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# Empowerment in the Red Cross' Refugee Guide

A Qualitative Study of Empowerment in the Red Cross' Refugee Guide,  
Trondheim

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation is qualitative study that examines whether the Red Cross' Refugee Guide in Trondheim is empowering refugees with respect to 1) participation, 2) choices, 3) options and 4), power relations, and how the relationship between guide and refugee affect the Refugee Guide. The Refugee Guide's goal is to help newly settled refugees with residency permit to integrate into Norwegian society by pairing them up with a Norwegian resident. Through this, the refugee is supposed to learn about Norwegian social codes and society, as well as starting their own Norwegian network.

This dissertation uses a theoretical framework based on the four dimensions of empowerment - participation, options, choices and power relations - to analyse the empowering effect of the Refugee Guide. The data was collective through interviewing former and current guides and refugees by using semi-structured interviews.

This study found that the Refugee Guide is both disempowering and empowering the refugees; disempowering due to the power relations between guide and refugee, and empowering due to the language skills and knowledge they get about how to reach their ambitions in Norway.



## **Dedication**

This thesis would not have been possible without the guidance of my supervisor, Ragnhild Lund, and the cooperation with the Red Cross Trondheim, and their coordinator Sidsel Tømmerås.

I would also like to thank my mother, Mette Feie Haram, for her help and guidance.



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## **Abbreviations**

NGO Non-governmental organizations  
IGO International governmental  
organizations



# Introduction

Moving to a new country brings new challenges, among them learning a new language and getting to know people. People have different starting points and backgrounds that help them integrate into a new society, but some might need more help to do this than others, for example refugees whom have escaped from their home country often as a result of traumatic events. Integrating these people is considered as important throughout Europe, and thus Norway, due to several reasons, among them being that society should continue to function well, which is difficult if a portion of the inhabitants of a country is not included. Furthermore, refugees, due to their background, might not have finished their education and have other special needs, which needs to be addressed. The Red Cross is cooperating with Norwegian local authorities all over the country on an integration programme known as the Refugee Guide. The main objective of the Red Cross' Refugee Guide is to help the refugee develop a Norwegian network<sup>1</sup>.

In order to be integrated into a new country, one needs to participate with the rest of society, and to do this one needs to speak the language, know the social codes and know how to get where you want in life. In other words, you need to have an understanding of how the society works. Integration and empowerment is closely linked together. Empowerment is dependent on these factors, as it is centred on being and having choices and options, and participating in society and within the household. However, the Refugee Guide has several other functions as well, such as language learning and helping the settled refugees learn how the Norwegian system and society works, as well as social codes to get where they want to. Thus looking at this from a perspective of empowerment is useful, as it not only provides a discourse to help analysing the findings, it also provides insight and a new perspective on how the Refugee Guide operates and the effects of it.

Empowerment is not a term without controversy, and can be difficult to pin-down. Nevertheless, in this thesis it will be understood in lines of a person being able to participate

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<sup>1</sup> From the Red Cross Refugee Guide Handbook. Unpublished material.

in society as he or she wishes; to make valuable and desirable life choices, and having different options to choose from, as well as not being under the power of others<sup>2</sup>.

A good portion of the empowerment literature is focused on how to use empowerment correctly, and the pitfalls of not doing so, rather than why empowerment is important, and what it can really add to projects and programmes. Thus there is a small gap in the literature on why it is important. Of those studies that have sought to close this hole, have mostly been focused on different forms of empowerment, such as either economical empowerment or health empowerment. Moreover, empowerment has usually been focused on women.

This project, however, will be focused on empowerment in a different setting. It was inspired by the work I did as an intern for the Asian Institute of Technology last semester. Here I wrote a literature review on empowerment, and it is because of this that I realised that looking at the Refugee Guide through an empowerment lens makes sense.

Furthermore, according to the Refugee Guide coordinator at the Red Cross Trondheim, the goal of the Refugee Guide is empowerment. She defines empowerment as living an independent life, and knowing what you want in your life and how to do it<sup>3</sup>.

This research project plans to use the Refugee Guide by the Red Cross Norway in order to find out its empowering effect on settled refugees. The Refugee Guide is a programme by the Red Cross that is aimed at settled refugees and seeks to help them to integrate in Norway through connecting them with a Norwegian resident. This connection is supposed to work not just as a social connection to the Norwegian society, but also as someone they can ask questions to and learn about the Norwegian society works. Hence it seems to seek to enable the refugees to participate in Norwegian society after settlement, and therefore it seems to be empowering.

There have been several studies evaluating the effect of the Refugee Guide but none of them have focused on the empowerment aspect of it. As empowerment is a goal of the Refugee Guide, measuring whether the participant does experience a form of empowerment is important. Furthermore, determining whether there is no experience of empowerment is

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<sup>2</sup> In this sense it means having control over one's life and free from discrimination.

<sup>3</sup> Unpublished material. Field notes.

equally important, as it may be considered a weakness of the programme. Participation, choices, options and power relations are the dimensions of empowerment that will be used to analyse the Refugee Guide in regards to empowerment. These dimensions will be further analysed in the theory section.

## **Research Questions**

1. Is the Refugee Guide empowering refugees with respect to

- participation
- choices
- options, and
- power relations?

2. How does the relationship between guide and refugee have an affect on the Refugee Guide?



# Context

This chapter aims at giving background information about the Refugee Guide in Norway, by showing the methods and structure of the programme. First, however, a very short introduction to how refugees are treated in Norwegian society will be given, in order to give show the political and media climate about refugees. Next an overview of the Refugee Guide will be given, with some background information as well as the methods used and the structure. Then the goals of the Refugee Guide and its connection to empowerment will be presented, which is followed by a presentation of the relationship between guide and refugee.

## The Refugee Guide

The media picture regarding asylum seekers and refugees in Norway has been dominated by violence, accusations of abusing the Norwegian system and providing an overall negative picture of refugees. The general idea seems that a lot of those who get into the country are abusing the system and taking the place of those who are genuinely in need.

The Refugee Guide programme was started in 1997 at the initiative of Bærum Municipality, which sought to create a better integration aid programme for newly settled refugees<sup>4</sup>. Their main goals were to help them learn Norwegian, “*kvalifisering*”, qualification, and networking. The municipality planned to do the first two parts themselves, but wanted to engage an organization to help them with the networking. Red Cross came across as a natural alternative due to their previous engagement with refugees and Norwegians, and thus the cooperation was born. A similar programme in Stockholm, Sweden, which had begun in 1994, inspired the Refugee Guide. While some of the goals are different, they have the same core idea – connecting a settled refugee with a Norwegian resident<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Unpublished material from the Red Cross Refugee Guide Coordinator handbook

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

At the very top of the organisation, you find the General Secretary. By 2012, the Norwegian Red Cross had 283 employees (The Red Cross, 2012). The district offices, who are the ones who organise the Refugee Guide, are lead by the district manager. According to Paulsen *et al*, 45.5% of the district offices have one coordinator in charge of the Refugee Guide, 30.2% have 2-3 people in charge, while only 24.2% have 3 or more in charge (2012, p. 24). In the case of Trondheim, there is one and a half position in their integration and diversity section, of which one person is responsible for the Refugee Guide (Interview with S. Tømmerås, 09.05.2014). Hence in most cases, only 1-2 people are in charge of the entire Refugee Guide in a district; while most of the coordinators only have responsibility for one local Refugee Guide programme, between 10-23.3% is responsible for 2-3 Refugee Guide programmes (Paulsen *et al*, 2012, p.24). The Red Cross cooperate closely with the local authorities, especially in their social integration work (The Red Cross, 2012). This is also the case with the Refugee Guide, where 84.8% of the coordinators asked by Paulsen *et al* answered that the Refugee Guide was a part of the municipality introduction programme for Refugees (Paulsen, 2012, p. 92). The participants I interviewed told me that the refugees could chose between different activities, and that the Refugee Guide was one of them. Moreover, 75% of the coordinators asked by Paulsen et al said that the municipality that they cooperated with was funding the programme, while only 31.3% and 34.4% said that the Red Cross centrally and local, respectively, funded their programme (*loc.cit*). In other words, the local authorities and the Red Cross cooperate closely in the work of integrating refugees.

### **Method of the Refugee Guide - 'Interaction is integration'**

The volunteer nature of the programme is not just a part of the structure, but an important part of the method of the Refugee Guide. This is because it is believed that it is easier for the Refugee to be paired up with a guide knowing that the guide wants to be paired up with them, and is not doing this as paid work. This is supposed to make the relations smoother and more natural between guide and refugee. Before becoming a guide, a person needs to go through 12 hours of training, of which the standard Red Cross Volunteer training such as first aid is included. The 12 hours are divided into four three hours courses. One of these courses are



focused more specifically on the Refugee Guide. It was this course I sat in on while they revisited the course material. Thus the core of the Red Cross method is to pair up a Norwegian resident with a settled refugee (settled means been given residency). As the Red Cross say on their webpage, ‘Interaction is integration’ (*Samvær er interegering*), which sums up their method; through interaction, the refugee is supposed to get to know Norwegian society, culture and norms (The Red Cross, 2014). An example that is given of this interaction can be watching a football game together, or explaining to the Refugee things like what the children need before starting school, where to find the tax office, and so on (*ibid*). While the information given on the webpage is quite straightforward on what the guide is supposed to do, the role of the guide is described in detail in the coordinator Refugee Guide handbook<sup>6</sup>.

The overarching goal of the Refugee Guide is to strengthen newly settled refugees and their families’ opportunities to participate in working life and Norwegian society, as well as being financially independent. More precisely, its goals are to let the refugees exercise their Norwegian language skills within both the public and private domain; learn how to build networks in Norway and get their own circle of acquaintances. Additionally, to learn about the local life and through this understand Norwegian culture, as well as informal and formal codes, and participate in activities that promotes both a sense of security and independence. As Tømmerås (2014) said, the overarching goal of the Red Cross is empowerment, which their goals described above shows. Furthermore, they are very similar to several authors’ definitions of empowerment; the emphasis on independence, participation and choice has distinct resonations in Cornwall (2005, 2007a, 2007b; 2005; 2008) and Rowlands’(1997) work on empowerment.

## **The Role of Guide and Relationship Between Guide and Refugee**

The role of the guide is carefully described in the Red Cross handbook. It explains that the guide should not be a “consultant” and not a friend, nor a “helper”. Instead, the guide is

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<sup>6</sup> Unpublished material – Red Cross Handbook for coordinators.

supposed to be somewhere in the middle of these, trying to balance out the three different points<sup>7</sup>. Hence the role of the guide is not to be an expert and explain everything or give the answers to the refugee, but rather *guide* them to find out how to solve issues. The guide should ask questions and let the participant reflect and reach their own conclusion. Moreover, should the guide have a background that would make them an expert in a field in the eyes of society, the guide and participant should talk about this to ensure that it does not affect their relationship. Thus, the guide should not be helper that takes over the issues of the participant and tries to solve them, but rather support the participant's choice and give information so that the person can make their own choice. Furthermore, the guide should not do things for the participant that the participants can do themselves. This is particularly important where money is concerned; the guide should not give money as a loan to the participant, but rather help them to make a budget. As the Red Cross is neutral, the guide should not take party. Thus when discussing sensitive things like religion, one should look at different perspectives and not take sides. Lastly, the guide should not function as a psychologist to the participant.

