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ReAct

Materials & Methods



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HAND BOOK REACT

Background

The idea of ReAct organically grew in July 2014 in Restad Gård, the biggest refugee camp in Sweden, which can hold up to 1 500 refugees. When the waiting time in refugee camps became very long (more than one year of waiting), there were no activities in the camp. There were very small efforts from local organisations in comparison to the refugee numbers arriving.

Refugees with crafts, talents, skills and high education sat in their rooms doing nothing for more than one year. They were just waiting for a decision in their migration cases - losing their educational skills and their identity, showing signs of depression, frustration and lost hope.

Adnan Abdul Ghani, a refugee from Syria arrived to Restad Gård in 2014. At Restad Gård, he met his former role model, a professor from the University of Damascus and other famous sportsmen from Syria. Adnan could see that they were chained by depression, frustrated and angry. Feeling isolated and lacking information, they were left believing that society did not need them and the reception structure for immigrants was made specifically to exclude them. He saw darkness in their eyes with no hope for the future. After only six months staying isolated in the camp, Adnan decided that he did not want to end up like that and had to do something about it.

He started asking people what they were good at and asked them to use their knowledge, education, skills and competence to help others in the camp to practice these competences and develop each others skills. The focus was to create some meaning in the long waiting time and to build something for the future. Soon a group of people who felt inspired by these ideas joined Adnan in this work. They called themselves the Support Group, and decided together that the Support Group should:

- Remind refugees that they are strong individuals, who survived wars and smugglers, death boats and death roads to arrive to Europe,
- Support them to not waste all that they already sacrificed and surrender to depression
- Support them to not give up or surrender to depression and all their sacrifices be in vain
- Start to do something about their own situation.
- Support refugees' ideas and initiatives
- Organize independent activities

As a next step, Support Group made contact with local organizations and volunteers. In these dialogues Support Group set some conditions: First, they stressed that organizations who want to cooperate cannot work from a top down charity approach, viewing refugees as victims and a liability. Instead they must treat them as equal, strong individuals, survivors with a lot of competence, potential and force. Second, instead of doing activities *for* refugees, they need to do activities *with* them, and let refugees create their own activities while supporting them with knowledge, information, tools and resources.

As Support Group started to connect their refugee initiatives to the local community, the organization and activities evolved very rapidly. In less than three months, Support Group had 13 sub divisions, which daily arranged several activities in Restad Gård connected to e.g. culture, education, health and sports. In addition, Support Group initiated and participated in local as well as national integration projects.

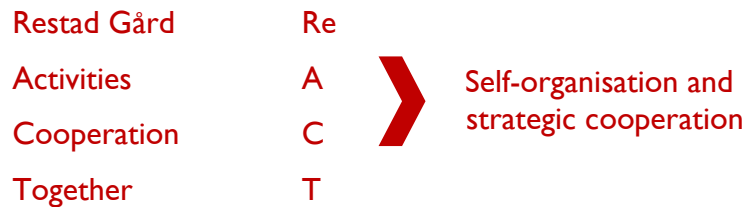


In 2015 the Support Group organised more than 901 activities in Restad Gård alone, with more than 16 385 direct support services “from refugee to refugee” with the support of the local network that they created around them. The local network supporting the Support Groups’ own activities were made of organisations, individual volunteers, churches, sport clubs, councils and companies.

In the beginning of 2016, Save the Children Sweden Region West hired Adnan to spread the self-organisation concept to other refugee camps and cities in Sweden, and to create the *The Restad Gård Model*.

Within a year, the model spread all around Sweden, and 16 Support Groups were created in 13 cities. When the model spread and developed not only in camps but to refugees in cities as well, the Restad Gård Model was no longer a relevant name – a new one was needed.

The new name should capture the assumption that support groups in all cities rested on: that refugees are capable and competent and that they should be the subject of their own matters. The name should also still be relevant as the model develops and is adopted in new settings. It was decided to call the model *ReAct*.



In the end of 2016 all the Support Groups in different cities and camps came together for a ReAct-conference in Gothenburg, Sweden and decided to form a formal NGO and called it the Support Group Network (SGN).

With the support of Save the Children Sweden, SGN is now continuing to spread the ReAct concept in Sweden as well as other countries, working to support the inclusion of refugees in hosting countries by creating need-based activities and projects, empowering refugees’ own initiatives, and to support them in all fields; social, cultural, educational, sports, health and psychological care.





