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MICRO-GEOGRAPHIES OF ADMINISTRATION: A WOLF IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING? THE IMPACT OF TRUST ON A STREET-LEVEL APPROACH TO IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION

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ABSTRACT

Increased global migration to welfare states puts pressure on successful integration. Successful integration is broadly associated with entry into the labour market. Therefore, integration is measured through employment. Attempts to increase migrant involvement in the labour market are often made by street-level organisations, where interactions between individuals from the private and/or public sector interact with the migrants. At this microlevel, seemingly innocuous administrative decisions made by individuals working to increase migrant labour integration are often overlooked, yet, as this study shows, have a significant impact on the perceived success of such projects. Using nonparticipant observation, chronological ordering and framework analysis, this paper investigates the dynamics of trust as a critical, yet underplayed dimension of the immigrant integration process within a Swedish street-level organisation. The findings reveal instances of immigrant commodification, exploitation of the project format and lack of cultural awareness, which can disrupt the delicate psychosocial relations at play, without ever being appreciated in official reports. Moreover, the impact of trust further impacts on the micro-geographies of immigrants and the integration process. We conclude that whilst the results of integration efforts should be evaluated at the macro level, the fundamentals of integration are set and often decided upon already at the street level.

Keywords: integration, trust, street-level approach, immigration, nonparticipation observation

INTRODUCTION

Migration is an inherent part of human existence, which can be traced back to Moses leading persecuted Israelites out of Egypt and the Viking invasions of Normandy to the establishment of colonies under the Ancient Greeks and the dispersal of Jews following the rise of the Roman Empire (cf. Fisher, 2013). In the modern era, Europeans travelled to overseas colonies in response to the movement



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of populations experiencing colonial domination, and mass migrations occurred in Europe during and after the two world wars (Lucassen, 2019). Recent decades have witnessed a 'migration crisis' in Europe, fuelled predominantly by political unrest in Africa, South Asia and the Middle East. Beginning in 2011, the surge in migration presented European leaders and policymakers with the greatest challenge. However, the European Union's collective response and the response of its Member States has been criticised for being ad hoc and for focusing on the security of the EU borders rather than the rights of the immigrants.

In this context, the Swedish immigrant integration policy is unique and has been lauded as the 'best' policy in Europe (Migration Integration Policy Index (MIPEX), 2020)¹. At the same time, its outcomes counterintuitively appear to be amongst the poorest (Eurostat, 2022). In 2004, the outcomes of Swedish labour market integration were deemed 'unfavourable in an international context' by the OECD, and thus worthy of improvement (OECD, 2014). In 2010, new laws were introduced to prioritise labour-market integration for newly arrived immigrants. The most significant change was that the responsibility for migrant integration was placed almost exclusively on the Public Employment Service, which suggests that labour market integration was the most important aspect of integration in Sweden. However, this change also meant that the responsibility had been shifted from the local (municipal) level to the state or national level. As a result, migrant integration became somewhat removed from the street level. Whilst the focus on labour market integration has contributed to Sweden's high MIPEX score, "there remains room

for improvement in integration outcomes and recent refugee cohorts still have low employment rates" (OECD, 2014). Thus, Sweden is still an OECD country with the largest gap between immigrant and nativeborn employment levels. Employment remains higher among the Swedish-born (83.2% for women; 86.9% for men) than among the foreign-born, for whom the overall employment rate was 70.2% (specifically, 63.9% for foreign-born women and 76.4% for foreign-born men) (European Commission, 2022; Eurostat, 2022).

Ager and Strang's *Indicators of Integration* (2004) is widely regarded as a key text in the discussion and definition of integration because it provides a basis for understanding integration as both a policy goal and as a process through which the goal is achieved. This conceptual framework arose from the idea that there is no agreed-upon operational definition of successful integration, particularly where multiple stakeholders are involved (Ager & Strang, 2004). This approach has been applied to both migrant integration (Dymitrow & Brauer, 2014) and the integration of other marginalised societal groups (Feltynowski et al., 2015; Krzysztofik et al., 2017), including those with a pronounced spatial connotation (Dymitrow et al., 2018).

The problems with defining migrant integration have become increasingly relevant in countries such as Sweden, where the responsibility for implementing integration policy falls on national agencies at the macro-level. In turn, scholars have highlighted the importance of connectivity in shaping and aiding the integration process. They also noted that these relationships may be fundamentally unequal with regard to power and resources (Haque, 2010; Ponzo et al., 2013). Furthermore, researchers have argued that there is a disparity between the mechanisms and policy that guide integration at regional, national and international levels, and the measures that are implemented at the local level (Craig, 2015; Penninx, 2009).

This kind of research adopts a *street-level approach* to address the issues of scale and localisation (Brodkin, 2016; Lipsky, 1980). The concept of street-level bureaucracy and the associated approach were first coined in the 1960s by Lipsky who argued that inte-

¹ MIPEX is a unique tool which uses 167 policy indicators on migrant integration to benchmark and score current laws and policies against best practice (MIPEX, 2020). The index measures policies that promote integration in all societies, in both social and civic terms. The eight evaluated policy areas are: labour market mobility; family reunion; education; political participation; permanent residence; access to nationality; anti-discrimination; and health (MIPEX, 2020). Sweden scored 86 (out of 100) points for its integration policy, and 91 points for its policy on labour market mobility.

gration policy is implemented at the street level by the people (street-level bureaucrats). Therefore, policy outcomes are not only a reflection on the policy itself, but also on the decisions made by individuals who enact them at the street level. The approach has been chosen because it focuses on the interpersonal level, whilst allowing for the exploration of the gap between formal policy provision and measurable outcomes, where trust is a critical dimension of the integration process (cf. Hansson, 2018).

The issue of trust has been employed as the critical dimension in the discussion about the integration process because trust is considered an element of social capital that has a positive impact on an individual's chances of success (Örkény & Székelyi, 2009; Rothstein & Stolle, 2001). Misztal (1996) suggests that trust is one of the most important aspects of social integration. However, research studies analysing trust in the context of migrant integration have overwhelmingly focused on the trust that migrants have towards their 'new' host country state (cf. André, 2014; Gabriel, 2017; Levi & Stoker, 2000 Maxwell, 2010).