Hence a guide should not be an expert, friend or helper. The Red Cross recommends that the guide lies closer to the role of a supervisor. In the act of supervision, one assumes that the one supervised knows the best what road to take. Thus supervision is a process of exploration and development.<sup>8</sup> In other words, the Red Cross has seemingly a strict framework for how the guides should understand their role. Moreover, a vital part of the relationship between guide and participant is that it is based on volunteer work. It is important to the Red Cross that it is the case, so that the participants knows that the guides wants to be there, and that they are not forced to do it.<sup>9</sup> However, the way the Red Cross have explained the role of the guide seems very theoretical, and not based on the experiences of guides and participants. Since the handbook was published in 2004 this is unsurprising, as the programme had only run for a few years. In short, the Refugee guide happens in the space between guide and refugee.

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<sup>7</sup> Unpublished material. Refugee Guide handbook for coordinators. p. 29

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 30.

<sup>9</sup> Field notes, unpublished material.

## Summary of Chapter

This chapter provides a small overview of how the media presents refugees in Norway; as a group of people who abuse the system in order to force their way into the country on dishonest grounds. The Red Cross was given an implementation role of this work when because Bærum municipality wanted a partnership to help with the networking part of integrating refugees into the Norwegian system. The Refugee Guide programme is widely organized today in several municipalities. Moreover, the Refugee Guide is collaboration between the Red Cross and Norwegian local authorities, as a part of municipalities introduction programme to settled refugees. The key goals of the Refugee Guide are thus to help the refugee start their own Norwegian network by being paired with a volunteer guide. This is also supposed to teach them the social codes of the Norwegian society. Moreover, the guide should not act like an expert or supervisor, but rather as a helper. However, the guide should not do things for the refugee, but rather aid them to make their own choices. Hence the Red Cross have detailed framework on how the relationship between guide and refugee should be.



# Theoretical Framework

The objective of this chapter is to provide an overview of the theoretical framework that is used in this thesis to analyse the data, and thus provide a theoretical overview of empowerment, how it is understood in this study and other. The overview is based on a previous literature review on empowerment, which I wrote as an intern during the previous semester at the Gender and Development department at the Asian Institute of Technology. The relevant key findings of this review are included here, and the bibliography is found in Appendix I. First the term empowerment is discussed, followed by a theoretical discussion of whether one can enable or empower another person. Then the nature of empowerment through how it works is discussed along with disempowered. Lastly, an overview and discussion of the four dimensions of empowerment is presented.

## Empowerment

This thesis will use empowerment literature as basis for the theoretical framework to understand and analyse the findings. This section will thus include an overview of some of the most important empowerment literature, and presents the different dimensions of empowerment, which will be used as the main analytical framework. The study will not use a single definition of empowerment summed up in one sentence, due to the complexity of the theoretical framework it would be reductionalist to do so. Rather, the term will be operationalized here, and thus give an overview of what empowerment is understood as. This opens up for a wider understanding of the term, while at the same time presenting main understanding of empowerment of the thesis.

A majority of the literature on empowerment that this thesis is based on is focused on women's empowerment rather than empowerment for both men and women; A. Cornwall (2005, 2007a, 2007b), Rowlands (1997) and Mayoux (1999) are all focusing on women's empowerment, yet they are included despite the Red Cross Refugee Guide not being solely focused on women. The Red Cross Trondheim, through their Refugee Guide coordinator,

understand empowerment being able to live an independent life, while being able to reach ones goals and ambitions (Tømmerås, 2014).

*Empowerment* is understood here as being able as an individual to participate in different levels of society, enabling him or her to make choices about their own future that leads to a desired outcome, in other words, the four dimensions; participation, choices, options and power relations.

Kabeer defines empowerment as “expansions in people’s ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them” (Kabeer, 2002 cited in Attanapola, 2014, p. 138). The World Bank operates with a similar definition, ‘Empowerment is the process of increasing the assets and capabilities of individuals or groups to make purposive choices and to transform those choices in the desired actions and outcomes’ (The World Bank, 2012). In the case of the World Bank then, it is focused on poverty reduction among the poor, rather than women’s empowerment which have been the more traditional, and still is, use of empowerment. That being said, women make out most of the poor people today, thus poverty, and thus empowerment, have a gendered component (Lund, 1993). This dimension is not explored in this thesis, however, most of the participants in the Refugee Guide are women – there is in fact a shortage of male guides, which makes it more difficult for refugee men to participate, as you are paired with someone of the same gender<sup>10</sup>.

Carr (2003) argues that empowerment is not a linear process, but that empowerment consists of mutually reinforcing and interconnecting sub processes through the different stages of empowerment. Thus according to Carr, empowerment has different reinforcing stages. This works well with the Red Cross approach to the Refugee Guide, as its methods are not linear, but rather a continuous partnership over a year. Thus Carr’s base idea is useful to this project, even though the approach to empowerment is different, as it is not this thesis’ objective to develop a programme that empowers others, but rather to see if the participants of the Refugee Guide have experienced some kind of empowerment through participating.

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<sup>10</sup> From unpublished material (field notes).

## The Process of Empowerment: Enabling or Empowering?

As mentioned earlier, empowerment, like many other terms within social science, is a widely disputed term. In the case of empowerment it is not just the meaning of the term itself, but also how and in what way empowerment happens. Thus empowerment can be experienced as diffuse and difficult to pin down. Moreover, there is a continuing debate within the empowerment literature whether a definition itself is indeed desirable – is it counter-intuitive to have a definition of empowerment as it can be experienced as limiting to those the term is used for? In other words, does a pin-down definition of empowerment limit people from becoming empowered, as it does not allow them finding their own way to become empowered? I would say that this depends on how you treat the definition of empowerment, and what the definition is. If you force people to use your language of empowerment to describe their own experiences, then that is disempowering. However, having a pin-down definition of empowerment does not mean that you force others to use your discourse, but rather that it clears up what you consider empowerment to be. Having a definition of empowerment is important when trying to figure out whether someone can be considered to be empowered, as the term becomes meaningless if everyone makes up their own definition of it. Meaningless in the sense that it is completely up to each and every person to decide what empowerment means – if everyone can make up their own meaning, one might as well make up a new term to make it more concise. This does not mean that consciousness-raising and creating one's own discourse about one's own situation is meaningless – it is certainly not, and can be very empowering. It simply means that in order to not confuse, one needs to have a definition of empowerment. What this definition of empowerment should be, however, is a discussion of its own that has been on going since the early 1990s. On top of that, it is important to understand that this is different than from asking women and men *what* would make them empowered, as in, which measures are needed in order for she or him to become more empowered, rather than making she or he follow a development project aimed at empowerment which does not include the measures that they say are needed.

The term empowerment has been criticized as being a buzzword that development agencies have used in order to get more funding, and changing the meaning of the word to suit their purposes (Cornwall, 2007a). Additionally, there are different types of empowerment, and

several fields write on empowerment, further defusing the meaning of the term. As a result there is a wide variety of texts on what it is, and thus the nature of empowerment is disputed. One of the core disagreements on empowerment is whether someone can empower someone else, or whether empowerment has to come from within, and further, how this process takes place. There are two major ways of looking at empowerment, and the first is to see it as something practical and hands-on that has an end goal – meaning that someone can be *empowered*. The second way is to see empowerment as a continuous process that can both go back and forth, and is not linear. It can even be dialectical where someone is simultaneously disempowered and empowered. There is a logical explanation to this split. Non-Governmental organizations (NGO) and International Governmental Organizations (IGO) such as the World Bank have to be able to show results of what they are doing are working, if empowerment is one of the end-goals. Thus while the NGOs might understand empowerment as a life-long process, they still have to be able to show clear results of empowerment. This then affects how they design their programmes, as they have to treat empowerment as a stage that one can reach; in other words, empowerment is treated like an end product. It can therefore seem contradictory to try to analyse the former refugees' experiences with the Refugee Guide to see whether the programme can be considered to offer an empowering experience. However, the four dimensions of participation, choices, options and power relations were continuously mentioned through the reviewed literature as something they all, to a certain degree, could agree on.

One of the most ferociously discussed elements of empowerment is whether it is possible or not to empower other people, or whether empowerment has to happen from within. Rowlands (1997), for example, mention the power from within, while Friedman (Lund, 1993), Lund (1993), Carr (2003) and Freire(2000) talks about conscious-raising, which is an important part of empowering oneself. At the first glance, the Red Cross Refugee Guide seems to aim to change people, and to empower them. What is very important to understand and remember with their work is the importance of volunteer participation. Hence those who participate in Refugee Guide are doing this completely voluntarily, both guide and refugee. Additionally, it is not the Red Cross itself who is empowering the former refugee, but rather helping the Refugee to participate and get to know Norwegian residents by giving them a contact. The contact is not supposed to be a helper or a consultant, but a guide to the settled refugees in



order to make their integration easier. The Red Cross does not want the guide to help the refugees in the sense of being an expert, which is why they use the word guide.

## **Disempowerment and Levels of Empowerment**

When discussing empowerment, one often discusses women or other people who are considered to be disempowered in some way or another. This in itself can cause a conflict, as it considers certain people in some positions to be disempowered, without themselves necessarily believing this is so. This is in particular important when analysing if the Refugee Guide has an empowering effect on its participants, as it may seemingly mean that those who participate are indeed disempowered. However, the starting point with deciding whether people are disempowered or not, is in itself disempowering, as it takes away some of their agency. Hence saying that in order to become empowered, a person must first be disempowered which seems ludicrous or at the very least over-simplified. There are, nonetheless, many, in both academia and in the NGO sector, who believe that empowerment is neither either/or – in fact, a common argument is that the empowerment process is not a linear process, but a complicated one which has several layers, levels and dimensions (Carr, 2003). Thus a person can be simultaneously empowered and disempowered at the same time – economically empowered, but disempowered socially in the sense that they do not control their social life, or disempowered in the sense that they are not free to do as they choose.

There is a widespread assumption in the empowerment literature that a person has to be disempowered in order to become empowered. Disempowerment is a state of being that individuals must free him or herself of by empowering themselves. Thus empowerment exists as the opposite stage to disempowerment. However, as Cornwall argues, empowerment does not have to be either or; it can exist at different levels and stages, and one can be simultaneously disempowered and empowered in these different levels and stages. This does not necessarily contradict the statement that one have to be disempowered, as empowerment can still be understood to function in this way even with different levels and stages.

The question is then, does empowerment exist on a scale between disempowerment and ‘complete’ empowerment, and thus makes it possible that someone is slightly disempowered yet somewhat empowered – or does the existence of this slight disempowerment make the

individual disempowered at this stage? While this might seem like obvious and useless intellectual discussions, these questions and assumptions do have practical implications as they affect empowerment projects.