For their work with refugees and society SGN received the Human Rights Award from Västra Götaland Region, and in Brussels SGN introduced ReAct to the European Integration Network (EIN); a committee of the European commission. SGN was selected one of the best ten inspiring initiatives in Europe. In addition, they received the Lifelong Learning Award (LLLAwards) in category of Best Practice.

ReAct and the Support Group concept spread not only in Sweden but also to other European countries. For instance, at the time we write this handbook, Support Groups are active in Stuttgart, Germany.



Why do we need ReAct?

Save the Children (SC) is a Child Rights Organisation and with the assistance from SC, the Support Group Network adopts a child's rights perspective in its work.

We believe that ReAct is directly connected to this perspective as children are in the heart of the ReAct concept.

By using the *Ecological Systems Theory*, we will demonstrate how the child's surroundings and social environment (family, neighborhood/community, and society) influence its development.

ReAct work with three circles surrounding the child; trying to reach social coherence and sustainability. Any disturbance or problems in any of the surrounding circles can have immense effects on the child's development and wellbeing.

This system can be applicable to any vulnerable group, but we will focus on situations of refugees:

- **The first circle**, surrounding the child is the importance of family. When parents and siblings are not feeling well, parents are depressed or incapable of taking control in their own life, it could have negative influence on the development of the child. We have seen this in camps and in cities where refugees get residence and live on their own.
- **The second circle** is the neighborhood and community surrounding the child, which in this case could be the refugee camp, or a city where the child lives. If the only thing a child can see when looking around is passiveness or frustration and only hear negative, dark views and bad experiences, it can put the child at risk, because child's rights are not priority in such situation.
- **The third circle** is the society, if the society is not diverse and not inclusive and see refugees (children, youth, adults) as victims and burdens and as costs for the society, it will influence all the previous circles, in particular the child.



By empowering parents to self-organise, we support them in taking back some control of their life. We do it by providing information, tools and resources to enable them use their competence or build new ones. Moreover, we do it to assure them that they are capable parents and important resources in society. Working like this brings some normality to the family structure and restores the child-parent relations. We have seen that this has a direct positive effect on the development of the child.



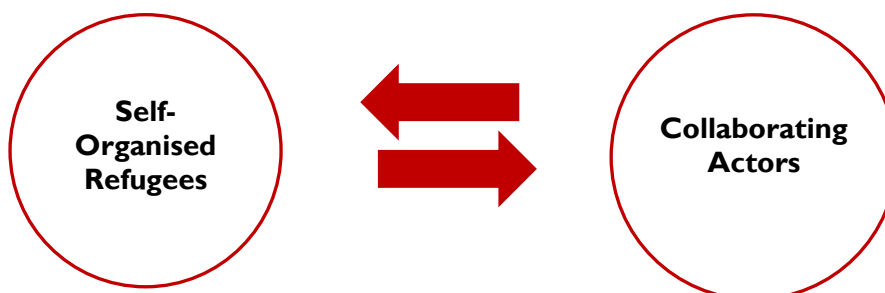
Again, empowering parents and other important adults to self-organise is crucial. Providing information, tools, resources and supporting refugees to have their own common voice, can directly reflect on the child's environment, development, and wellbeing. When the child can see empowered people acting for community matters and the surroundings allow adults to provide child protection tools and training it also bring a sense of safety. When we make more people wear child-safeguarding glasses, it will create a safer and more nurturing community for the children.

What is ReAct, actually?

ReAct mobilises and empowers refugees through self-organised groups, so called *Support Groups*. For the ReAct concept and the Support Groups to function well, it is crucial that networks surrounding and supporting the Support Group are created.

In ReAct we try to contribute to a social sustainable development where we change the society's view on refugees, and make refugees actors of their own matters. This is all to create a movement that challenges the general idea of **who should be a caregiver and who should be a caretaker**. We want to pave the way for refugees to become part of the local civil society and create platforms for cooperation between civil society and important municipal/public actors. We want to re-structure local patterns of working with integration in a way that is inclusive and where refugees are an active part of this action where we look at everyone in the society as a resource and potential for the sake of social sustainability.

How do you think the child in the center will develop in such society and environment?