Previous studies have suggested that integration policy alone does not affect the acculturation of trust. Researchers have argued that trust is developed through interaction and engagement with the native communities (Dinesen & Hooghe, 2018).

To bridge the existing knowledge gap, this study was undertaken to explore the role of trust in the disparity between integration policy and its actual outcomes. This goal was accomplished with the use of a case study involving a street-level organisation (SLO) that struggles with the integration of immigrants. The SLO approach and methodology provided us with a unique opportunity to critically assess the outcomes of policy implementation over a period of six months through non-participant observation.

The article begins with a theoretical exploration of the concept of integration, both as a measurable outcome and a process, because this difference is often overlooked during policy evaluations. This is portrayed as only one piece of a puzzle, where integration and trust interact at the street level and

lead to discrepancies between policy and labour market outcomes in Sweden. Lipsky's (1980) theory of street-level bureaucracy was used to address the challenges of immigrant integration at the local level. A single case study was analysed to shift the focus from the national to the local level. The case study involves the Green Integration project which sought to develop immigrant integration by initiating interest in green business development. Non-participant observation of Green Integration was conducted over 32 weeks, the entire life cycle of the project. The critical dimension of trust was discussed by analysing three trust relationships between the stakeholders that eventually impact integration at higher levels. The concluding section posits that trust is a critical dimension of immigrant integration, and it suggests that turbulent trust relationships between stakeholders provide a possible explanation for why integration projects fail despite the implementation of an exemplary policy.

THREE PIECES OF THE SAME PUZZLE: INTEGRATION, THE STREET-LEVEL AND TRUST

Integration

Europe has become a destination of choice for many immigrants due to tragic events that took place around the world in recent decades. Europe's economic prosperity, relative political stability and democratic systems of governance are particularly appealing, for both those seeking to work or study and those who are seeking refuge. Most EU states have experienced increased immigration. During 2021, approximately 2.3 million immigrants arrived from non-EU countries, contributing to an estimated figure of 5 immigrants per 1,000 people living in the EU (Eurostat, 2023). In 2022, Sweden was one of the 13 EU states to witness an increase in the number of citizens born in both non-EU and EU countries relative to 2021 (Eurostat, 2023). Given such high numbers, successful integration becomes a priority issue.

Integration, however, is known to be a chaotic and controversial concept. It is "a word used by many but understood differently by most" (Robinson, 1998, p. 118), with little prospect of the adoption of a unifying definition. Still, integration remains a significant policy goal and a targeted outcome for most governments, projects and organisations working with immigrants (Ager & Strang, 2008). It is also considered a major challenge in the process of successfully addressing interlocking problems of unsustainability caused by cultural contingents (Dymitrow et al., 2019).

These discussions have moved beyond academic debate and have been adopted in widely cited definitions. For instance, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) (2011) sees integration as: "[the] process by which migrants become accepted into society, both as individuals and as groups... [Integration] refers to a two-way process of adaption by migrants and host societies...[and implies] the consideration of the rights and obligations of migrants and host societies, the access to different kinds of services and the labour market, and the identification and respect for a core set of values that bind migrants and host communities in a common purpose" (IOM, 2011). The EU's Framework of Integration, in turn, defines integration as: "a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrant and residents of Member States" (as cited in Carrera & Atger, 2011, p. 4). However, differences of opinion exist even within the definition of immigration as a two-way process. Some scholars place the responsibility equally on both the immigrants and the autochthonous majority (Zapata-Barrero, 2012), whilst others explicitly place the weight of integration on the shoulders of the entire society (Penninx & Garcés Mascareñas, 2016).

In this article, the concept of integration as a two-way process was used to address the gap in knowledge about the 'de facto' process of integration (Penninx et al., 2008), namely to explore and understand how integration operates in practice, rather than to draw assumptions based on public policy.

Integration at the Street-Level

Contemporary research holds that public policy cannot be adequately understood by looking at what is being done in the higher echelons of legislation unless its effects can be assessed "at the street level", namely through the interactions between co-workers and the public they serve (Lipsky, 1980). The "street-level approach" was developed to explore the relative levels of success of the grand social projects initiated in the USA in the 1960s and 1970s which sought to address poverty and build more inclusive and just societies (Brodkin, 2016).

A key research area within this movement involved studies which drew attention to the (then new) fact that a good policy is not enough and that a policy must be translated into action to generate desirable outcomes (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973). Although early scholars had failed to acknowledge that the bulk of policy implementation was done by lower-level organisations, this area of research was picked up by organisational scholars engaged in policy research. They focused on organisations as entities with internal dynamics, and they were less concerned with what organisations should be doing with policy, but rather what they actually did and why (Brodkin, 2016).

The most seminal contribution to this line of inquiry was Michael Lipsky's book entitled Street--Level Bureaucracy (1980). Lipsky had inverted the approach to policy research by recognising that street-level bureaucracies and bureaucrats (SLBs) both delivered and made the policy. SLBs are frontline workers who today work within both traditional government agencies and organisations, including non-profit, for-profit and public/private hybrid organisations (Hupe et al., 2015; Rathgeb Smith, 2003). The diversification of frontline workers reflects attempts to downsize government agencies, and a shift in delivery towards contracting, devolution and outsourcing of policy delivery (Meyers & Vorsager, 2003). As a group, frontline workers enter into regular and direct interactions with citizens and hold power over the services received by the beneficiaries (Tummers & Bekkers, 2014).

Lipsky (1980) considers two key theoretical contentions within the scope of SLBs as generators of public policy: a) the actions of SLBs actually become or represent the policy through their decision-making for the individual citizen; and b) SLBs can 'make policy' by implementing the required actions at their own discretion. Lipsky suggested that "policy conflict is not only expressed as the contention of interest groups, as we have come to expect. It is also located in the struggles between individual workers and citizens who challenge or submit to client processing" (1980, p. xiii). Because policy is enacted through the decision--making processes of individual stakeholders, each possessing their own motives and objectives, decisions are often fraught with difficulty. Therefore, decisions are often contested by individuals, and it is within these struggles that we can place the concept of trust.

Trust

The issue of trust has been extensively explored in the academic literature (Luhmann, 1979; Mayer et al., 1995; Rotter, 1967). Primarily, the literature on trust analysed the dyadic (interpersonal) relationship (Six, 2005) between two persons at the individual level, where A (the trustor) trusts B (the trustee). Later, trust has come to be viewed as a three-part relation, where A trusts B to do 'something' (Hardin, 1993). This perspective introduces the trustor's discretion into the equation, making trust a dynamic factor that influences the decisions made by SLBs.