Another question that should be raised is whether making a project based on the idea of someone being disempowered is arguably disempowering in itself. This is especially important in this case, where one seeks to uncover the empowering effects the Refugee Guide may or may not have, because otherwise this project would have the underlying assumption that those refugees that participate are not empowered. This assumption in itself is somewhat disempowering as it takes away some of their agency by putting them in the category of disempowered without asking them whether they do feel disempowered. It is therefore important to state that this project bases its understanding of empowerment and disempowerment not as an either/or dichotomy, where one puts the refugees as disempowered and guides as empowered, but as a scale where most people, both refugees and guides, can be said to be both disempowered and empowered at the same time. Thus it is not in this project's intentions to treat all participant refugees as disempowered individuals, but rather to see if the Refugee Guide can be considered empowering through its activities and structure of pairing a guide and refugee together.

## **The Dimensions of Empowerment**

### **Participation**

The four dimensions of empowerment that has been identified in this thesis are based on a literature review on several academic sources on empowerment, stemming from different forms of empowerment such as economic empowerment to health empowerment<sup>11</sup>.

Participation is repeatedly mentioned to be a vital part of empowerment – from the World Bank and UNDP to Mayoux. There are two major ways that participation is considered to be important to empowerment. The first one is where a person gains rights, and changes the

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<sup>11</sup> The bibliography of this literature review is found in Appendix 1

course of their lives as desired. The second one includes the first definition, as well as changing the society at a larger scale. However, this is not the only way that participation is considered to be important in empowerment; several studies show the importance of including people, often women, in work, decision-making and thus within society. Hence participation is understood here as more than just gaining rights, it is participating as an individual person in society and being able to do so as one wants to. Participating in society is for example being able to vote in elections, being able to engage in politics as politicians. Participation and empowerment, however, can happen at a much more personal level than participation like this – in this study the dimension of participation is understood in the lines learning the language, social codes and knowing how to get where you want to. It is between the guide and the refugee, and it aims to have an impact on the everyday life of both the refugee and the guide. It means being able to navigate through the educational system, being able to apply for a job and similar acts.

## **Options and Choices**

Besides participation, having effective choices to get a desired outcome is a vital component to empowerment (Aslop & Heinsohn, 2005). Put differently, that an individual has genuine options, and not just having to choose the lesser evil – but being able to choose to follow a direction in life that you desire. Closely linked to this is skill-building, which is important in order to get where you need to be in order to get this effective choice. Lastly, the possibility to choose what you want without being held back from societal norms and traditions is considered to be a part of empowerment. An example of this would be to pick the kind of work you want without regards to gender or social class. Options and choices are thus closely linked to being emancipated and having equal rights within a society. However, this part can be difficult to realise as one does not always realise that one is held back from society. Participation, choices and options are therefore closely linked to the notion of power and independence, except that they also includes not just being able to decide what you want to do on your own, but also being able to do what you want.

## Power relations

The root of the word empowerment is power (Rowlands, 1997). Empowerment is thus concerned about how power functions in people's everyday life. Thus in order to gain a better understanding of what empowerment is, one needs to analyse how power is distributed within society and between people. According to Bjørge (2009, cited in Vågenes, 2014) power can be understood in its most conventional form as someone making another person doing something that they would otherwise not do (Vågenes, 2014). This understanding of power is similar to the traditional zero-sum balance, where power means that person A has more power than person B, and that if person B gains more power, its consequence is that person A gets less. In terms of empowerment, it means that by someone becoming empowered, someone else loses power. This understanding of power has been criticised and challenged, not just on how it understands it, but also on how it presents it; Rowland's argues that someone losing power when empowerment is entailed is not necessarily something negative, and in fact should be applauded (Rowlands, 1997).

Foucault challenges the conventional understanding of power, and argues that power is found in relations, and only exists when it is exercised (Rowlands, 1997). In other words, power exist in the power between people, and only so when the people use their power. However, his take on power is criticised by Rowlands, who says that it is inappropriate when it comes to empowerment, as it prevents us from "Seeing or conceptualising relationships in which the object is neither to act upon another in a power relation or to resist the attempts of governing conduct or in a local manifestation of power" (Rowlands, 1997, p. 12). Nevertheless, while she does argue that power is between people she argues that knowledge is a vital and critical part of power (Vågenes, 2014). Indeed, knowledge is an important part of empowerment in the sense that in order to get access to one's choices and options – without knowing which possibilities or how to orientate within the society, it is difficult to become empowered.

The understanding of power as a zero-sum game is referred to in the empowerment literature as *power over*. However, there are other forms of power balances between people – it does not have to be a zero-sum game, as Rowlands (1997) argues. Besides power over, Rowlands outline three additional categories that power is separated into; power to, 'the capacity to act', power within, which is when an individual becomes more confident, as well as a rising sense

of self-identity and awareness about their situation, which is a ‘precondition for action’, and lastly, power with, power with collaboration with others and through partnerships (Attanapola, 2014, pp. 138-139; Rowlands, 1997).

## **Summary of Chapter**

Empowerment is not understood as a linear process, but as a process that can be dialectical and happening at several levels, and in different spheres of life. The different types of being in power is identified as being important as to understand the nature of empowerment, as having power over oneself is the core of empowerment. Power can thus be in the form of power over, where one excludes power over a different individual and group in order to make them do something they would otherwise not do, and, power with, in which individuals share power and recognize that they do not need power over another person in order to be in power over themselves. Furthermore, there are four major dimensions of empowerment which have been identified and will be used in analysing the Red Cross Refugee Guide; participation, choices options, and power relations. These four dimensions, although similar, are continuously mentioned throughout the literature. Participation revolves around an individual’s capacity and possibilities to engage and participate in social life in the way they want; this includes education, hobbies, jobs, being a part of the decision within the home and in the society. Options and choices are fairly similar, and the core idea is that an individual has a choice in how to steer his or her life, that knows how to get where he or she wants to, and that he or she have genuine choices and options, and not just choosing between lesser evils. Power relations refer to the relations between people, both in close relationships, household, as well as the individual and the rest of the society. In the case of the refugee guide it is centred around the relationship between guide and refugee.



# Methodology

The objective of this chapter is to give an overview of the methodology. First a rationale over the choice of methods will be given, then an overview of how I did and why chose qualitative interviews is presented. Followed this, a presentation of how I designed the interview guide, as well as how I contacted the interviewees is given, followed by language and ethical concerns. After this, there is a section on participant observation, and what form of and how I did the participant observation. Then document analysis is presented, including which documents I analysed. Lastly, writing, processing and analysis of data is presented.

## Choice of Methods

Qualitative and quantitative research methods have both their strengths and weaknesses, and the choice of research method is dependent on the aims and nature of the study. Since this research objective is to see if the Refugee Guide has an empowering effect on the participants, a qualitative study is more suitable because of the nature of the topic and the literature that this study is based on. The main data collection method was qualitative interviewing, supported by participant observation and document analysis. Empowerment is a concept that is very disputed and difficult to define. It is personal, and people may experience it differently, and generalising it is therefore difficult. Furthermore, a lot of the literature on empowerment criticises a top-down approach to empowerment where one has a clearly defined understanding of empowerment, without allowing those whom the research is focused on to explain their own experiences. Hence in order to be in line with the literature that is the basis on how this study uses the definition of empowerment, the study needs to be qualitative. However, in order to be able to use empowerment as a form of analysis, one needs to have an operationalization of the term, which in this case is what empowerment have been defined and understood as in the theory chapter. Moreover, in order to find out whether people have had an empowering experience, one needs to know and decide which part of peoples lives to look at. In this study it focuses on what refugees and guides did together, whether they talked

about future ambitions, practiced Norwegian, how they experienced their relationship and so on.

## **Qualitative Interview**

The qualitative interview is different from quantitative interview as it allows, and even encourages, the informant to go off tangent and speak about their own experiences (Bryman, 2012). The qualitative interview is the favoured tool for collection of data in this study, as getting to know what the participant thought and believed about the Refugee Guide and the process of participating in it was needed. A lot of the literature on empowerment states that letting the participants use their own language as important; DeLauretis argues that this allows women (and others) to realise the political dimension of their own oppression<sup>12</sup> (Carr, 2003). This is an important part of conscientiation, or conscious-raising as it is also known as. Several articles underline the dangers of using a pre-defined definition of empowerment (ibid). This is why the interviews conducted for this project have been qualitative, as it allows them to use their own discourse. The particular type chosen was semi-structured interviews. This form of interviewing allows the interviewer to ensure that the interview contains certain elements, yet opens up for changing or adding questions throughout the interview. This is particularly important in this case, as the interviewee might say or highlight elements and parts of the Refugee Guide that I had not thought about before, and hence adding another dimension to the data. Additionally, it allows the interviewee to have some control over the interview as well, even though the majority of the power lies with the interviewer.

The interviews had to be of either a semi-structured or unstructured fashion in order for the data to not become corrupt, as the people interviewed have different levels of Norwegian and English. I experienced that I had to rephrase myself during the interview, and in some cases they misunderstood what I said and replied with something that was not completely relevant to the question in mind. This is not a weakness, but rather a strength, as it lets the informant come with information I had not thought about earlier. Moreover, by using a qualitative semi-structured form of interviewing, I could still use the data received when they answer a

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<sup>12</sup> Most of the empowerment literature focuses on women's empowerment



different question than the one I asked. For example, when asking one of the refugees about what he expected from the refugee guide, I was given a lot of information of what he had disliked about the process of getting a refugee guide, as well as given information about some of his friends' less fortunate experiences with the Refugee Guide. On top of that, using semi-structured interviews allowed me to steer the informant back on to topic they digressed, whilst letting them talk about what they want to talk about, without letting it dominate the entire interview.

I conducted two forms of interviews face-to-face interviews and telephone interviews.

In one of the cases the interviewee did not feel at all comfortable with the recording of the telephone interview, and therefore I had to take notes. Thankfully, I am good at note taking and therefore it was transcribed rather accurately to a standard I am happy with.

Besides these interviews, I had informal talks with the Red Cross Refugee Guide coordinator Sidsel Tømmerås at several occasions, face to face and once over the phone, regarding the nature of the Refugee Guide.

## **Selection of Informants**

The amount of people that was interviewed is based on how many were willing to be interviewed, as well as data saturation. There are two groups that were interviewed, guides in the Refugee Guide, and settled refugees. The two groups will consist of both former and current guides and refugees. This is because both former and current groups have valuable information to come with the current one because it is in the situation now, and the former one as it has already gone through the Refugee Guide and can thus look at it from a distance.

I interviewed 8 refugee guides, four men and four women. Of the men, one had finished his period as a guide, while the other three are current guides. Of the women, two of them had completed the programme, while two were current ones. However, one of the two current participants had previously been a refugee guide in a different city.