Refugees get support to organise themselves and to identify the needs, competences and commitment. They learn about representativeness, democracy, gender equality, diversity and gain knowledge and tools to work with issues that are important to them.

They become their own actors.

The network supports self-organisation, thereby making need-based efforts.

The Strategic Cooperation Network has a common goal to support self-organised group initiatives, making it possible for refugees to raise their voice to a strategic level.

The work in ReAct is divided into an internal and an external part. The internal part is about motivating people who are in a “passive waiting”-phase to do something meaningful with their time. To help them to organise themselves in order to support each other with the needs and desires that exist in their situation.

The external part is about ensuring that the volunteers, associations and organisations who want to support refugees, do so based on the needs and wishes of the refugees. Problems arise when active people from local associations come up with ideas and activities that are based on the assumption of refugees’ needs without having the knowledge of what the prioritised need is right here right now.

This is sometimes one of the reasons why activities has no attendance from the refugee side, which can lead to disappointment for both sides. Some volunteers may feel that the refugees are neither ungrateful nor uninterested - when the true problem is absence of dialogue.



HOW IS REACT CARRIED INTO EFFECT?

Approach

ReAct is located within a complex domain. Solutions are situational. The relations between different actors who are affected by the political situation. Solutions must be developed systematically step by step towards long-term formulated goals with respect to human rights in their ethical and moral dimension, ReAct's approach is about the value of every person, regardless of ethnic or cultural background. The core is dignity and diversity.

ReAct is actually a way of working that challenges a tradition of a top-down perspective and social engineering, where care perspectives govern and the experts know best. With focus on the intercultural approach, ReAct can be described with the following figure:

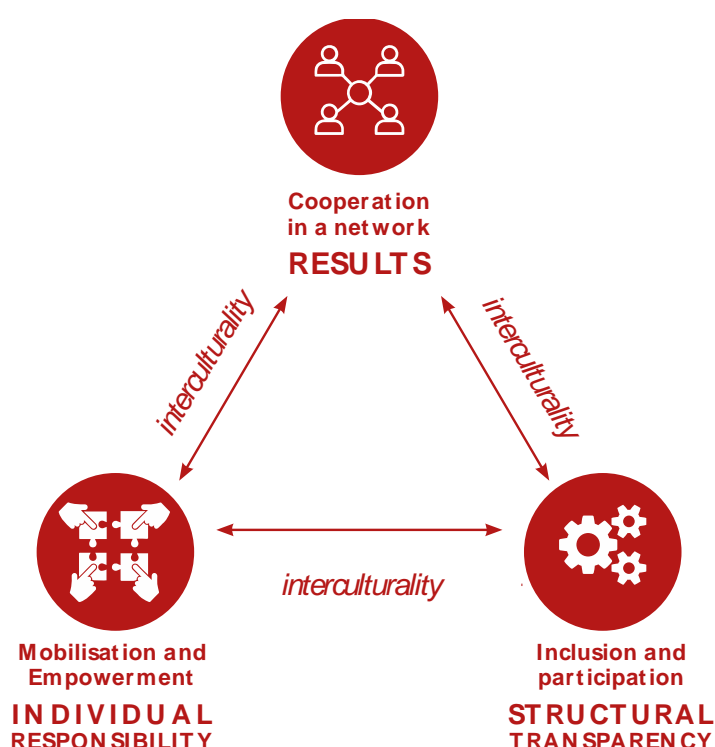
Interculturality

Interculture is a perspective where social mobility within and between different groups is sought. It is an approach, and an interaction process that assumes that people both influence and are affected by the places they live and stay at. The purpose of interculturalism is to create social change and reduce inequality in order to create social cohesion and inclusive communities. Interculture is characterised by three components; *approach, interaction and action.*

An Intercultural approach refers to how we relate to one another, an interaction process in which collaboration, meetings and communication take place between people with different starting points, positions and cultural backgrounds. The assumption in intercultural culture is the understanding that people's cultural identities change depending on the context and relationships within the environment they live in. The places where we live and function have significance for who we become.

Individuals and social institutions need to develop intercultural skills in order to relate consciously, reflectively and self-critically to their role, social position and inclination to judge others based on their own frame of reference. Intercultural competence leads us to integrate with a self-reflective awareness with the intention of not reproducing arbitrary social norms that attribute characteristics to individuals or groups of individuals. An Intercultural approach is based on human rights, which means that all people have the right to be and become who they want. They should be treated with respect and dignity.