Of late, forays into understanding trust have moved away from exploring grand social relations of institutions and social groups towards more hidden aspects of social interactions (Örkény & Székelyi, 2009) Firstly, trust can be interpreted as an integral part of social norms and a central pillar of rational behaviour, decision-making and cooperation between individuals and groups (Hardin, 2002). Secondly, trust is seen as less of a concrete goal and more of a belief in other people, which manifests itself as a positive and optimistic approach to others (Örkény & Székelyi, 2009). Thirdly, trust can be viewed as a generalised notion, where emphasis is placed on the moral aspects of trust.

This study departs from the most influential and commonly cited definitions of trust in the literature and defines trust as "[a] psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations of the intentions or behaviour of another" (Rousseau et al., 1998, p. 395). However, Lewicki et al. (1998) suggested that commonly cited definitions present a static view of trust and fail to acknowledge the complexity of relationships where both trust and distrust coexist.

The model of trust/distrust proposed by Lewicki et al. (1998) is represented by two intersecting axes, where trust occupies the vertical axis, and distrust – the horizontal axis) (Fig. 1). Both axes range from low to high, creating four archetypal relationships:

- Low trust/low distrust low-key casual relationships, normally with no grounds for confidence or concern. Over time, mutual understanding between actors develops quickly, giving rise to the establishment of trust or distrust.
- 2. High trust/low distrust only one actor has reason to trust the other actor and no reason to be suspicious. This relationship is characterised by positive experiences, constant interaction and trust based on empathy and identification.
- 3. Low trust/high distrust one actor does not have faith in the other actor and plenty of reasons for being mistrustful based on prior experience with that actor.
- 4. High trust/high distrust one actor vests extreme trust in the other actor in some respects, but not in others.

Nowadays, trust is also explored in the institutional context, namely as a relationship between two strangers that is forged in the context of a specific interaction. The implication is that individuals intrinsically trust each other based on their position in an institution or because the interaction takes place within a stable institutional context (McKnight & Chervany, 2000). Nooteboom (2007) has argued that institutional trust is localised at a macro-level, namely within the wider communities of nations, regions, industries, or religions. However, this type of trust is built by 'go-betweens' (Nooteboom, 2007) or SLBs (Lipsky, 1980) through street-level interactions.

CASE STUDY

Sweden has a long history of immigration which peaked in the 2010s. This surge posed several challenges for the country, not only by placing a burden on the welfare system and state-funded healthcare, but also by forcing Swedish citizens to integrate immigrants into their communities. During the refugee crisis of the mid-2010s, Sweden became a refuge for more than 80,000 refugees and asylum seekers, and it took in the highest number of refugees per capita than any other country in Europe in 2015 (Eurostat, 2019). Between 2002 and 2022, the proportion of foreign-born persons residing in Sweden rose to almost 2.15 million. In other words, in 2022, foreign-born citizens made up around 20% of Sweden's population, while the number of citizens with foreign ancestry (having at least one foreign-born parent) was just over 25% (Statista, 2023).

In view of the above, the present study focused on a three-year EU-funded municipal project (2017–2020) in a large Swedish city which sought to address these issues through a different approach. The overarching aim of the project was to create conditions for green business development and innovation by harnessing unused skills, initiatives, and natural resources (green city areas) for the sustainable development of local communities and a low-carbon society (Dymitrow & Ingelhag, 2020). However, this innovative project stirred controversy and attracted considerable criticism from the media, both before and during its course. In essence, the project's focus on urban farming, animal husbandry, cooking, and 'rural development' activities involving unskilled labour from developing countries led to allegations that the proposed measures fostered cultural stereotypes about immigrants, including territorial stigmatisation, resource wasting and local disillusionment (Korn, 2017; Verdicchio, 2017a, 2017b). The ensuing criticism and media frenzy were partly instigated by the manager of the SLO, which is analysed in this study, and the resulting controversy gave rise to the Green *Integration* sub-project (as a form of appearement).

The *Green Integration* sub-project launched by the SLO was one of the largest Swedish projects that was

a part of a wider EU-funded scheme. *Green Integration* was designed as an outreach programme to assist in the integration of newly arrived immigrants by aiding them in creating jobs in the area of 'green business development'. In this study, the personal data of the involved actors were not disclosed to safeguard their professional integrity and the sensitive nature of the discussed relations.

The SLO consisted of a Volunteer Centre (VC), a self-declared multicultural meeting place for residents of all genders, nationalities, religions and sexual orientations. According to the VC staff, approximately 125 people visited the centre at the beginning of the study in autumn 2018. The gender split was approximately 50-50 men and women. Approximately half of the visitors were over 40^2 . Although more than half of the visitors had formal education, their education lasted only two to six years. Only one in five found employment that required some form of training. Only 50% of visitors had a permanent residence permit with the right to live and work in Sweden. The remaining 50% were refugees whose residency applications were being processed. As refugees, they were not entitled to work (legally) or participate in other integration activities, such as free Swedish language training or internships.

Over time, the VC manager became strongly committed to the VC's visitors to integrate immigrants into Swedish society and vested strong trust in the centre's beneficiaries. The manager is considered to be a gatekeeper, and gaining the manager's trust has become a barrier to initiating any systematic integration projects. The *Green Integration* project team comprised representatives from local government agencies, business development platforms and the academia. All actors involved in *Green Integration* are detailed in Table 1.

² These are only estimates as the exact data were not provided by the VC, partly because the visitors were unwilling to disclose their personal information in fear that the disclosure would compromise their residency applications and legal status in the country.

METHODS

In this study, a street-level approach was used to capture the gap between policy provisions and outcomes. Policy analyses, such as MIPEX (2022), are only able to determine the degree of agreement between the policy rhetoric and measurable outcomes (Eurostat, 2022; OECD, 2016). A street-level approach provides the missing information in the middle and explores what happens at the stage of policy implementation. Therefore, this approach fills in the gap between policy and outcome (Brodkin, 2015).