## Contacting the Interviewees

In order to get in touch with former and current participants, I contacted the Red Cross and find contact information from their records of potentially willing interview volunteers. It is worth noting that the Interviewees were not offered any financial or material compensation for their time. There were some difficulties of getting a hold of the participants due to out-dated contact information. The majority of the contact information I received from the Red Cross was out-dated, and I received several error messages when using the email addresses, and very few answers when using the telephone numbers. A total number of eleven error messages were received. It proved much more effective to snowball in order to get connected to guides than going through emails, as I could name-drop the guide I had received the contact details from. This was far from as effective with refugees, as very few answered.

In one case, the person I wanted to interview was currently working abroad, however, he tipped me about other people I should consider contacting. Getting connected with female participants proved to be more difficult than with male participants. At one point I asked my contact with the Red Cross to send out an email to all of the participants in order to get connected with them, unfortunately this did not bare much fruit, as no one answered.

One of the informants I got connected with was through a friend and classmate, whom had a friend who had participated in the programme before. Through him again I got connected with several other guides. Contacting the female former refugees myself did not work well, thus I asked two of the female guides I was interviewing whether they could get me connected with the women they had or was a guide for. I hoped would make it less intimidating to be contacted by me, if they someone they trusted had been interviewed by me. Thus they sent a text to their refugee, and I texted them later. In one of the cases where I got the contact details from one of the guides, I managed to get connected with one of the refugees, but as she could not participate herself due to time constraints, she connected me with her sister, who had also participated in the Refugee Guide as a refugee.

It was much easier to get connected with guides than refugees. This can be due to language issues, out-dated contact information, and because they might have found it intimidating to participate as an informant.

## Interview Guide

The interview guide was more or less the same for both groups, as I wanted to know what they both have to say about the same things<sup>13</sup>. However, some of the questions were only suitable for the participants and vice versa. As a result, the interview guide contains questions meant solely for the participant, and solely for the guide, and yet followed the same route for both. The interview questions were centred on the guide and refugee's activities, their relationship, as well as what they felt could be better with the Refugee Guide and how they heard about it.<sup>14</sup> The questions are in some cases fully formulated, and in other cases only keywords. The interview guide does not actually use the word empowerment due to the disputed nature of the term, and because not everyone knows what empowerment is. Furthermore, since there is no common definition of it, and because there is no good Norwegian word for empowerment, the term itself could lead to more confusion rather than enlightenment. It could have put me in a situation where I had to define the term to them in the interview, and hence affect the way they answered my questions. Thus instead of straight-out asking the interviewees whether they had had or the refugees they were guiding had had an empowering effect, I designed the questions in a way that would reveal to me the nature of the relationship between guide and participant; what they did together, and the power relations between them. This was done by using the operationalization of empowerment where it is understood in the dimensions of participation, choices and options. In other words, I asked them questions about language skills, whether they talked about future ambitions and how to get there, how they experienced the relationship between guide and refugee. Additionally, I asked them about feedback to the Red Cross and how they experienced the framework and support of the Refugee Guide. This gave me a good overview of what the participants thought about the programme and how it worked. Moreover, by doing it this way, the guides gave me a better picture of what was going on, than it would have been by asking them straight away whether they thought the other part had become more empowered.

The interviews were mostly conducted face-to-face, and in Norwegian as most of the participants speaks Norwegian better than English. In one case I ended up interviewing one of

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<sup>13</sup> The interview guide can be found in Appendix II

<sup>14</sup> A full list of the guides and refugees can be found in Appendix III. The list will not include their real names.

the refugees in English, and in another interview I sometimes had to use English to make the interviewee understand the question better.

Due to different reasons, some of the interviewees preferred to be interviewed via telephone. While the loss of body language can be limiting in regards to follow up questions, the inclination of the voice of the interviewee also said a lot about the emotional condition he or she was in. Hence finding out whether the next follow-up question were suitable or not, was not impossible over the phone, especially since in these cases both the interviewee and interviewer were both speaking in their first language, as well as having the same dialect.

## **Language Concerns**

One recurring issue when interviewing the refugees were language difficulties. One of the interviews with the refugees went well as the person spoke English fluently. However, the other two were much more difficult as they were conducted in the only language we had in common – Norwegian. As Norwegian is my first language, I have no issues with communicating with it. However, one of the informants was barely fluent in Norwegian, making it very difficult to conduct an interview with her. One reason for this might be that she is unfamiliar with my accent, which is the Standard Eastern Norwegian dialect which is not the same as the one spoken in the area that the informants lived in and learned Norwegian.

The informant had issues with understanding words I thought was basic Norwegian, which meant that I had to change the way I formulated the question in several different ways in order to try to convey what I meant. While it was difficult I still managed to get an answer to the questions I asked. One word that proved to be difficult for some of the refugees to understand was the word “*forventninger*”, expectations. The other interview that was conducted in Norwegian went much smoother, even though I realised that the informant did not necessarily always understand what I meant when I asked the question – hence the interview became closer to unstructured than semi-structured. However, the informant did answer my questions, just not necessarily in the order I asked them.

There is a possibility that the lack of response from refugees were due to language issues. I tried to circumvent this issue by letting people that was learning Norwegian check my language in order to see if it was easy enough to understand.

## **Ethical Concerns**

I had to sign a confidentiality agreement with the Red Cross, where I promised not to reveal any personal information. In line with this, all of the interviewees will be allocated new names when used in the thesis to protect their confidentiality, and were told about this before conducting the interviews. Moreover, the Red Cross will not have access to the interviews themselves, and they will not be able to read my notes. Hence the interviewees are able to speak freely knowing that I am the only one who knows who said what.

## **Participant Observation**

The Red Cross invited me to participate in some of the meetings with guides, as well as a meeting for revising the introductory course. One of the meetings was a meeting where the guides gave feedback to the Red Cross, and the other was a meeting where the coordinators went through the course material they used. Furthermore, I had informal talks with the coordinators who told me about the organization and structure of the Refugee Guide. This allowed me to participate as well as observe. In all of the meetings, the other knew that I was a researcher, and what my role was. However, while knowing this can affect how people behave, as this was already a meeting concerning feedback, there was little chance that they would change their behaviour too much. Furthermore, those who took part in the meeting were students in my own age group, hence my role was not unfamiliar or very estranging to them. Participating in the meetings in this way, allowed me to speak to the guides before and after the meeting outside the framework of the meeting.

In the feedback meeting with the guides, I was able to listen in on what they had to tell the Red Cross representative, as well as how the dynamic between them and how the Red Cross representative worked. Through this I could see the methods that the Red Cross are using, as well as the discourse used when discussing the former refugees. Furthermore, I got to listen in on what they Guides thought about the programme, and some of the difficulties they had met with 'their' refugee. I was able to take some notes as we were given a sheet to take notes on, hence it was not obvious that I was there to observe. Moreover, as with the meeting on planning the course, I was asked to participate with any inputs, hence making me join in the meeting, and not just sit around the table as a distant observer.

### **Meetings with the Red Cross**

In the meeting planning the coursework for the Guide's introductory course, the Red Cross asked me to help them out with the coursework, hence allowing me to see how they work. In this meeting I was asked to contribute to how the course was going to be designed, hence I became an active participant and got to see how they worked and their decisions behind the way they formulated things. This gave me a chance to listen to their discourse about the Refugee Guide.

The Red Cross functioned as a gatekeeper as they not only gave me a lot of information about their Refugee Guide, but also gave me access to the participants. However, the Red Cross can also be considered a client, as they wanted me to give them feedback on the Refugee Guide. Thus there is a duality to the relationship where they both give me the means to do collect the data, while also want me give them feedback on their methods.

### **Document Analysis**

Through the Red Cross I have been given access to a few documents on the Refugee Guide. Among them is the handbook, which gives detailed instructions on the role of the guide, how

things ought work, as well as the overreaching goals of the programme, among other things. This book is thus a first-hand source into the workings of the Refugee Guide, and has proved to be an important information source of how the Red Cross wants the programme to work.

Besides the handbook, I have been given access to previous studies on the Refugee Guide, and they provide useful second-hand information. Two of the studies, one from SINTEF and the other from NTNU Samfunnsforskning, collected data through both qualitative and quantitative methods, and although they had a different objective and research problem than this thesis, they still provide useful information. The other two reports I have, I got through the NTNU who have had previous cooperation with the Red Cross through their Expert in Teams module.

## **Processes, Writing and Analysis of Data**

I began the writing whilst I was conducting the interviews and data. However, the writing on findings and analysis did not start properly until the end of the data collection.

I transcribed the interviews myself. Transcription is not only useful as a method of making sure that you record the data properly, but also because it allows me to both remember thoughts I had at the moment in the interview as well as analysing what is being said. In some cases I also wrote down everything I remember what was being said straight after the interview, including my own thoughts on the matter. This was especially useful as it was difficult to sometimes understand what was being said when listening to the records afterwards, due to both noise and due to the participants' level of Norwegian.

The analysis of the interviews happened both whilst conducting the interviews, transcribing them and after finishing the transcription. The analysis was used by comparing the information gathered, and coding them according to the four dimensions of empowerment; participation, choices and options, and power relations. The coding was thus thematic; the mentioning of learning Norwegian was for example coded as participation.

The use of the four dimensions, participation, options, choices and power relations, as an analytical toolbox has not been used in this way before. Most of the models on empowerment tend to work out from how to create a programme that empowers people, rather than as analytical toolbox to see if a programme or project is empowering. Hence the nature of approach I have used is different than the one from Mayoux (1999, 2001), Carr (2003) and others, as this approach is not a model of how empowerment happens, but rather an analytical tool model to analyse projects and programme. In other words, Mayoux and Carr have models on how empowerment happens, whilst this method analyses whether there have been any empowerment as a result of the project. Thus this analytical approach is supposed to be used on on-going or finished projects. It does not make assumptions on the right method or activities to empower, but rather what factors needs to be included in whatever activities or methods that projects chose to use. The way this is done in the case with the Refugee Guide is to look at how its methods can be considered empowering in terms of the dimensions of participation, options, choices and power relations. This means that the data collected is analysed to see whether it enhances a person's participation, power relations, choices and options on different levels; in wider society by acquiring the skills needed such as language skills; learning and understanding how the Norwegian society works, and finding out what rights they have. In regards to power relations, the relationship between guide and refugee is analysed. Thus I looked at whether the Refugee Guide helped the participants develop skills and knowledge of how to participate in the Norwegian society as they wish, and if they now know how or have the means to have the choices and options to do what they want to with their lives after they have gone through the programme.

## **Limitations of Study**

This study is focused on and thus limited to the Refugee Guide in Trondheim. Furthermore, I was only able to interview a small handful of participants, which is not enough to make it generalised findings. Since this was a qualitative study, however, the aim was never to generalise the findings on a larger scale, but rather to see the potential for empowerment and if it has had an empowering effect on some of the participants, and why. However, due to the existence of older evaluation studies, I was able to compare my findings with theirs to see if my data corresponded with their findings. These studies helped me gain data saturation.



Additionally, with the exception of one, all of the guides I interviewed were in my own age group, and students. Moreover, several of the students were master students as well. In other words, most of the people I interviewed belonged to the same demographics as myself; a member of the major ethnic group in Norway, as well as half of them being postgraduate students. This did affect the way we communicated – although in a positive way, as it was without any major complications at all.