In order to achieve the intercultural goals of social equality, strengthened democracy and reciprocity, a conscious intercultural action is needed. It requires redistribution of power and



making tools available that strengthen individuals' empowerment and opportunities for better living conditions and chances of life (Unesco pilot 2019, p. 6).



For the ReAct concept to work, the intercultural approach needs to be present at all times

Mobilisation and empowerment – individual responsibility

Mobilisation and empowerment is in this context to organize refugees in Support Groups and support them to become independent actors of their own matters. By creating Support Groups they can voice their experiences and needs collectively, and get the mandate to initiate and implement activities on their own terms.

The Support Group idea ensures that the activities are need-based and that the refugees themselves are the active actors in the creation of their own work. In addition, this requires that the individual knows and understands the societal context in which he/she will participate and act on their own terms regardless of cultural, religious and linguistic boundaries.

Inclusion and participation – Structural transparency

Inclusion is a leading idea when creating the **cooperation networks** on operative and strategic level, and the demands of all involved actors to reconsider the way they are working with the refugee's matters and integration.

The networks have to work beyond power hierarchies, prestige or their usual way of working. But instead to give priority to the joint task; in order to achieve the desired objectives, the networks have to include the Support Group as a partner in the identification and planning processes that occur.

The networks need to have a participatory perspective when forming and working in the networks. Therefore, joint actions need to be done in order to visualise norms and values among the different actors that are exclusive or preventing refugees from being a part of the solution regarding refugee's matters and integration.

By making Support Group a partner in the networks and adapting a participatory perspective, refugees can take on their role as valuable assets whose participation is essential in the the integration and inclusion work in the society. With Structural transparency, in the triangle figure, the arrows between the individual's responsibility and structural transparency go in both directions. The individual's responsibility must be welcomed by network creating space for participation and inclusion. Structural transparency and participation from all actors, on the other hand, increase the responsibility and strengthen empowerment.

Cooperation through networking – co-creation

Cooperation through networking is the policy making method on which the common platform for cooperation stands. The main idea with the platform is to identify key actors in the reception of

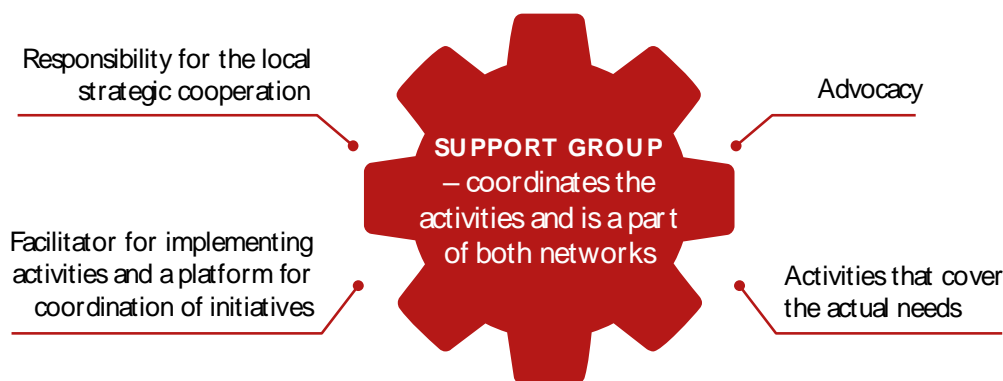
refugees, integration and inclusion efforts. These key actors (for example: The Migration Agency, property owners where refugees live, the municipality, civil society, volunteers and the target group represented in support group) are a part of a necessary partnership model with the purpose of formulating a common view of challenges that refugees usually face.

A functional platform for cooperation can develop and progress by:

- Changing the view on new arrivals in society and contributing to socially sustainable development (for example to create meaningful waiting time during the asylum seeking and further integration process).
- Formulating common objectives and including refugees when identifying challenges.
- Working together to create sustainable structures and solutions.

The creation of self-organised Support Groups and the coordination of local key actors in different networks with specific intent create the societal changing base that is needed in order to bring together local efforts and change policymaking structures [AGAI].