The key objective of street-level analysis is to consider policy implementation through internal logic, rather than the logic of command and control (Brodkin, 2008). To achieve this objective, this study relied on non-participant observation in the SLO case study. Non-participant observation enables researchers to analyse both the providers and the recipients in the context of the examined interactions (Brodkin, 2008). Non-participant observation was selected as a data collection method for two key reasons. Firstly, to explore the processes at play and the relationships that exist between stakeholders, with as little interference as possible in the process itself (O'Reilly, 2009). Secondly, to describe the characteristics of such relationships which may be difficult to identify for the stakeholders and may not be evident in self-reporting data collection methods, such as surveys or interviews (Lui & Maitlis, 2012).

Data collection

The data collection process lasted nine months, and it covered the entire life cycle of *Green Integration*. Multiple data sources were combined, including at least 20 hours of observation at formal meetings organised during *Green Integration*, more than 60 interactions and conversations with at least 13 *Green Integration* actors or groups of actors (Table 1), as well as extensive fieldnotes (auxiliary contextual information) during the research process. Therefore, the research followed a multipronged approach which, according to Yin (2009), is appropriate when the goal

is to garner insights into the behavioural aspects (from observations) and cognitive dimensions (from guided interactions).

The actors involved in *Green Integration* were the unit of the analysis. The challenge was to explore and extend 'the analysis from an inherently individual level to the organisational level' (Zaheer et al., 1998, p. 141). Green Integration was a project and, consequently, an organisation in its own right (cf. Tahvilzadeh, 2020) despite the fact that it was a temporary and smaller-scale programme in terms of budget, staffing, and objectives.

The research consisted of three phases of data collection. In the first phase, a researcher attended formal *Green Integration* meetings as a passive observer. Non-participation was selected as a research method to reduce the likelihood of the researcher's involvement in changing the behaviour of actors and participants, which is a potential risk during participant observation (Handley, 2008). During these meetings, the researcher collected as much information as possible in the form of extensive fieldnotes.

The second phase of the study (from week 7 of the project) involved observations of interpersonal dynamics. Phase two differed from phase one in that it focused on relationships of trust that were (or were not) present within the project, as well as events or interactions that impacted upon such relationships. This shift was due to events that transpired in week 7 and demonstrated that interpersonal relationships were a critical dimension in need of much closer inspection. For example, there could be clues, such as the extent to which the actors allowed each other to make decisions or work independently. Again, fieldnotes were kept to enable the researchers to both critically reflect upon and contextualise the interactions that occurred.

Conversations with the actors involved in the project were initiated in the third interactive phase of the study. These included both spontaneous interactions and more formalised discussions, such as open questions about interpersonal relationships and processes. Based on the approach proposed by Serva et al. (2005), open-ended questions were framed

within informal interactions, which enabled the actors to speak freely about how their relationships with other actors had developed. The aim of these interactions was to ascertain the extent to which specific events or behaviours contributed to the development of trust relationships. These interactions were also initiated to confirm or undermine the assumptions formulated based on the observations. Triangulation was achieved by collating documents related to *Green Integration*, such as activity reports that were generated on a weekly basis by the facilitator of the *Green Integration* project ("Sara").

Ethical considerations

During the initial meeting, the SLO's manager ("Ulla") and the Green Integration project leader and coordinator ("Malin") agreed on the extent to which the researchers would have access to the SLO. The SLO staff, Green Integration actors, and the SLO visitors were made aware that the project was being observed by researchers, whereupon the appropriate introductions were made, and all questions were answered. Furthermore, since the character of data collection changed through the three phases of research, the researchers reintroduced their activities to the SLO staff, Green Integration actors and the SLO visitors, and once again sought their consent to continue the project. Pseudonyms were used to maintain the actors' anonymity. The pseudonyms were selected randomly, but remained faithful to the actors' cultural identities (see Table 1 for an overview).

Data analysis

During the first phase of the study, systematicity was achieved by organising the fieldnotes into memos (Barley, 1990; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The observed events were recorded in a chronological order (Mills et al., 2010). In this approach, each event or interaction is regarded as an opportunity to discover underlying themes. The data were also collated in a chronological order to derive meaning from their temporal context relative to events that occurred simultaneously or after the event in question. The second and third interactive

phases of the study focused on identifying specific actions that could serve as beacons of organisational culture, for example, the trust dynamics that existed between *Green Integration* actors (cf. Six & Skinner, 2010).

The fieldnotes and memos from informal conversations were coded thematically. For example, codes could include information on whether trust was being built or eroded, whether the actors were present as trustors or trustees, and whether hierarchical relationships of trust were being manifested. This process led to the recognition that small and seemingly insignificant actions at the individual level affected larger actions, and smaller actions were constantly revisited to understand their impact on the relationships between the actors. The documents collected during the research process were not coded in the same manner, but they were used to support the claims made by project team members and to validate the assertions and assumptions made by the researchers in the analysis stage.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

As part of the framework analysis, significant trust events were identified, namely interactions or incidents that were deemed to have an impact on a trust relationship. Significant events, including the time of the project at which they occurred and the trust relationships they influenced, are presented in Table 2. Each significant event (as per Table 2) is discussed in detail below.

This section presents an in-depth analysis of the nuanced and seemingly insignificant interactions that took place at the micro-level yet, but exerted a significant influence not only on trust relationships in the *Green Integration* project, but also on the motives and rationale behind the decisions made by project members as trustors and trustees.

A. Project inception – weeks 1–3

Malin visited the SLO to discuss the launch of *Green Integration* with Ulla, despite the fact that Malin had no previous personal involvement with Ulla and no formal experience in dealing with migrant integration. A historical relationship had existed between Malin's organisation (the municipality) and Ulla's SLO, and this relationship was characterised by lack of trust on Ulla's behalf. Malin's predecessor was responsible for the events that led to distrust. Malin's predecessor was removed from the project on disciplinary charges, and Malin was thrown into a project that she was not qualified to lead. Despite the above, the interaction was successful, and Ulla granted initial "access" to the migrants. Trust was derived from the fact that project had an academic basis (which was true), rather than the fact that it was a part of a larger EU programme (which was also true), of which Ulla had been highly critical.

B. Miscommunicated group meeting – week 3

Malin arranged a follow-up meeting to discuss the finer details of *Green Integration*. Armin had invited around 50 non-Swedish-speaking visitors from diverse cultural backgrounds to the meeting. The result was chaotic because Malin was not prepared to host such a meeting and no interpreters were present.

