models: Civic integration policies for immigrants in Western Europe. *West European Politics*, 30, 1–22.
- [10] Laouris, Y. (2012). The ABCs of the science of structured dialogic design. *International Journal of Applied Systematic Studies*, 4, 239–257.
- [11] Laouris, Y., & Christakis, A. N. (2007). Harnessing collective wisdom at a fraction of the time using structured dialogic design process in a virtual communication context. *International Journal of Applied Systemic Studies*, 1, 131–153.
- [12] Laouris, Y., & Michealides, M. (2017). Structured democratic dialogue: An application of a mathematical problem structuring method to facilitate reforms with local authorities in Cyprus. *European Journal of Operational Research*, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejor.2017.04.039>
- [13] Robinson, V. (1998). Defining and measuring successful refugee integration. *Proceedings of ECRE International Conference on Integration of Refugees in Europe*. November 1998. Antwerp, Brussels: European Council on Refugee and Exiles.
- [14] Roder, A., & Lubbers, M. (2015). Attitudes towards homosexuality amongst recent Polish migrants in Western Europe: Migrant selectivity and attitude change. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 41, 1858–1884. doi:10.1080/1369183X.2015.1023183
- [15] Rudiger, A., & Spencer, S. (2003). *Social integration of migrants and ethnic minorities: Policies to combat discrimination*. Brussels: The European Commission & The OECD.
- [16] Schreibman, V., & Christakis, A. N. (2007). New agora: New geometry of languaging and new technology of democracy: The structured design dialogue process. *International Journal of Applied Systemic Studies*, 1, 15–31.
- [17] Statistikcentralen. (2018a, October 01). Official statistics of Finland (OSF): Population structure. Annual Review 2017, Appendix figure 1. Swedish-speakers' and foreign-language speakers proportion of the population in 1900–2017. Helsinki, Finland.

[http://www.stat.fi/til/vaerak/2017/01/vaerak\\_2017\\_01\\_2018-10-01\\_kuv\\_001\\_en.html](http://www.stat.fi/til/vaerak/2017/01/vaerak_2017_01_2018-10-01_kuv_001_en.html)

- [18] Statistikcentralen. (2018b, March 06). Official statistics of Finland (OSF): Preliminary population statistics. December 2017, Appendix table 5. Preliminary data by region on immigrants and emigrants according to country of departure/destination 2017, quarters 1–4. Helsinki, Finland.  
[http://www.stat.fi/til/vamuu/2017/12/vamuu\\_2017\\_12\\_2018-03-06\\_tau\\_005\\_en.html](http://www.stat.fi/til/vamuu/2017/12/vamuu_2017_12_2018-03-06_tau_005_en.html)
- [19] Strang, A., & Ager, A. (2010). Refugee integration: Emerging trends and remaining agendas. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 23, 499–607.  
doi:10.1093/jrs/feq046
- [20] Whyte, W. H. (1952). Groupthink. *Fortune*, 45, 145–146.

## **Appendix I**

### **Clarification of Challenges which received at least one vote**

#### **Challenge #67: Not including Finns in the integration process (4 votes):**

When we have integration, we take the immigrants and they go to a room and talk about things that they need to know. Of course, this is necessary, but they [Finnish Government/officials] should include Finns also more openly and with much more in numbers of course; not only the ones who are interested, but also include everyday people [people from all levels]. Like just make them [Finns] see that they [immigrants] are ordinary people too and they want the same things as you [Finns] do like house, secure life, etc... and this is as simple as it is. There should be something more blending.

#### **Challenge #1: Clashing values (3 votes):**

Collectivism vs individualism: How people from different cultures value education and wellbeing differently, and you are coming into a culture that individualism is important, and your collectivist values are not taken into consideration as much for – kind of hierarchy of values – so it can be hard for your beliefs and practices.

#### **Challenge #2: Lack of education (3 votes):**

In Finland everything is based on the assumption that everybody receives the same level of education; grammar school, high school whatever comes after and then, if somebody comes between these or having something different, you don't get in the same educational years or you don't get the jobs that for example demand certain certificate which you don't have, if you come from a different country. For example, for a doctor coming from another country, it takes around five years to get a permit to work here. So Finnish education standards are built just for the Finnish people. As a foreigner, it is very hard to beat that, especially if you are already older and you

haven't gone to the basic education in Finland: How are you going to get your certificate?