COOPERATION THROUGH NETWORKING



The networks and their intended function rest on a platform which is ruled by the idea of cross-sectoral cooperation, common objectives, inclusion, participation and partnership.




Structural change


Changes in local policymaking procedures


Democratic development


Social sustainability



ReAct Coordinator

To start working with the ReAct concept in a new location, we need a **local ReAct coordinator** who can create and have contacts and relations with the local actors. This person also needs to share the common values and characteristics such as:

- Having an open mind.
- Empathetic ability and a humility regarding previous experiences of others.
- Understanding of the intercultural approach.

Who can be a React coordinator is not defined by their formal position, but rather depends on the person's position, beliefs and resources in the local context.

The coordinator could be a professional who works with integration and inclusion in the Municipality, as well as a volunteer or professional from local NGO. It could also be any person with proper understanding of the situation and most importantly the connections to start such a work.

The coordinator's responsibility is to implement ReAct in a local context and to explore the local partnerships, actors, conditions and challenges.

The coordinator needs to assess the current situation and find strategies to initiate ReAct on operative and strategic levels parallel at the same time:

- Inspire refugees to self-organise and start support groups and gather actors to initiate operative network.
- Gather actors around the self-organised group to initiate strategic networking.



SUPPORT GROUPS AND THE OPERATIVE NETWORK

Support Groups in ReAct

In ReAct, self-organisation is about creating opportunities for the individuals to make their own situation better. Self-organisation can be accomplished with a small group of children, youth and adults or a larger group of people defining their own objectives and solutions in their own lives. The common ground for self-organisation is mobilisation, empowerment and co-creation.

When self-organised groups are initiated in ReAct, they are called Support Groups. The Support Group is the hub in the operative network and is created to identify the needs of refugees they are supporting. It is essential that the Support Group is the actor who defines and is a part of the implementation of the activities carried out with and for refugees. In this way, need-based activities from a refugee point of view are ensured.

By giving the lead to the members of the Support Group they become spokespersons for their own matters. This strengthens the willpower of the target group and creates meaningfulness for those who are engaged in the support group organizing the activities and being part of the implementation.

Operative network

The aim of the cooperation in the network on an operative level is to make sure that the needs are realized from the target group perspective, and to gather all actors who want and can contribute with their support. Support Group is the key actor who, on an operative level, coordinates initiatives and activities.

The cooperative network on an operative level becomes the platform that ensures need-based activities and is also a **facilitator** that make it possible for the Support group to implement their planned activities.

When the Support Group is active, it is important that the operative network allow the refugees themselves to take actions in matters that concern them.



For instance, an outside actor can mean well by giving refugee children gifts that nice people in community have gathered. To follow the intention with ReAct and the work with Support Group it is important that parents are seen as capable. One easy way to display that is to let the parents themselves give their own children these gifts. In that way the gift contributes to maintain or re-establish the parents position and authority in relation to the child.

3 quick Q&A's regarding self-organisation in ReAct:

WHY?

To create an empowerment process that provides the conditions for faster establishment, greater sense of coherence and greater inclusion.

WHAT?

A way to make the target group actors on issues that are important for themselves

HOW?

Give the target group inspiration and tools to organise and engage. Support self-organisation through collaborative networks of actors

STRATEGIC NETWORKS

The strategic network is created around the Support Group and works parallel with, and in interaction with operative network. In the strategic network functions and persons from society:

<p>WHY?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create Conditions to Work• Coordinated and Customised• More Cost Effective• Inclusive	<p>WHAT?</p> <p>Collaboration where everyone participates on equal terms, everyone works for jointly formulated goals and everyone's voice is heard.</p>	<p>HOW?</p> <p>Everyone is on equal terms in the information and decision-making processes.</p> <p>Create a joint view of challenges and address them with a cross- sectorial perspective. Solution must include the refugees' interest.</p>
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Representatives among the key actors form the strategic network which has the role of an **umbrella organisation** in the municipality. The main task of the umbrella organisation is to create a joint view of the local challenges that exist and address them with a cross- sectorial perspective. The proposals for solution must include the interest of the refugees and consider Support Group representatives as a partner when defining the local strategies for integration

Cooperation through networking on a strategic level is believed to lead to structural changes through the partnership idea defined by commonly set objectives and a cross- sectorial working method. This should affect the local policy making structures and lead to more inclusive and circular ways of thinking when making decisions.