The SLO were responsible for inviting participants to the meetings. Therefore, the *Green Integration* team had very little influence over the messages being relayed to the participants. The lack of effective communication was reflected in the questions asked by the participants, which centred around offers of employment, rather than the services offered by *Green Integration*.

Moreover, this seemingly minor event laid the ground for mistrust in communication between the SLO, *Green Integration* and the participants. Given the diversity of languages spoken within the SLO, only one person (Armin) could speak four languages and effectively communicate with other project members and participants. However, Armin's inability to ensure transparency in the translated messages led to confusion and mistrust.

C. the Meeting with an Arabic-speaking group – week 7

Three orientation meetings were held at the beginning of *Green Integration*, each with a different language group. The purpose of each meeting was to share information about green business development and the opportunities offered by *Green Integration*.

The first two meetings (group 1 and group 2) were facilitated by Sara, Hamed (Hamed was the second project member who was tasked with introducing *Green Integration* to the SLO), and an interpreter ("Farah"). Farah was external to the project and the SLO. She offered her services free of charge and had deep knowledge and expertise in the field of integration and business development (she was officially recognised by the municipality for her work in this field).

The first meeting involved Arabic speakers (group 1). Ten participants were present at this meeting: six males (one aged 20-40, four aged 41-60, and one aged 60+) and four females (one aged 20-40, two aged 41-60 and one aged 60+)³. The number of questions that were addressed to Hamed suggested that the participants vested greater trust in Hamed than Sara. This difference could be attributed solely to gender, but even more questions were addressed to Farah. Therefore, the trust expressed by group 1 was deemed to be related to the knowledge and ability possessed by Hamed and Farah.

D. Meeting with a Kurdish-speaking group – week 7

The second meeting was organised for Kurdish speakers (group 2). This group consisted of ten males (eight aged 20–40 and two aged 41–60) and five females, (four aged 20–40 and one aged 60+). The meeting followed the same format as the previous one; however, this time Ulla was also present. Again, more questions were addressed to Hamed and Farah

³ The participants' age was estimated by the researchers because the relevant information was not provided by the SLO or the participants themselves.

than Sara despite Sara's attempts to identify as a migrant and build bonds with group 2, which was unsuccessful. Persons with a migrant background do not necessarily have shared affinity or experience with other migrants, as the experience of migrants is highly diverse. Therefore, Sara's attempts to identify as "a migrant too" did little to build trust with the migrants, and perhaps only served to signal her lack of cultural sensitivity when dealing with migrants.

The most conspicuous part of the meeting was Ulla's verbal assault of Farah (in front of the participants) for distributing pamphlets to the attendees. The pamphlets contained contact information to the mentoring organisation where Farah was employed. Ulla accused Farah of advertising her own commercial activities⁴. Moreover, Ulla was aware of Farah's dubious history of funding integration activities (redacted) and was suspicious of Farah's motives. Whilst Ulla's response could be regarded as characteristic of a gatekeeper or a matriarch protecting the migrants from Farah's unscrupulous activities, another explanation could be that Ulla was hoping to retain migrants as "customers" who financed the SLO's operations.

E. Gap between meetings – weeks 7–12

Despite attempts to ensure the continuity and consistency of the SLO's activities, it took five weeks to arrange the next meeting, this time with Somali-speaking visitors (group 3). The meeting was held despite Malin's multiple reminders instructing Sara to continue the process of trust-building with the SLO, with reiterative positive interactions. Due to the multitude of these requests, a low trust/low distrust relationship had initially developed between the

three parties. Malin had substantial previous positive interactions with Sara to establish high trust or high distrust within the relationship.

F. First report - week 8

An initial report on the meetings with group 1 and group 2 was developed. The internal report focused on the trust relationship with Ulla and placed preliminary findings within a theoretical framework. The report was forwarded to Sara and Malin. This event prompted Sarah to adopt a defiant and resistant attitude. Although Sara acknowledged the report's recommendations, she questioned her role in *Green Integration* and, presumably, the impact that the report would have on her working conditions and environment.

G. Meeting with a Somali-speaking group – week 12

Five weeks after the first group meetings, a further presentation was organised for Somali-speaking participants (group 3). The meeting was attended by nineteen women (three aged 20-40, twelve aged 41-60, and two aged 60+) and five men (all aged 41-60). Again, the meeting was facilitated by Hamed and Sara and followed the same format as the previous meetings. A male interpreter (Yasir) was employed. Yasir provided a one-off service and had no prior knowledge of the SLO, group 3, Green Integration, or its team members. The use of a male interpreter had a negative impact on the meeting outcome because most participants were women. The women were mistrustful of the interpreter because in Somali culture, women are discouraged from interacting with strange men in a public setting. The above testifies to Hamed's and Sara's cultural insensitivity because Hamed booked the interpreter and Sara did not question his actions (they shared an office). Thus, Sara trusted Hamed despite his lack of competence or awareness.

⁴ Farah was employed in an organisation that offered free business mentoring to migrants, including the newly arrived and those far from the labour market. Therefore, the organisation was deemed relevant (and complimentary) to the *Green Integration* sub-project and the SLO visitors. However, Ulla saw the organisation as competition and its involvement as peddling of commercial activities.

H. Escalation to management – weeks 12–27

From week 12 onwards, Sara expressed her concern with the management that she felt under pressure to complete work that was beyond her job description. The concern stemmed from an inability to engage the participants. Sara's reaction was perceived by Malin as an attempt to avoid responsibility for the potential failure of Green Integration, which made her actions self-servicing and not in the interests of *Green Integration*, its participants or the SLO. This escalation to management broke the trust (if it ever existed) between Sara and Malin. However, the trust between Ulla and Sara remained because Ulla was not aware of the fracture in the relationship between Sara and Malin, and was thus still able to use Green Integration and Sara's presence to press her own agenda, namely to increase funding for the SLO.

I. Cancelled group meetings – week 17

From weeks 12 to 17, Sara communicated with Ulla and Armin to arrange further group meetings. There were multiple issues with Armin's availability and Ulla's inability (attributed to her lack of language skills, competence and will) to invite participants to *Green Integration* meetings. Whilst a mutual level of trust may have existed between Armin and Sara, Armin's Armin's inability to ensure transparency in the translated messages led Sara to question what was really being communicated to the participants, and why.