Although I have tried to be as objective as possible, it is impossible to be completely objective, and in some cases not even advisable. My take on social sciences has been greatly influenced by critical theory, and in particular poststructuralist feminism. This again affects how I analyse, which literature I consider to be more important, and even how I formulate myself.

## **Summary of Chapter**

This chapter presented the methodology of the thesis. The thesis is a qualitative study, and is using qualitative, semi-structured interviews as the main method of data collection. Besides the interviews, participant observation as well as former studies on the Refugee Guide were used. Furthermore, the thesis will analyse the findings using an analytical framework developed from a literature review, of which the bibliography can be found in the appendix. The analytical framework is centred on the notion of empowerment having four dimensions participation, options, choices and power relations. Through using these dimensions, the data will be analysed in order to find out its empowering effects.



# Findings

The objective of this chapter is to present the findings of the data collection. It is organized into two parts, the first one presents data from the interviews, and the second presents data from participant observation and documents.

The first part is further divided into four sections; expectations, in which the expectations of the refugees and guides separated into different sections; the relationship between guide and refugee, the activities, other influences and then lastly, a section on what they thought about the Red Cross. The sections have their own smaller sub-sections.

The second part starts with the findings from the participant observation, by first presenting the findings from the feedback meeting, and then from the coursework meeting.

Lastly, the major key findings with regards to empowerment from two evaluation reports on the Refugee Guide done by NTNU Samfunnsforskning (Paulsen et al, 2012) and SINTEF (Valenta et al, 2003) will be presented.

## Part one: Interviews

### Expectations

#### *The Refugees' Expectations*

In this section I will be looking at refugee's expectations of the Refugee Guide. This is important as it explains why they chose to participate.

*Erik*, a refugee from South-East Asia, said that his number one reason for attending the Refugee Guide was to become fluent in Norwegian. Thus he had great expectations for becoming better in Norwegian.

*Lisa*, a young woman, had primarily two expectations concerning the Refugee Guide. The first was that she would become much better at Norwegian. The second was receiving help with her homework.

*Denise* is a young woman under 20, who is still in school. I interviewed her guide as well. She did not seem to have many particularly expectations with regards to the Refugee Guide, except learning Norwegian.

*David*, a student, expected his guide to help him a lot. His understanding of the guide is someone who helps you. He said that when you move to a new place you need someone to show you different places.

Hence most of the settled refugees joined the Refugee Guide in order to learn better Norwegian, as well as understanding the society better.

### ***The Guides' Expectations***

In this section I will present the guide's expectations to the Refugee Guide. The reason is that finding out if the expectations differ may a different shed light on how the relationship between guide and refugee, then just asking directly about the relationship. A lot of the expectations were quite similar, and there were not an obvious gendered difference, besides that the women tended to expect shopping and going to cafés more than the men did. One of the female guides said that while she tried to keep herself as open as possible to how it would be, she did expect, and hoped, to learn a lot about a different culture, besides helping the refugee settling down. Furthermore, she hoped that she would get to know a new person quite well. Overall, her expectation was what the Refugee guide would be an exciting experience that would teach her a lot. A male guide *Even*, said that he mostly expected to help the refugee with everyday things such as applications, reading meters and so forth. However, another female guide, *Marie*, said that she did not have any special expectations, as she was only participating in the Refugee Guide programme because her original programme had been cancelled. The male guide *Thomas* did not have any particular expectations other than what he had read about the Refugee Guide at the Red Cross webpage.

*Else* said that she was very curious about how the relationship between guide and refugee would work out, as they had been told that they were not supposed to be professionals and not really friends, but somewhere in between, and how this would work out in real life.

Hence a lot of the expectations were focused on helping the refugee integrate and understanding how Norwegian society works, as well as getting to know someone from a different culture. Few of the guides mentioned practice with the refugee as one of their main expectations – this can be because they believed that language learning would happen automatically.

## **Activities**

The female guides reported that a lot of their activities consisted of going to cafés, shopping, being invited over for dinner at the refugee's place. *Marie*, a female guide, reported on taking the refugee on hiking trips and trying to introduce her to Norwegian culture by taking her to Christmas markets and lighting of the communal Christmas tree. The refugee paired with this guide repeated this, as well as saying that the guide helped her by telling her where the sales were, as she really enjoyed shopping.

A recurring activity for both men and women is that the guide helps the refugee with homework. Some of the guides reported that what they mostly did consisted of helping them with homework, and they felt that the relationship ended up with being more related to schoolwork than creating a network or getting to know each other. Moreover, several of the guides reported that the refugees asked them to help out with understanding the Norwegian bureaucratic system, and to help them understand letters sent from official instances.

One of the male guides, *Thomas*, reported that the activity mostly consisted of him helping the refugee understand the Norwegian education system, and how to apply for higher education. Another male guide repeated this, and said that most of what he did was helping the refugee to understand the Norwegian system, and also helping him with buying furniture by driving him to the shop. This guide also helped the refugee with applying for jobs. Of the four male guides interviewed, only one of them, *Stig*, invited the refugee along for activities such as football, and other social activities of that kind. One guide, *Carl*, did something similar, which consisted of meeting up with other guides and refugees to mingle. Thus some of them did participate in activities in which the refugee got to meet other people.

## Language Skills

Several guides reported that they believed that the most important activity for the refugees was to learn Norwegian in order to not just integrate, but to find a job or enter into education. The refugees I spoke to confirmed this. Three of the four refugees I interviewed said that in particular that becoming better in Norwegian was their major reason for wanting a refugee guide in the first place. However, one refugee used to work as an English teacher in his home country, and thus ended up speaking English a lot, even though he wanted to practice his Norwegian. He expressed some frustration that Norwegians tended to speak English to him if they realised that he spoke better English than Norwegian. This interview was the only one I conducted in English. The guide *Even* reported that he tried to speak mostly Norwegian with the refugee, but that they sometimes used English in order to get a smoother communication. Thus some of the refugees have a working knowledge of English, but all of those who I spoke with, or who were linked to the guides I was interviewing, were participating in Norwegian classes.

Through the work that the guide *Stig* set up for the refugee, the refugee was able to become better at Norwegian, and even though the environment were international, the common language that they all spoke was Norwegian, rather than English. Lisa said that she did not become much better at Norwegian, which she said was mostly due to her guide not being a native Norwegian speaker. While ensuring that the guide was very kind, she expressed sadness that she did not get to exercise Norwegian as much, which had been her primary objective to participate in the Refugee guide.

*Erik's* experience with the guide concerning language skills did not match his expectations, and he said that the most important part he got out of it was a better understanding of Norwegian social networks and educational system. *Erik* contributes his rising skill in Norwegian to his participation in church, where he has his own friends from both his home country and Norway. Several of the guides expressed that the refugees they were paired up with were not very good at Norwegian in the beginning, but that their Norwegian skills became much better during their time with the refugee. Nevertheless, one guide, *Marlene*, reported that after the summer holidays, which lasted 2 months, she noted that the refugee had

lost some of her fluency in Norwegian, as she did not seemingly practice it when she did not meet up with the guide.

In one case I interviewed one of the refugees that one of the guides had told me had become very good at Norwegian. However, I found myself having difficulties interviewing this refugee due to her lacking Norwegian skills. As mentioned in the method section, I believe this might be due to my accent, which is different from the one spoken in Trondheim. This led me to believe that in some cases the refugee and guide might develop their own way of communicating based on their experience with each other.

That said, one of the guides said that while the refugee had become better in Norwegian, she did notice that the refugee would answer “ja ja” without necessarily understanding what was being said. This may hinder the progress of learning the language, and thus the refugee should try to tell the guide to slow down or rephrase. However, doing this can stop the flow of the conversation, and thus making the communication becoming more frustrating than helping. In this case it would be better that the guides try to speak slower on their own accord, rather than expect the refugee to tell them to slow down.

## **The Guide and Refugee Relationship**

The nature of the relationship between guide and refugee differed greatly from person to person. While some guides said that they considered the refugee to be a friend, others said that they did not feel like that at all. I got to interview two paired refugees and guides. These interviews were conducted apart. In one of the pairs it became clear that the guide and refugee had somewhat different understandings of their relationship. Thomas told that he did not really view the refugee as a friend, but rather as someone he was there to help and guide, and mentioned that he felt more like a consultant as he mostly focused on helping him apply for university. The refugee, however, told that he considered the guide to be a close friend and showed great appreciation for the help he received.

Another male guide, *Even*, said that he tried to get as little involved as possible with the refugee's life, as he did not want to become a part of it. He too saw his role more

professionally, but did remark that the relationship was akin to friendship; he said that he tried to 'just give him the little finger, not his whole hand', implying that they would not see each other every day. However, *Even* did tell the refugee to call him at any time if he needed help.

*Even's* experience and expectations are thus rather different from the case with *Stig*, who saw the refugee he was guide to as a friend, and as someone he would hang out with. Thus their relationships differed in the sense that *Even* expected the refugee to ask for more practical help on how to settle down in a foreign country, whilst the other guide, *Stig's* approach was perhaps closer to networking. The guide *Else* considers it next to impossible to not become friends with the refugee, or friend like with a person that she is spending that amount of time with. However, she did say that it took a toll on their relationship that she had to be the one who always had to take contact.

Some of the pairings had a large age difference between them. This greatly influenced the relationship between the guide and refugee, as they were in different stages of their life. This does not mean that their relationship was bad, but it did have an impact on what they could talk about and how natural the relationship felt like. Similarly, pairings closer in age reported that they had a good and easy communication with the other part, which they said was primarily due to being in the same stage of life. The refugee *Erik* was paired with a student who was more than ten years younger than him, and he said that this did affect their relationship as they were in different positions in life. *Erik* is married with children, while his guide was a young student. *Erik* mentioned several times that he thought his guide was very kind, but also expressed frustration with how he was connected to his guide: they met at a Red Cross activity, and was not paired through comparing different applications. *Erik* had been waiting for a guide for several months, and found it bit dissatisfying that the match was random, especially when his guide ended up moving away from the city and thus cancelled their contract before the year was over.

Likewise with the guide *Marie* and the refugee *Denise*. The age difference between them are 10 years, and since the refugee is much younger, it greatly inhibits what they can do together without breaking *Denise* house rules or go outside her budget.

*Marie* explained that one of the greatest difference she can see in *Denise* so far, is that she trusts *Marie* more and seems less shy. *Marlene* reported the same, that there was an immense



difference between the beginning of their relationship and at their end. This is important because it changes the power dynamic between guide and refugee, and also because it takes away some of the pressure on the guide to organize and take initiative all the time.