- **WHERE DO WE COME FROM, AND WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?**
- **WHAT IS THE CHALLENGE IN RECEPTION AND INCLUSION?**

We will not try to answer the whole question as that would be an essay in itself. However, we want to describe some of the things we see and to suggest another way of working in reception and inclusion. To be able to start answering the questions above, we need to go all the way back in history to colonial times when the hierarchy of power was set.

Rasoul Nejadmehr describes in his paper “Intercultural dialogue as a tool for change” that through the ongoing refugee situation, the history of colonial times has thus gained new relevance. The majority of the migration and refugee flows originate from the former colonies and therefore the colonial past, when cultural and colonial hierarchies were taken for granted, becomes active. We need to pay attention to the fact that the colonial era's cultural hierarchies have not suddenly disappeared. In fact, they have "naturalised", become invisible and unspoken, and continue to influence us beyond our conscious self. In other words Rasoul Nejadmehr emphasises that we live in post-colonial time, where the same hierarchies are still active (Nejadmehr p. 4-7).

Adnan describes that in Support Groups they call it “the white man–syndrome” and can best be explained that it is internalised that white people know best. Often in the self-organised groups people who try to join and understand the work ask “where is your boss” – meaning a white person who is in charge.

So what approach is dominant in the Swedish reception of refugees?

Gabriella Olofsson is consultant and researcher who followed ReaAct work in 2016. She describes the approach on reception and refers to Norma Monatesino and Erica Righard, editors of the anthology “Social work and Migration”:

The view on refugees as socially handicapped has been developed since the 2nd World War. After the war new demands on an international structure and politics in reception of refugees arose. Many people without citizenships lived in camps all over Europe. Numerous countries around the world offered to receive refugees, however the selection was made in the refugees’ ability to work. Which led to that the first ones to be offered new citizenships were young healthy men. In the end of the 1940’s there were still over a 100,000 refugees in the camps in Europe that nobody wanted to receive. These individuals were sick people, children, people with disabilities, elderly, single mothers etc. I. e. groups of people that were considered totally uninteresting from a socio-economic perspective.

Receiving these groups was seen as social work because it involved people that were categorised as non-employable, but they still needed a sanctuary and a citizenship. The concept “socially handicapped” was created and had its big breakthrough in the early 1970’s and describes refugees as passive individuals. It is built on the perception that a refugee is a problem and that the task of the Social Services is to bring this group from “passive receptors” to “active participants” in the new society.

In the anthology, the author Ana Guilherme Fernandes presents a study of policy documents for Introduction Programs for newcomers in Sweden. It shows that the perception of the “passive receptor” is also connected to an economically dependent individual who has a weak relation to the job market. That way of describing the problem blames the individual and puts it on an individual level. In many of these policy documents, the main attention is put on the refugees’ “lack of competence”.

The respect of the Human Rights in its ethical and moral dimension is the *value* of every individual, disregarding ethnical or cultural belonging or nationality. Hans Ingvar Roth, professor in Human

Rights, describes the deprivation of core values such as freedom, self-esteem, security and a decent living conditions, as the same thing as being deprived of the ability or chance to lead a human dignified life. Human dignity is according to Roth the social idea that all individuals shall be equal to each other in the meaningful common activities and areas in society. Not being able to be an active subject in one's own matters and in everyday life is in fact to be deprived of one's human dignity.

The municipality needs to see the refugees as resources. But it is equally important that the individual is motivated and stubborn. Both perspectives are important and that's what ReAct tries to demonstrate (Olofsson 2017, p. 5-6).



However, we cannot assume that all individuals know their rights. Sometimes we need to make them aware of their rights and different possibilities. For example the first question that we always face when trying to empower a group to self-organise is:



Are we allowed to do that?

EFFECTS OF REACT

To help to measure the results of ReAct, we held a learning conference in 2016 about the effects of ReAct. This is the result of those lessons learned:

- Support Group contributes to a normalised, active everyday life and contacts with society
- Support Groups contribute to better relationships between different groups in the accommodation
- Through the cooperation with Support Group, associations and volunteers can help to meet the needs of refugees and contribute to changing attitudes in the local community
- The strategic network, where Support Group is included, means that players come together and become cautious of the expertise of refugees.
- Collaboration facilitates work on creating internships and jobs
- Collaboration reveals administrative obstacles to getting out to work as business, the municipality and authorities can change
- The municipality and companies see that if they invest in refugees, they gain responsible and competent local residents and employees. (Report Conference 12.12.2016)

In 2018, University West in Sweden and Västra Götaland Region Research council for Intercultural Dialogue conducted a research study.