J. Change of engagement tactic – week 20

To prevent the breakdown of the hard-fought relationship between Ulla and Malin, Malin was keen to try a different approach to keep *Green Integration* alive. This was motivated by the lack of communication from group participants, and the problems experienced by Sara in her attempts to arrange subsequent meetings. Malin was acutely

aware that Ulla's previous criticism had been aimed at how the projects were launched: promises were made, the migrants were engaged only fleetingly, and they were left abruptly without any contingency planning (cf. Tahvilzadeh, 2020). Therefore, Malin wanted *Green Integration* to succeed, at least in Ulla's eyes, to avoid another media debacle criticising *Green Integration* and putting the spotlight on Malin. This was particularly pertinent to Malin, given the fate of her predecessor who was fired for mismanaging the project.

Malin suggested that Sara attend the SLO weekly for two hours to ensure that *Green Integration* remained visible in the SLO, in hope that consistent action would contribute to trust between Sara, Ulla, and the participants. However, Sara arrived at the SLO at the time the participants were attending obligatory Swedish language lessons; therefore, engagement was not possible. Even though Sara was aware of the misscheduling, she continued to come at the same time and spent her time idle.

K. Women's group meeting - weeks 21-24

As part of their engagement with another project, the researchers welcomed a colleague from Africa to observe *Green Integration* in action. The ambition was that an external observer, who had experience with women's groups and labour market integration projects, would be able to provide feedback and suggestions on how to better engage the SLO visitors (cf. Kotze & Dymitrow, 2022).

A meeting was to be organised with women from group 3 (hereinafter referred to as 'group 4' due to changed context). Sara was reluctant to organise this meeting, claiming that she did not understand the reasoning behind it, despite the fact that she had received detailed verbal and written instructions from Malin. As the supervisor, Malin did not expect Sara to question the reasons for changing the activities initiated as part of *Green Integration*. This further eroded Malin's trust in Sara.

L. Engagement reporting - week 24

To ensure that Sara fully understood her role, Malin asked Sara to develop a weekly action plan detailing her engagement with the SLO visitors. Sara refused, and all paperwork that she completed focused on denouncing her low levels of engagement with participants. By that time, Malin's trust in Sara had completely eroded.

However, recognising that Ulla still had some trust in Sara, Malin allowed Sara to participate in the SLO and *Green Integration*. Without Sara's involvement, however limited, Malin would have had to pull the plug on the project. This would have left Malin as a sitting duck and expecting not only a potential backlash from her employers (the municipality), but also, given previous experiences, a scathing media attack from Ulla. Moreover, given the issues with Malin's predecessor, her position as a substitute project leader in *Green Integration* meant that Malin could not allocate sufficient time to the project. Therefore, she reverted to acting as a coordinator with minimal hands-on duties, leaving Sara to bear the brunt of the workload.

M. Women's group meeting - week 24

Group 4 meeting was attended by twelve women, eleven Somali and one Ethiopian (ten aged 20-40; and two aged 60+). Similarly to the meetings with groups 1-3, an interpreter was needed. Once again, Sara had booked an external male interpreter ("Filsan"). This meeting witnessed the highest level of engagement between Sara and group 4, with both Sara and Filsan sitting in a roundtable format alongside the women throughout the meeting. The high level of trust between Sara and the participants was an anomaly in this case study, given that a male interpreter, Filsan, was present. Filsan's involvement violated cultural norms because Somali women are discouraged from publicly interacting with unrelated men. The above could be attributed to the fact that Hamed did not attend the meeting and that Sara sat with the women (and did not stand in front of them), which shifted the power relations and created

a more informal setting in which the women could converse openly. Despite this relative success, Sara was reluctant to continue with the meetings and increase the number of participants. Sara passed off the meeting as her own initiative to Ulla, but did not want to include her "own migrants" from another project in *Green Integration*.

N. Meeting with the gatekeeper – week 25

As part of the *Green Integration* follow-up, Malin visited Ulla to discuss the project and Sara's engagement during her weekly visits. Ulla reflected positively on Sara's weekly visits as she was now able to include *Green Integration* as an ongoing "integration activity" in her monthly report to the local government (who were funding the project based on such activities) without any greater level of engagement from herself or her staff. Ulla also inquired about Sara's duties during the awkwardly timed visiting hours at the SLO. This opinion was compounded by Malin's own observations that Sara was not engaged or productive during her visits.

Throughout the entire project, Ulla seemed content to sit back passively, despite the fact that she was the main culprit behind the scathing criticism of previous migrant integration projects in the area. Although their relationship could not be described as trustworthy, Ulla was happy for Sara and Malin to continue with Green Integration because the project would testify to the SLO's success in integrating migrants. Ulla's only active engagement in the project was her aggressive stance towards Farah, despite the fact that Farah arguably offered the only realistic chance for Green Integration to change the outcomes for migrants. This demonstrates that Ulla was unable to get over the previous incident, which shattered her trust in Farah, even though it also shattered the success of any subsequent projects.

O. Disbandment of the project – week 35

Due to Sarah's failure to engage with the participants, the absence of new events, lack of meaningful reporting and general distrust, *Green Integration*

stagnated and eventually self-died. No measurable outcomes for integration were noted, despite the fact that the project had absorbed considerable resources. To our knowledge, none of the observed migrants received a job in "green business development" or any other sector for that matter. The SLO was eventually disbanded in mid-2020 due to insufficient funding and overall lack of efficiency, and this decision was partly accelerated by the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic.

DISCUSSION

The definition of generalised trust was used in the description and analysis of the results, whereas this section focuses on three different trust relationships to discuss in detail the extent to which various trust relationships affect the success of immigrant integration in practice. A microscale analysis can provide valuable insights about why a highly lauded integration policy does not always generate measurable outcomes that are held in equally high esteem.

Trust relationship one – Trust between SLOs

The first key trust relationship involved Ulla and external partners or collaborators, such as the wider project team. Within the project team, the trust relationships between Ulla and Sara and between Ulla and Farah had the greatest impact on the success of Green Integration. Gatekeepers are individuals who act as mediators between researchers or project teams and participants and who control access to a particular group. Gatekeepers exercise control by exerting or holding positions of power and trust within these communities (Clark, 2010; McAreavey & Das, 2013). They hold power to both allow access to communities and influence their participation. However, they also have a keen interest in ensuring that the granted access and participation do not jeopardise their positions of trust and power within these communities (Clark, 2010).