### ***Availability and Amount of Get-Togethers***

The guides and refugees meet from once a week to once every month. The Red Cross does not have any guidelines on how often they should meet. Some of the relationships last their full 12 months, but some guides and refugees have reported that they have “split” up after 3-4 four months or more. There are several reasons for this. An occurring reason is that the guide found it tiring to be the only one who takes contact and decides what and when. One guide, *Else*, said that due to this the meetings tended to get a low level of prioritisation. In some cases the guide moved to a different city. However, the guide moving away was not always the issue. *Else* also reported that due to the refugee getting a child, they fell naturally apart, as the refugee had less time to spend with her. *Lisa*, a refugee from Asia in her 20’s, said that she and her guide is no longer seeing each other, even though they were just paired three months ago. The main reason for this was incompatible timetables, as *Lisa* had gotten work at a restaurant, and hence was busy at both day and evenings.

### **Sharing Knowledge**

Thomas, a guide who is also a student, said that what he considered to be most important was to impart knowledge on how to work the Norwegian system, such as calling rather than sending emails etc. The refugee, *David*, that he was paired up with confirmed this, and said that finding out how and being able to get into university and get a degree was his primary concern at that time. Thus Thomas helped *David* in detail how to apply for his degree, and to find out whether he needed any pre-courses to enter university, and also if his previous qualifications were good enough. Thomas described the system as almost impossible to understand on his own, since the different universities and institutions have different deadlines and requirements. *David* reinforced this by saying that he was very pleased that *Thomas* helped him applying for higher education.

In the case of *Erik*, he said that the two most valuable experiences he had from his time with his guide was that he was taught how Norwegians communicated with each other, such as over social networks online, and how to navigate and apply for studies online. Hence both *Erik* and *David* experienced a knowledge sharing of a bureaucratic nature with their guides.

The female guides and refugees also focused a lot on work experience and studies. However, as several of the female guides were still in basic education, helping them apply for studies were not relevant. Instead they tended to talk about future ambitions. Several of the guides mentioned that the women have strong ambitions, such as becoming nurses, lawyers or doctors. While applying for studies is not relevant yet, they did talk about how to get there, and what to do in the meantime, such as having a part-time job.

### **Other Activities and Influences**

People do not live in a vacuum, and this became very clear throughout the interviews with the guides and refugees. The refugees have their own networks and hobbies outside the Refugee Guide; a recurring finding was that several of the refugees had other activities that helped them become more integrated within the Norwegian society and learn Norwegian. Additionally, several of the guides reported that a lot of the refugees had networks of their own, and were seemingly pleased with not having a larger network with Norwegians.

Furthermore, the Refugee Guide itself does not exist in a vacuum within the Red Cross. Several of the guides and refugees said that they participated in other activities within the Red Cross, "*Leksehjelpen*" (Homework help) and the Boy/Girl groups being the definitely most widely used. Besides having their own network and participating in other Red Cross activities, most of the refugees participate in Norwegian classes provided by the Norwegian state.

## Feedback and Support From the Red Cross

Overall, the guides were pleased with the support they received from the Red Cross. Everyone mentioned that if they needed help, they knew they could get in contact easily with the Red Cross. However, the guides were not agreeing on whether they should have more support during their time as a guide, in the sense that the Red Cross got into contact or not. Both Thomas and Even said that they preferred the way it was – this way they could control things more themselves, and they expressed that being checked up on might be more than they would want and need. However, other guides said that they wished that the Red Cross had been in more contact with them throughout their time as a guide.

Furthermore, some people found the role of being a guide a bit confusing, and that the framework difficult to balance out. This again was very different from person to person. In the end, the guides ended up trying to find their own understanding of their role, and said that they experienced the framework as open to their own interpretation of it. As one female guide said, while she was a bit nervous in the beginning of how her role was going to be like, it disappeared when she met the one she got connected to naturally.

*“You can write as many pages as you want on what a guide should be or should not be, but in the end, when you sit there with your refugee, it isn’t much of a point [...] to say how you should behave as a fellow human being”. (Else, female guide).*

Besides support from the Red Cross, it was mentioned that it would have been nice to have more contact with the other guides and refugees, and that the Red Cross arranged some kind of social meetings of this kind. The guides expressed that this could help them finding out more what to do with the refugee, as well as getting tips from other guides. Moreover, *Else* mentioned that it would have been nice to meet previous refugee guides in order to learn from their experience.

Some of the guides arranged social gatherings with other guides and refugees on their own initiative, but due to the volunteer nature of their work, it rarely happened more than the first time. Furthermore, it was mentioned by some of the guides that they believed that having more contact with other guides and refugees could make the relationship seem more natural,

because it would allow the other refugees to get to know people in their own situation, as well as other Norwegians.

*Else* also mentioned that it would have been nice if the refugees were explained by the Red Cross that they would have to be an active part in the relationship and not let the guide take care of most of the contact. This is important because being the one who always takes contact not just because it is tiring, but also because meeting up with the refugee ends up being less prioritized.

## **Part 2: Participant Observation and Documentations**

### **Participant observation**

#### ***Feedback Meeting to the Red Cross From the Guides***

In this meeting, there were four female guides and two male guides participating, as well as a female refugee. Of those participating, I interviewed four, including the refugee. It became clear that the Red Cross wants feedback from the guides, however, it seems like the guides were hesitant to speak their minds. The representative from the Red Cross spoke more than the guides, as a result of them not talking a lot. The meeting itself was at the Red Cross house, and there were food served. The guides mostly talked about how they had some cultural issues with their refugees. Two of the girls mentioned that they were often invited over for dinner at their refugee's house, and that they sometimes felt like they were exploiting them, as they never had to pay for their part of the meal. There was some conversation on how they could tell the refugees how this worked in Norway, without insulting them.

The meeting was very interesting discourse-wise, as the way they spoke about the refugees were revealing that there is a lack of finding a comfortable way of speaking of their relationship. For example, the refugee the guide was paired up with was spoken about in the possessive way “*my* refugee” or “*your* refugee” – this was done in the interview as well.

Neither the Red Cross representative nor the guides seemed to be particularly comfortable using this language, yet they did not seem to have a different way of speaking about them.

This language is denying the refugees agency to act as and be an individual person, and the Red Cross should consider using a different way of wording themselves. However, they seem to use this language as a lack of a better alternative.

### ***Evaluation of Course Material***

I was invited to participate in a small meeting with two of the Red Cross employees who was in control of organizing the Refugee Guide. In this meeting they were going to go through the course material they used in their introduction course to the guides.

We went through each slide and commented on what was good/negative about each, and what should be done differently and if it gave the right message to the guides.

What became clear was that the employees were aware of their own language, and also commented on what the discourse they used. A huge part of the work done on the slides was to make the discourse seem more empowering rather than talking about people in the possessive noun.

Hence the coordinators are very much aware of the power that discourse has, and try to use language that does not disempower the participants, among other things.

### **Documents**

There are three different documents I have gotten access to, which I borrowed from the Red Cross. Two of them are former evaluation project of the Refugee Guide, while the last one is a folder of material to the coordinators of the programme, which is useful in terms of knowing what the goals of the programme is, as well as how the Red Cross at a national level expects the Refugee Guide to be run. While some of the data they have collected is similar to mine, the way they are using it is different, which enables me to analyse the data with a different theoretical and analytical framework.

The major findings relevant to this study will be presented here, and organized by the different studies.

### ***Evaluation Study by Valenta et al, 2003***

In the evaluation study conducted by Valenta *et al* in 2003, they found that the major issue that guides and refugees had was to implement the refugee into the guide's network. Similarly to refugees I interviewed, very few of the refugees in Valenta *et al's* study had Norwegian friends. They seemed to rarely fit into the network, and some of the guides expressed that they hoped that the refugee would not turn up at parties, as it was difficult to make it work.

However, despite this, several of the refugees and guides expressed that they experienced a lot of positive and good things of participating in the Refugee Guide. One very interesting finding was that the refugees explained that they got to understand Norwegians and the Norwegian culture better, and in some cases ended defending Norway in discussions about Norwegian culture with other foreigners. One refugee explained that it was nice to meet with a guide, as it made her understand that not all Norwegians hate refugees, as the media representation of refugees can give this impression. Furthermore, another refugee expressed that just being in the public sphere and being greeted by a Norwegian made her feel more accepted.

### ***Paulsen et al, 2012 – 'The Refugee Guide as a door opener'***

Similarly to what I found through the interviews, Paulsen *et al* in 2012, reports that the overarching goal and desire for the participating refugees is to learn Norwegian, while for the guides it is to help integrating the refugees into the Norwegian society as well as learning more about a different culture. Furthermore, this study also shows that it is the guide who takes most of the contact, as well as the frequency being between once a week to once a month. The guides report here too that they wish that the refugee would take more contact. The activities are similar as well, with several reporting that they go to cafés, make food together as well as reading newspapers.

This study also reports that some of the guides feel like they are out of their depth when it comes to what they are helping with. One guide says that it feels like they are helping the refugee with things that their contact person in the municipality or integration should help them with, such as internet, reading off the electricity and similar issues.

## Summary of Chapter

The guides expected to help the refugees with settling down, as well as introducing them to a different culture. Moreover, the guides reported that a lot of the activity that they did was helping the refugee with learning Norwegian, and several of them reported that they ended up helping the refugee with homework, or related work. The guides also mentioned that there was not a lot of networking going on, and the relationship between refugee and guide seemed to differ greatly from pair to pair, where some guides said that while they did have a friendly companionship with the refugee, they did feel more like an expert than just a friend. One guide in particular mentioned that he also tried to keep their lives separate, so that while the refugee knew that while he could be called upon when needed, he would not do it for the smallest things. Furthermore, several guides mentioned that they were usually the one who took contact and initiative to arrange meetings, and that they wanted the refugee to take more initiative. The activities reported by the guides consisted mostly of helping with homework, cafés, shopping, applications and so forth. This was confirmed in Paulsen *et al's* study.

A common wish was to organize get-togethers with other guides and refugees, for several reasons, including to make the relationship more natural and to get to know the others participating. Additionally, both through the interviews with the refugees and through Paulsen *et al's* study, it became clear that the number one reason that refugees participate is to learn Norwegian with a native speaker. Through participant observation, I found out that they had an interesting way of talking about the refugees, by using the possessive pronoun. Furthermore, through the documents it became clear that similarly to my interviews, the guides informed that the refugees had their own network and thus seemingly less interested in establishing one with Norwegians. Valenta *et al's* study reported that some of the refugees found it nice to realise that not all Norwegians disliked or hated refugees like they were led to believe through the media.





## Analysis and Discussion

In this chapter, the findings presented in the previous chapter will be analysed according to the different dimensions of empowerment, which are participation, options and choices, and power relations. First the data will be analysed according to the dimension of options and choices, then participation, followed by power relations. Following power relations, a section on proposed changes to the Refugee guide will be presented, and after this an overview and analysis of empowerment in the context of the Refugee Guide will be presented. Then proposed solutions to what the Red Cross can do to enhance the empowerment of the Refugee Guide is presented, and lastly, the added value of the research.

As a general analysis, it is clear that the refugees experience some kind of empowerment with regards to their participation in the Norwegian society through raised Norwegian skills, and learning how to navigate the system. However, as this chapter will show, this does not mean that all of the activities are empowering, and in some cases it might be disempowering rather than empowering.