**Challenge #22: Ignorance (3 votes):**

Finnish people see what they see in the news and a lot of them don't have media reading skills. So, when they read the negative things, they see as it is. They don't see the bigger picture: For example, they think that they should close the borders. They base their facts and their conclusions about these issues like black and white.

**Challenge #23: Negative attitudes (3 votes):**

We all have prejudices, but we don't know how negative attitudes we have affect our choices. These attitudes can be very rude. It is what you get from your family, especially from the area where you live. I live in here, Ostrobothnia, now and I lived in southern Ostrobothnia before. These regions have huge differences and it can even be bigger difference on the integration: How we perceive the people who are different than us, and how we treat them. When I consider negative attitudes, I mean being closed-minded. You stuck to that attitude, because you already decide that this is my attitude because of your values, identity or your religion which says it's wrong being gay or I love my country and I don't want anyone else to come here. It is very hard to change these values and attitudes, and it is a big barrier getting to know people.

**Challenge #28: How to accommodate for specific traditions/rituals (3 votes):**

Traditions like women genital mutilation, circumcision, arranged marriage, maybe instead of accommodating, it should be how to deal with it, because these are more negative things which don't have place in the Finnish society.

**Challenge #53: Immigrants are seen as economic drain in the society (3 votes):**

So many times, the negative aspects of the immigration or minority groups come up, when you have asylum seekers or refugees, and when you put them in the social programs, etc. There are also the positive aspects your society can gain probably, however, they [your society] don't take into consideration of the positive side of these groups since they are always seen as what it costs for the society.

**Challenge #54: Structural violence (3 vote):**

It's an indirect violence we see in the society from governmental part or more organizational part... When they [immigrants] apply for 50 jobs, they cannot get any. However, when the Finnish people apply for 50 jobs, at least they can get an interview for most of the places. This structural violence can be anywhere, it can be at the hospitals, in the court for example, you might be sentenced more, even though you did the same offences as the local person around you.

### **Challenge #60: Slow integration process (3 votes):**

We need both parties to work on integration. Finnish people are shy, and many are not that open-minded. It takes more time to know Finnish people and to become closer. We are not like: Let me take your hand and show you this and that..., it takes long time. At the same time, we have very high expectations from refugees and asylum seekers such as learning Finnish language and adopting to the Finnish culture. It can be very frustrating that how slowly you get into this country.

### **Challenge #4: A tight community (2 votes):**

We [Finns] don't get exposure from outside cultures or you [immigrants] don't get exposure of certain channels which obviously is bad, if you are trying to integrate. Of course, in that way, all kinds of different mindsets and traditions might stay in the community instead of getting exposure on. This also goes both ways. So you [immigrants] don't get any influences from others and we [Finns] don't accept also from others. As a community, nobody gets in.

### **Challenge #7: Assumptions of inferiority (2 votes):**

You are a foreigner which means that you are living on a minimum wage and you are not well educated, and you don't have a good economic situation and so on. Your culture is a lower culture; not as developed as the Finnish culture and your religion is lower, because you are not Lutheran and so on.

### **Challenge #24: Cultural differences (2 votes):**

How people come up with the package of cultural values and cultural norms that are acceptable while you are at your home culture, and when you come to the new culture, they are no longer valid. You are a kind of stranger. This might be very first barrier that you face; your cultural perspective towards ordinary or daily life are no longer valid or recognizable by the surroundings.

### **Challenge #39: Lack of connections in professional area (2 votes):**

If you want to find jobs, you need to have connections. But if you just came to the new country, it is difficult to get these connections and if you studied here, you met with just some teachers and students, so you don't have like your father's friends working somewhere and you just go and ask if you can work there.

### **Challenge #59: Bullying/ violence (2 vote):**

There is a bullying pretty much against all the minority groups, especially in schools and online. There is more hate speech against the minority groups such as sexual minorities, immigrants and others... I assume that there may be even more psychological violence toward these minority groups.