The issue of gaining access was a recurring theme in the interactions between the *Green Integration* project group and Ulla. Initially, Ulla acted as a traditional gatekeeper by seeking to protect the immigrants from a vulnerable situation (McAreavey & Das, 2013). The vulnerability of the situation stemmed from Ulla's conviction that projects are often fleeting, lack follow-through or follow-up, and provide no clear and tangible outcomes for the immigrant participants (Clark, 2008). However, both the SLO and Sara referred to immigrant groups as 'my immigrants'.

The reasoning behind this ownership claim is that the SLO relies on external funding which is allocated based on the number of immigrants who are registered by the SLO for language training and integration services. Due to funding implications, Ulla was not willing to collaborate with other local SLOs to share knowledge and resources. As an SLB, Ulla chose services that would be offered to 'their' immigrants based on the allocated funds, rather than services that were in the immigrants' best interests. This was further evident in Ulla's treatment of Farah who was a highly skilled and experienced business mentor for the immigrant population, but was verbally abused by Ulla and hounded out of the premises, never to return. Sara was equally possessive of a group of women immigrants from a different project. She prevented this group from meeting other Somali women at the SLO. This possessive attitude was an attempt to demonstrate their abilities and professional skills, and thus justify their position within both Green *Integration* and the wider EU-funded project.

The competition between SLOs and their stakeholders, and Ulla's and Sara's sense of ownership towards 'their' immigrants was related to the acquisition of funds. In this case study, immigrant labour-market integration projects were funded from diverse sources, including the state (municipal or regional councils), government agencies (such as the Public Employment Service) or large external funding bodies (such as the European Social Fund or the European Development Fund), funding is directly related to the interests of the funder (cf. Diedrich & Hellgren, 2018). Therefore, funding is sporadic

and often directed to specific purposes and specific groups of people. These stringent criteria imply that SLOs are paid per immigrant registered with their organisation, more specifically per person enrolled in Swedish-language lessons at the SLO (Mukhtar et al., 2015).

This funding system has created a competitive environment between SLOs and SLBs whose operations are funded based on the number of immigrants participating in the organised activities. As a result, immigrants become commodified, and SLOs and SLBs become possessive and protective over immigrants as their resource. These competitive and possessive interactions are high in trust as well as high in distrust. A high trust/high distrust relationship is characterised by multifaceted interdependence, where each party holds a separate, but shared objective (Lewicki et al., 1998). In this case study, this is exemplified by SLOs which raise funds by attracting immigrants, whereas an integrated society is the priority goal of all SLOs concerned with immigrants.

Trust relationship two – Trust between Green Integration team members

Multiple studies have suggested that trust between project team members and collaboration have a direct impact on a project's success (e.g., Buvik & Rolfson, 2015). Furthermore, studies have shown that the top indicators for team member performance are based on interpersonal relationships (Ibrahim et al., 2015). According to Cooke-Davies (2002), all success factors identified in the literature are rooted in humanrelated dimensions of a project. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that human-related aspects are central to a project's success, because projects are delivered by people, not processes or systems (cf. Lipsky, 1980). In this study, the human-related aspect of trust was explored as the key and underplayed determinant of Green Integration's success (cf. Gil et al., 2011; Munns, 1995). Given the singular case-study approach and a small project team, the trust relationships

established by only one individual, Sara, exerted a much greater influence on the project's success than the relationships built by other team members.

The pushback regarding professional responsibilities was highlighted by Sara's refusal to provide a programme of integration activities at the SLO during her weekly engagements. Although Sarah's refusal did not directly prevent immigrants from accessing integration services, the immigrants were offered fewer services and activities than *Green Integration* had aimed to provide. Therefore, Sara's discretionary decisions were motivated by personal gain, which influenced the way policy recommendations were delivered to the immigrants visiting the SLO. The above could also be interpreted as in the context of employee resilience, where employees make decisions as part of a coping mechanism to deal with their work context (Kuntz et al., 2017; Okojie et al., 2023).

Sara's choice of timing for the weekly engagements was poor, given the number of visitors at the SLO at that time and their engagement in alternative activities. Even though Sara was aware of this fact, the timing was not changed for weeks on end. As a result, the interactions between Sara and SLO visitors were severely reduced. Again, the choices made by the SLB affected the range of services offered to the immigrant visitors. Poor timing, combined with the lack of a structured programme to both inform and encourage participants, can be interpreted as a reactive and one-way response.

It can be argued that Sara's poor service delivery was highly dependent on the relationships between *Green Integration* team members, rather than her relationship with the immigrants themselves. A low trust/high distrust relationship had developed in the last stages of the study. This type of a trust relationship is extremely uncomfortable in an interdependent work environment. Distrust relationships are inherent in any project or work environment, but they should be 'compartmentalised' to promote the emergence of other trust and maintain beneficial stakeholder interactions (Lewicki et al., 1998).

Trust relationship three – Trust vested by immigrants in the sub-project team

According to Misztal (1996), generalised trust is a critical component of social integration, as well as an important measure of social cohesion (Stolle & Harell, 2012). Given the 'migration crisis' and the resulting multi- or super-diverse societies in Europe, the impact of increasing diversity on social cohesion needs to be discussed. Stolle and Harell (2012) have argued that generalised trust levels are not only lower among immigrants, but that trust also becomes suppressed within the majority populations as they face new diverse environments. Putnam (2007) suggested that at least in the short-term, social solidarity, social capital and social trust will ultimately decrease among citizens within a newly multi- or super-diverse society.

In this case study, Sara's decisions affected the immigrants' trust in the project team at large by limiting the services that were made available to the visitors and the SLO. For example, Sara recruited Yasir, a male interpreter, for group 3 and group 4. This demonstrates a lack of cultural awareness when dealing with gender issues (cf. Kotze et al., 2021). The resulting lack of honesty from the women in group 3 and group 4 further reduced Sara's ability to provide suitable services.

Furthermore, distrust was generated through the perceived actions of the immigrant participants who told Sara and Farah that they had no interest in *Green Integration* and that they attended the meeting only to maintain their living allowance. Such statements undermine the trust relationship between the project team members and the immigrants because they cast doubt on the participants' motives for attending the meeting. These attitudes also prompted team members to question the purpose of *Green Integration*. For instance, Sara expressed her concern that none of the team's efforts would be translated into the overall success of *Green Integration*.