### Options and Choices

There is a definitive process of empowerment where options and choices are concerned. Several of the guides and refugees remark that the guides share a lot of knowledge with the refugees; they are taught to understand the Norwegian system, and how to use it to their advantage. While far from everyone had spoken about their rights, since they were not in a position to need to know about NAV<sup>15</sup>, according to the guides, there was still a lot of communication on what the refugee wanted to do with their lives. More importantly, the guides and refugees seemed to have spoken a lot on how to fulfil their ambitions.

In other words, there is an on-going process of empowerment in regards to understanding how to reach ones goals, and which options you have concerning these goals. Hence while the

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<sup>15</sup> The Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration. NAV administrates schemes such as unemployment schemes and sickness benefits.

participants do not necessarily have access to these options at this moment, there is a process of learning how to get these options. Additionally, the guides did help the refugees a lot when it came to the actual application process and how to navigate the system. *Erik* said that the most useful he got out of his time as a participant of the Refugee Guide, was learning how to navigate through the Norwegians system online, which would help him when he was going to apply for his studies at a later time. The same happened to *David*, when his guide helped him apply for higher education in Norway. Thus sharing knowledge about how the Norwegian system works is definitely an empowering experience in the sense that they learn how to navigate the system.

## **Participation**

In order to fully participate in the Norwegian society, including getting work and being able to communicate with most Norwegians, the refugees need to have a working knowledge of Norwegian. The better their Norwegian is, the better they are expected to be able to be integrated in the Norwegian society. Thus in order to be able to properly participate, they need to be able to speak Norwegian. The findings show that learning Norwegian is one of the major reasons, if not the major one, that refugees want to get a guide. According to Paulsen *et al* (2012) the refugees are often not able to practice their Norwegian with Norwegians outside the introductory course they are participating with.

However, throughout the interviews it became clear that while both guide and refugee consider learning Norwegian important, there have been varying degrees of success. This is due to several factors, including that the refugee-guide relationship ended prematurely; due to the level of Norwegian that the refugee had beforehand, or because the guide is not a native Norwegian speaker.

Thus one cannot make a generalized conclusion on whether this is empowering or not, as while learning the language is empowering, becoming much better at Norwegian is not something that automatically happens through the Refugee Guide, and thus to the degree where it can be said to be very empowering. For example, the refugee *Lisa* said that she did not experience her Norwegian becoming noticeably better, during her meetings with her

guide, while several guides say that they were very impressed by how quickly the refugees became good at Norwegian.

That being said, as the guide *Marlene*, mentioned, the refugee she was paired up with lost some of her Norwegian skills during the summer break, as she was the only Norwegian contact the refugee had. This is indeed an issue – do the refugees continue to practice their Norwegian after the year is over, or do they stop using it? This does in most likelihood depend on the network of the refugee – if they spend a lot of their time with people from their own home countries, or with people they need to speak Norwegian with. Hence while they do get a lot of Norwegian speaking practice, they might lose it if they do not expand their network beyond their own nationality.

This is a further reason to organize social gatherings with other guides and refugees, as this would be a good setting to both meet people in a similar situation, but with different backgrounds, and at the same time get to meet other Norwegians than their guide. However, this would change some of the nature of the Refugee Guide, as it would not be completely up to the guide how things are organized. That being said, it would help the Refugee Guide with their core goal – helping the refugees making their own Norwegian network. Moreover, as participating in the guide itself is volunteer work, organizing social events would not necessarily change this, as it would still be voluntary – the guides would know what they signed up for. In terms of making this practical, this should probably not happen too many times, as otherwise it could risk the danger of being too much, and thus lose some of its function. Hence one has to question whether the growth that the refugees get through the Refugee Project is on a temporary basis language wise, if they do not practice it when they are not with the guide. Thus, will the language skills they have been taught during their participation in the programme continue to grow after the contract is finished?

## **Networking**

The main reason why the Refugee Guide was started was to help the refugees gain a Norwegian network. Having a Norwegian network is important in terms of participating in Norwegian society. However, while a lot of the guides and refugees have some contact after the contract is over, it is mostly in the form of being Facebook friends. Valenta *et al* (2003)

and Paulsen *et al* (2012) confirmed this in their evaluation studies – the networking part is the part of the Refugee Guide that the guides find the most difficult. The guides I spoke to mentioned that the refugees usually had their own network, and that they were usually the only Norwegian person they spoke with. Moreover, while some of them did introduce the refugee to their friends, the refugee did not become a part of that network. One reason this might be is because the Refugees do not see the Refugee Guide as a place to gain a network, but as an opportunity to practice their Norwegian with a native speaker. All of the refugees I interviewed said that this was their major reason why they wanted to participate in the Refugee Guide. Moreover, the guides also said that practicing Norwegian was something they considered to be very important.

The effect that the Refugee Guide has on the level of participation within the Norwegian society seems to be limited to learning to speak Norwegian a bit better and to get in regular contact with one Norwegian only.

However, in those cases where the refugee got to meet with their guide often, and practice their Norwegian skills, one can argue that there is a process of empowerment.

As empowerment is understood here as an on-going process, it is fair to say that during the participation in the Refugee Guide, the participants can experience empowerment in forms of being able to participate more in society through language learning and learning about the society they are living in. Nevertheless, there is reason to believe that unless the refugee continues this work on his or her own after the contract is over, the process of empowerment in this field stops. In other words, they have to actively use the knowledge they gained afterwards and continue working on their own in order to experience further empowerment after the programmes end. One of the male guides said it well “the programme is what you make out of it”. If you are an active participant during and after, you will experience more empowerment than if you do not.

## Power relations

As one of the female guides mentioned, the guide becomes the expert in the relationship. While the Red Cross states in their coordinator booklet that the guide is not supposed to be an expert, this seems to be the natural consequence due to the nature of the relationship. After all, the refugee seeks help from the guide, whether it is to understand an official letter, or to do homework. Moreover, it is by far usually the guide who arranges and organises their meetings, rather than the refugee, even though the guide wants the refugee to take more initiative. Thus it seems like there is a power disparity in the relationship where the guide is the expert and the ones who seemingly control how many times they meet, and what they do. Nevertheless, the power is not one-sided. While it seems like the guide has a relationship of *power over* the refugee, where the guide can choose which type of knowledge to share, and to guide them in a certain direction, the refugee also has a form of power. This type of power is not just the one where they do not have to decide on what to do when meeting, or do not have to organize the meetings, but they have a soft form of power where they have direct access to someone whom they can call to ask for help when it suits them, and the guide feels obliged to help. In other cases they can decide not to meet the guide. Hence the refugee seems to usually only take contact with the guide when they need something rather than to “hang out” and get to know each other.

Thus the power-relations are far from an obvious case of power-over by the guide over the refugee – the refugee has a form of power too, and it is the type of power over. This power is in the form of the guide having to be there for the refugee, while the refugee does not have to be there in the same way for the guide. In other words, both the guide and the refugee have *power over* the other, which is problematic according to empowerment theory – having power over is considered a disempowering status, for both the person in power, and the person under power. Seeing as both the guide and refugee is in this category, a change should have to be made to make it a situation that is *power with*, rather than *power over*.

Hence the Refugee Guide can be simultaneously empowering, disempowering and neither of the two. Its empowering effect is dependent on two factors; the relationship between refugee and guide and what activities they are doing. In other words, it is dependent on what they make out of it. The programme itself, while it aims at empowerment, is not automatically

empowering unless the guide and refugee have activities and a relationship that allows empowerment to happen. This makes sense, as empowerment is an active process, and cannot happen without the participants engaging wilfully in acts that can be considered empowering. Hence the Refugee Guide can be simultaneously both empowering and disempowering, for example if the refugee becomes better in Norwegian through participating, yet disempowering depending on how much they rely on their guide. However, it can be disempowering for the guide as well, even though the power relations seem to often be in their favour, if they end up in a relationship where they are only called upon when the refugee needs their help – for example that they end up being a homework helper rather than someone to start a network with.

## **Proposed Changes and Activities for the Red Cross Refugee Guide**

All in all, most of the guides and refugees seem overall pleased with the Refugee Guide and how it is organized. Those who have not been very pleased have been so due to unforeseen circumstances outside the control of the Red Cross. Despite this, there are room for improvement, both in regards to empowerment and overall satisfaction. There are some things that the Red Cross can change or start doing in order for the Refugee Guide to become more empowering as well as helping the Refugees getting their own Norwegian network: most of the activities in the Refugee Guide will in all likelihood continue to consists of the guide helping the Refugee with everyday activities as homework, applying for schools and jobs and meter readings. Nevertheless, this does not mean that these activities cannot be joined by others to include other activities.

The recurring wish from refugee guides is to have activities together with other guides and refugees. While they have tried to organize these kinds of events themselves, they seem to only happen once or twice, due to the volunteer nature of the Refugee Guide. While one of the pillars of the Red Cross is exactly that it is volunteer work, it does make it more difficult to organize networking events. One solution to this could be that it is the Red Cross that organizes these get-togethers. One challenge is that these cannot be obligatory, and thus there is a chance that few people meeting up. However, if people have to sign up for these get-

together, this can be worked around. In order for this to happen properly though, updated contact details are needed..

Besides the difficulties with the nature of volunteer work, there is another reason as to why the Refugee Guide is not as empowering and good at Networking as it could have been.

This is because the recurring reason to why the refugees seek to participate in the programme is to learn Norwegian rather than networking. That said, a lot of the participants already have their own networks, and do not seem to feel like they need to have a different Norwegian network. Thus it could be worthwhile to investigate more on the needs of those who join the Refugee Guide and see if helping them with having a Norwegian network is what they believe they need themselves.

Moreover, there is an imbalance in the relationship between guide and refugee where the refugee usually becomes the passive part since the guide is usually the one to organize the meetings. Thus the refugees should perhaps be told that they are expected to participate actively in the relationship, such as taking contact and making more suggestions earlier on. This can make the feeling of the Norwegian being the “expert” go away, and perhaps make the relationship feel more natural, where the case is that this is needed. However, it is worth noting that several of the guides said that the biggest difference they experienced throughout their time with the refugee was that the refugee began to trust them more, and by doing so took more contact and gave more suggestions. However, in these cases it tended to be in order to get help with homework.

Hence it is not simply a matter of the refugee not wanting to participate, but perhaps that they do not feel secure enough in their relationship to do so, or do not know if it is “suitable” to do so in the beginning. If it is a question about not being secure on what is appropriate, then being informed of what is expected of them as participants might help. However, finding a way to do this in the right manner is important, as it can clash with the idea of letting the guide and refugee find their own way. Nevertheless, the way that several guides report that the relationship functions now, there has to be a change in how the guide and refugee stay in contact. The refugees should be told then that they have to initiate contact as well. In other words, the refugee needs to *participate* in engaging the relationship between guide and refugee. Otherwise, the relationship tends to become a bit tiring, and as a result, not

prioritized by the guide. This would make the Refugee Guide more empowering as well, as it would not just allow, but actively suggest and even expect, that the refugee would participate.