The study showed that working with self-organisation made a difference for the situation of refugees in several ways:

- It created many activities in the asylum center, which reduced the risk of insomnia, passivation and mental illness
- It brought opportunities for preparing and qualifying for an improved inclusion process
- It found methods to quickly bring people into internship and work
- It strengthened people's control of the situation, solidarity and people's identities
- It partially changed the image of the refugees as passive victims and aid recipients
- Many constructive collaborations with other actors have been established
- Created a common voice for the group capable to claim their own needs and wishes.

(Herrman och Kullgren 2018, p. 2-3)

RESULT HARVEST

Workshop with Support Group Network, Trollhättan, March 2019

Self-organised groups

Success

- Changing the image of the refugees in the eyes of local community
- The right meaning for integration
- One way to come in to the Swedish society
- Mobilisation, active, self-awareness imp., social network, economic – social empowerment
- Give target group self confidence
- Creating need-based activities
- Convert the idea to reality
- Increase the visibility of refugees
- Identify the refugees needs in the new society
- Creating platforms to work with refugees

Challenges

- Cultural differences
- The lack of info and the details
- Resources
- Attracting people for self-organised groups
- Inclusion of people with different personalities and opinions
- Attracting all groups of people
- Empowerment of people (attract volunteers)
- Volunteers, identify needs, achieving personal empowerment
- Rumors about volunteer work
- Considering the human rights while treating the team/target group

Networks

Success

- Broadened network to serve more of the target group
- Sharing common goals
- Sharing resources as of cost efficiency and responsibilities
- Co-operation, contribution
- Most beneficial to the target group, not to working actors
- More and better activities/Impact i. e. more successful ideas by discussion and hearing different perspectives – effective impact
- saving time and efforts
- Less economic load on the country (donor)
- Get support from the right places by the help of networks

Challenges

- To target the right stakeholders in the network
- To keep every member's commitment
- Finding a real win-win relationship
- Different interests and agenda of the organisations
- Competition instead of cooperation
- The networks work in a very slow pace and it takes time for them to adapt to changes in the camps which needs fast adaptation.
- Compromises in cooperation when it comes to engagement of many organisations.
- Equal values and goals - finding common ground for cooperation (shortage of financial resources)

Interculturality

Common human needs across cultures

SUCCESS

- Compromises and contribution
- Acceptance
- Receptivity
- Being able to creating activities
- considering different cultures
- Understanding
- Adapt and adjust
- Diversities
- Wider vision through solving problems
- Enriching – see the person not symbols, colours or tradition

Critical dialogue in culture

CHALLENGE

- The root of attitude
- Explaining what intercultural means
- All cultures are equal and have to change
- Together
- Common language
- Tolerance to gain satisfaction
- Receptivity
- Convince the people to talk about cultural differences.
- Intercultural dialogue
Acceptance and understanding

For the future...

A new kind of refugee reception?

- from traditional to inter-cultural refugee reception

In the transition from traditional to intercultural reception, we need to examine the different administrations way of working with and for refugees and newcomers. We need to look at both individual level and structural/organizational level. If we focus too much on the individual level, we risk to lose the structural context and tools where we, through steering, are able to equalize social inequality and secure rights. Too much focus on the structural level will however risk to lock individuals in specific structural contexts, loose movement and individual empowerment – risking to consolidate the categorization and discrimination we want erase.

In intercultural refugee reception everyone who lives and resides in one place have rights and obligations whether they are registered in the municipality or not. The ones who are registered in the municipality has full access to all services, but the municipality also has an obligation to ensure dignified conditions for the ones who are not registered in that place.

An intercultural approach is fundamental to intercultural reception. Taking an intercultural approach is to be conscious, reflective and self-critical of their own role and social position. It requires the ability and willingness to see individuals' life situations, to understand the connections behind the social inequality that occurs, and to choose to act for equal opportunities of life and that individual rights are secured.

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