### **Challenge #61: Lack of local involvement (2 votes):**

I always face this problem, when I was working with minorities or cultural diversity. When you call it as a cultural diversity, the local community should also be included. When you make an event for kids for example, for migrant kids, why not involve Finnish kids too. So, they can have safe space for them to play together or to do some art work or to be involved. When you look at the Facebook events, you can find certain events for other cultures and some for Finnish society. So, they do not match together. Integration is a two-way path. The local community also should be involved. I cannot just come to your house and expect you to accept me. I should also introduce myself to you. I think, the local community should also have the opportunity to be introduced to these new cultures and at the same time be involved with them with the integration process.

### **Challenge #66: Lack of follow-up integration plans (2 votes):**

With the refugee crises, there has been integration programs and you are hearing about these programs in every corner. But as an example, there was a seminar about the regional integration in this region last year... you open up a program, you have the applications, you organize the seminars and close the doors. Then everything is forgotten. And again, couple of months ago, another group of people was doing the same thing from the scratch. Gathering these people and talking about the same things. So, the following up about what's happening is more constructive than just asking question about what integration is and how it works, etc... These things brought up so many times, but following up is more important at this stage.

### **Challenge #14: Fear of foreign culture (1 vote):**

Finnish people used to be in the same education environment. We didn't have any foreign people in here. For example, my grandmother hadn't seen any foreign people in her village all her life since she was living in the country side... This is just basic fear of not knowing other cultures. People fear it without knowing.

### **Challenge #20: Language barrier (1 vote):**

When you learn Swedish or Finnish, the people still judge you [due to] how well you speak the language... They [Finnish people] will look at you as a foreigner even you learn the language. More specifically, I studied psychology and involved with many people, even I learn the language, it is not enough actually working with the people here in Finland.

### **Challenge #33: Xenophobic behavior towards certain ethno-religious groups (1 vote):**

It happens quite often. When not only local people, but also in general public encounter with somebody else from certain ethnic group. They are even afraid of interacting with you... It would be impossible to integrate and learn about the local

culture when nobody talks to you or they ostracize you. You are not even able to enter to this classroom or working place. When you have lunch, you eat on your own. Even the shop keeper doesn't say hello to you, because you are just coming from a certain cultural background.

**Challenge #34: Lack of trust in foreigners (1 vote):**

When a foreigner applies for a job, even she/he has a good cv and speaks good English, still they [Finns] see her/him like they cannot trust her/him. When there is a Finnish person with the equal cv, they almost always choose the Finnish one.

**Challenge #41: Lack of help to integrate (1 vote):**

The integration in the society is a two-way street. The newcomer in the society puts work on learning language, culture and all that... no matter how much working on that, the majority group also can come half way and give you the chance to enter the society. Let's say, if I'm coming into the Finnish society as a foreigner and I do everything right, but people do not give me the chance to integrate to the society, it will be very hard for me to integrate. So, it has to go both ways.

**Challenge #45: Silent acceptance of racism (1 vote):**

It is like an everyday thing. For example, people know that there is racism, but still in a level they do it and they can do it unconsciously. They do something that they don't realize that it's actually racism.

**Challenge #50: Condemnation of other's beliefs or habits (1 vote):**

It goes into the different levels. The religious parts; for example, going to the swimming pool and getting un-dressed in the locker rooms, or having pork here [in Finland]. How do you put all these together? Your friends go out for a drink and you [as a Muslim person] are not allowed to drink and you are not allowed to dress certain way because your family has different rules than Finnish people. These kinds of cultural differences... Maybe, knowing the Finnish ways or Finnish people may know about your ways to do certain things. Some sort of co-existence there. I think, the problem is the fear of differences. The people act differently.

**Challenge #58: Inadequate communication about rights and responsibilities (1 vote):**

This is about the Finnish bureaucracy, for example, they [immigrants] have rights to get the money from the social services, but they [Finnish officials] don't inform them or educate them how to get the money, even the rights are there. People don't know about it. Since they don't know, they make some assumptions, and this makes it [what kind of rights immigrants have] more confusing. And as in Finnish way, we [Finns] expect the people find out about things themselves, we just don't talk about it. For example, my friend had a problem with her driving license. She could have just gone there before 2 years of living in Finland and said that she wanted to change it to the

Finnish driving license, and it would have been okay. But now, it is over two years, so she has to take the driving license test again. But there was no way to know it before, because if you don't think about changing your license at that point, you cannot know this.