However, not all of the guides wanted more intervention from the Red Cross, and felt like this was needed. It is thus in all likelihood very person-specific, and catering to everyone's needs is not practical. If the refugee takes more contact, it can also make the guide feel less like being with the refugee is something that they "have to do".

## **Empowerment in the Context of the Refugee Guide**

So why is empowerment not just useful, but important to the Refugee Guide?

As it has been mentioned throughout this thesis, both the goals of the Refugee Guide and how the Red Cross Trondheim understand empowerment coincide with what empowerment is defined as here; participation in society, in this case through learning Norwegian, getting Norwegian contacts and getting inside-tips on social codes. While the option and choices part of empowerment is not the primary focus of the Refugee Guide, its take on participation allows these to develop on their own. It is thus plausible to argue that at one level, the goal of the Refugee Guide is to enable the participating settled refugees to become empowered. Hence it makes sense to see how this works in practice - which is what have been done here. By using the different dimensions of empowerment as a method of analysing the Refugee Guide, one not only get to know what the participants think and mean about the Refugee Guide, but also evaluate its empowering effect in practice.

While one can use this approach in such a fashion where empowerment can be treated as a possible end product – that being completely and utterly empowered is possible – it is unadvisable to do so. It is important to note the use of the present tense of empowering – this model has not sought to see if the Refugee Guide makes its participant fully and completely empowered, as this goes against the whole idea of empowerment being a continuous process.

Thus the approach is best when being used as it has been in this thesis – as an analytical method to look at whether it has an empowering effect, rather than to check if the participants



are fully empowered. The analytical approach of analysing the empowering effect of the Refugee Guide by using the different dimensions of participation, options, choices and power relations are particularly useful to the Refugee Guide exactly because the goals are so similar to that of empowerment. In result, one finds out the effectiveness of the programme in regards not just to empowerment, but also to the overarching goals to the project - but at the same time with a different perspective than of those previous reports on the Refugee Guide. Not just because the discourse is different, but because it puts it in the wider context of empowerment, and thus can look at other perspectives and factors that other studies have done.

## **Previous Research and Added Value**

How is this study different from Valenta *et al's* (2003) and Paulsen *et al's* (2012) studies, besides using empowerment? The first distinction is the theoretical framework. As I have argued, the goal of the Refugee Guide is empowerment, and thus using a theoretical framework based on empowerment to analyse how empowering the Refugee Guide is makes sense.

Paulsen *et al's* (2012) main goal is to find the effects of the Refugee Guide, however, they are not using empowerment literature and discourse. But does the use of an empowerment theoretical and analytical framework have any practical value? As a lot of the findings are similar, which do gives both of our studies increased validity, what makes the empowerment approach different in practical terms; does it result in giving any different, meaningful findings? The answer is yes. One of the major practical differences is the way the relations between guide and refugee is analysed. Neither Valenta *et al* (2003) and Paulsen *et al's* (2012) study have not focused on the power relations between guide and refugee, while this study has done so due to using empowerment theory, and found different things than the other studies as a result of this. Furthermore, Valenta *et al* (2003) does not focus their study on the challenges in the relationship between guide and refugee, while Paulsen *et al* (2012) focus on practical difficulties that the guide and refugee have in their relationship, whilst this study is focused on the power relations between guide and refugee. Hence they have not come with

any suggestions to possible solutions as to how to change the power relations, as they have not discussed these relations between guide and refugee. While they do mention that the relationship needs to be more equal in the sense refugee needs to take more initiative, they do not mention how a lot of the guides end up being personal homework helpers to the refugees. Nor do they analyse in depth the power relations between guide and refugee – for example that the refugee do in fact have a lot of power over the guide in the sense that they can chose not to meet the guide, call them when they need help and expect help, as well as give the guide the responsibility to come up with activities. Furthermore, they have not used the analytical tools provided by empowerment theory to analyse the consequences of the challenges in the relationship between guide and refugee.

That being said, the findings in the three studies coincide for the most part, which suggests that the Red Cross have not changed the Refugee Guide much throughout the last 10 years, or at the very least not been able to tackle the challenges presented in the reports.

## **Summary of Chapter**

Under options and choices, it was argued that there was a definitive process of empowerment as the guide and refugee discussed the refugees goals, how to get there, as well as learning what they needed to do in order to get the options and choices they wanted.

Participation, however, is a bit more complicated in terms of language learning, as while the refugees did become a lot better at speaking Norwegian – a skill which is very important for integration – there is a concern that most of the refugees knows few other Norwegians to practice their Norwegian with after the year of the Refugee Guide is over. Moreover, networking, which is the primary goal of the Refugee Guide, seems to no happen at all.

Furthermore, the power relations between guide and refugee is indeed disempowering, as they both have power over the other.

## Conclusion

This study was set out to explore whether the Red Cross Refugee Guide in Trondheim is empowering in regards to participation, options, choices and power relations. The Refugee Guide is a valuable asset to the introduction programme to settled refugees, but is the Refugee Guide empowering in regards to participation, choices, options, and power relations? What this study found is that the Refugee Guide is both disempowering and empowering.

While one can argue that the Refugee guide has an overall empowering effect on the participants, and that just participating is empowering, this is not necessarily the case in regards to those four dimensions. In the case of participation, in this case language skills, it seems empowering at the first glance. However, since few of the refugees actually gets a Norwegian network, the question is if they retain their Norwegian skills after the contract has passed. Two of the refugees mentioned that they were not pleased with the extent of how their Norwegian skills progressed during the Refugee Guide, the first reason for this being that the contract was cut short, the second because the guide did not have Norwegian as his or hers first language. However, in the case where the relationship was cut short, the refugee said that he was taught a lot of different things, like how Norwegians communicated with each other, as well as how to apply for education himself. Hence skill-wise this refugee became more empowered. Thus in regards to participation, it is very dependent on the relationship between guide and refugee.

In regards to options and choices, however, it is plausible to say that the Refugee Guide is furthering the process of empowerment, as several guides and refugees mentioned that they did indeed talk and discuss regarding what the choices and options that the refugee had, as well as how to get where they wanted to in life. Receiving the skills and know-how to navigate through the Norwegian bureaucracy in order to get where they wanted to, happened seemingly across the board.

However, in terms of power relations, the picture gets more complicated. Both the refugee and guide have power over the other, and while this might seem as equal, it is troubling from an empowerment perspective. The guide has the power to chose what, where and when to do activates, and the refugee has the power to decline, as well as not having to take initiative, and

when they do take initiative, when they are in need of help. The relationship between guide and refugee can be empowering in the sense that the refugee gets to participate in the society with a Norwegian and learn the language. However, as the guide often ends up with aiding the refugee to solve their issues instead of guiding them, the relationship is not as empowering as it could be. In fact, the way the relationship have been portrayed in this study shows that is in fact more disempowering rather than empowering in certain areas, due to the nature of how the guide helps the refugee, as well as the power relations between the guide and refugee. For the Red Cross, this also means that there is a disparity of how they themselves understand the role of the guide, and how the guides end up practicing their role. However, due to the nature of volunteer work, there is a limit of how much the Red Cross can expect from the guides when it comes to following the framework they have developed around the guide role. After all, when it comes down to it, the Refugee Guide happens between individuals, and is practiced based on what feels right for the guide and refugee.

The limitations of this study are the low number of refugee interviewees, as well as the demographics of the group. These limitations, however, was made less important due to the support of the previous studies of Valenta *et al* and Paulsen *et al*, whom contributed with information, and most importantly, concurs with my findings. The difference between this study with their studies is the theoretical framework used, and the practical result of this, which is a different perspective on the relations between guide and refugee, as well as different solutions. Additionally, this study did not explore the gender dimensions of empowerment in the Refugee Guide. In order to do this, more interviews would have to be undertaken, especially with the refugees. Considering the amount of trouble I had with contacting them to be interviewed, future researchers should be aware of the difficulties of contacting the refugees, and thus create a strategy of how to do so.

This study has shown that several of the challenges raised by Valenta *et al* (2003) and Paulsen *et al* (2012) is still present, while also showing how this is problematic from an empowerment perspective, as well as presenting some solutions as to how they can change it to become more empowering for the participants. Furthermore, this study presents a new approach of analysing the empowering effect of integration programmes, by thematic analysing based on the dimensions of participation, options, choices and power relations.

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# Appendix I

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# Appendix II

## Interview guide

### Norwegian version

#### 1. Introduksjonsspørsmål

- hvor gammel de er, hvor de er fra, hva de gjør om dagen (studier, arbeid osv)
- Hvor lenge har du vært guide/deltager?

#### 2. Flyktningguiden

- Forventninger
- Førsteintrykk

#### 3. Språkkunnskaper

- (Hvis deltager) Har du noen problemer med å kommunisere med nordmenn?
- (Hvis guide) Hvordan opplevde du deltagerens norskkunnskaper?
- ~~— Kommunisere med de rundt deg og gjøre seg forstått for å få til det man ønsker~~

#### 4. Deltagelse/Participation

- Sosialt – venner, norske venner?
- Hobbyer: sport, lokalpolitikk, nabolag??
- Arbeid, studier?
- (Deltager) Å bli hørt – følelsen av å bli hørt

#### 5. Valg og muligheter

- (Deltager) Har flyktningguiden bidratt til å gjøre deg i stand til å finne ut hvordan du kan styre livet ditt i den retningen du vil?
- (Hvis deltager) Har flyktningguiden lært deg om arbeidsmuligheter, NAV og rettigheter?
  - o Hvis så, har du lært deg hvordan du skal ta i bruk de?

- (Hvis guide) Ble deltageren fortalt og forklart om arbeidsmuligheter, NAV og rettigheter?
- (deltager) Hvilke muligheter mener du at du har i det norske samfunnet?
- Har du/ tror du han/hun du var guide for har kommet noe nærmere å jobbe eller delta i samfunnet på den måten du/De ønsker?

#### *6. Opplevelsen*

- noen merkbar forskjell på å delta i programmet – føler/ser man en endring?

#### *7. Forbedringer:*

- Noe som mangler/ kunne ha vært annerledes/ er bra?
- Er det noe Flyktningguiden ikke fikk til å dekke, eller ikke dekker?

#### *8. Hvordan går det med vedkomne?*

- (Hvis deltager) Har du funnet deg mer til rette i det norske samfunnet?
- (Hvis guide) Merker du en forskjell på deltageren før og etter? Synes du at det virker som om de har funnet seg mer til rette i det norske samfunnet?



## **Appendix III**

### **Overview of the Guides and Refugees**

#### List of guides

Marie, Norwegian, student in her mid-twenties.

Else, Norwegian, student in her mid-twenties.

Marlene, Norwegian, student in her mid-twenties.

Sarah, Norwegian, student in her mid-twenties.

Thomas, Norwegian, student in his mid-twenties.

Even, Norwegian, in his late-30's.

Stig, from central-Asia, student in his mid-twenties.

Carl, Norwegian student in his mid-twenties.

#### List of refugees

Erik, from South East Asia

David, African refugee

Denise African refugee

Lisa, South East Asian refugee