The researchers did not expect the immigrants to participate in *Green Integration* because the Swedish integration policy is non-mandatory, and immigrants are required to attend 'integration activities' only

to keep their monthly welfare payments. However, Wiesbrock (2011) noted that although integration activities are not mandatory, they hold financial benefits. Integration activities may not be obligatory in Sweden, but the presence of financial benefits points to the mandatory nature of integration activities in most EU Member States (Wallace Goodman & Wright, 2015).

The above affects the trust and distrust dynamics which are ever-present in organisational relationships. This study demonstrated that the interplay of trust and distrust in Green Integration had a greater impact on the project's trajectory than the immigrants themselves. Similar observations have been made in previous research on intra-organisational relationships which revealed that such relationships are plagued by suspicions from the beginning, with stakeholders questioning each other's motives and ambitions within the collaboration (Lewicki et al., 1998). Therefore, the challenge lies in the stakeholders' and project managers' ability to simultaneously manage distrust and build trust within the team, and to ensure that the trust dynamics do not affect the outcome, in this case, for the immigrants.

CONCLUSION

Integration is a complex social process during which newcomers or minorities are incorporated into the social structure of the host society. In the current age of migration, explorations of how to best conduct integration, both to the benefit of host societies and the migrants, remain an important yet unresolved sociological issue. Although research on the role of human agency in integration processes has gained significant attention through literature on values, self-efficacy and citizenship, it has remained in the background in the European context amidst research on systems thinking and complexity science.

The reason for the above is the continued preoccupation with integration as a phenomenon that takes place at the macro level. And while this is true if we see the end results, the fundamentals of integration are set and often decided upon already

at the street level. Acknowledging the above, this paper delved into a seemingly 'trivial' case of an immigrant integration project in a street-level organisation (SLO). Using methods such as non-participant observation, chronological ordering and framework analysis, we were able to follow the project from inception to disbandment, and provide a different analysis than that provided by the official reports. Instead of integration efforts, our study revealed an array of unfortunate circumstances, where serious deficiencies in ability, benevolence and integrity undermined the delicate trust dynamics at play. In this spectrum, we have identified three areas that warrant further research: immigrant commodification, lack of cultural awareness, and exploitation of the project format, where time pressure, an inherent component of the project format, undermines the establishment of workable professional trust relationships.

We conclude that integration failure is not about the immigrants themselves, but rather about the superstructure of the project, its situatedness within the greater context of integration efforts and, most notably, the personal characteristics of service providers. Instead of integration, we witnessed a scramble for immigrants as commodities, exploitation of the project format for personal gain (idleness, procrastination, routinisation) and a general lack of cultural awareness, all of which undermined the delicate trust relations at play. By recognising that integration is a broader psychosocial process, i.e., more than just a tick-box, it can be concluded that trust and its intricate dynamics seem to be an underplayed dimension of integration. This could be one of the reasons why Sweden is lauded for having the best integration policy in Europe, while exhibiting some of the poorest results. A better understanding of this intricate relationship is essential to garner public support for more critical attitudes to processes that unfold at the street level because this issue – as evidence shows - cannot be left to chance.

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APPENDIX 1

High trust Characterised by: hope; faith; confidence; assurance; initiative	 High value congruence Interdependence is promoted Opportunities are pursued New initiatives 	Trust is verified Relationships are highly segmented and bounded Opportunities are pursued and downside risks/vulnerabilities are continually monitored		
Low trust Characterised by: no hope; no faith: no confidence; passivity; hesitance	 Casual acquaintances Limited interdependence Bounded, 'arms-length' transactions Professional courtesy 	Undesirable eventualities are expected and feared Harmful motives are assumed Interdependence is managed Pre-emption. Best offense is good defence Paranoia		
	Low distrust Characterised by: no fear; absence of scepticism; absence of cynicism; low monitoring; non-vigilance	High distrust Characterised by: fear; scepticism; cynicism; weariness and watchfulness; vigilance		

Fig. 1. Trust/distrust relationships *Source*: Lewicki et al. (1998).

Table 1. Actors involved in the *Green Integration* sub-project

Association	Title (pseudonym)	Description	
VC team	Gatekeeper (Ulla)	Manager of the VC and the main gatekeeper in the project (female)	
	Staff member (Armin)	Acting deputy manager of the VC (male)	
Project team	Team member 1 (Hamed)	Consultant from the local office of a municipal business incubator (male)	
	Team member 2 (Sara)	Staff member of an EU-funded project with experience in sustainable food production in the locality (female)	
	Team member 3 (Malin)	Project leader and coordinator, liaison to business development	
Interpreters	Interpreter 1 (Farah)	Interpreter with past experience working with the gatekeeper and the VC (female)	
	Interpreter 2 (Yasir)	External interpreter (male)	
	Interpreter 3 (Filsan)	External interpreter (male)	
Participants	Group 1	Arabic-speaking participants (male and female)	
	Group 2	Kurdish-speaking participants (male and female)	
	Group 3	Somali-speaking participants (male and female)	
	Group 4	Somali-speaking women (female)	
	Participants	Visitors present at the initial (miscommunicated) group meeting (male and female)	

Table 2. Chronological ordering of trust events

	Event	Week	Low trust / low distrust	High trust / low distrust	Low trust / high distrust	High trust / high distrust
A.	Project inception	1-5			Malin-Ulla	
В.	Miscommunicated group meeting	3	participants-Malin	participants-Ulla		
C.	Meeting with an Arabic-speaking group	7	group 1-Farah group 1-Hamed	group 1-Ulla		Malin-Farah
D.	Meeting with a Kurdish-speaking group	7	group 2-Ulla group 2-Farah group 2-Hamed		Malin-Farah	Ulla-Farah
E.	Gap between meetings	7-12	Malin-Sara			
F.	First report	8				
G.	Meeting with a Somali-speaking group	12	group 3-Sara			group 3-Yasir
Н.	Escalation to management	12-27				Sara-Malin
I.	Cancelled group meetings	17			Sara-Mohammed	
J.	Change of engagement tactic	20				Malin-Sara
K.	Initiation of women's group meeting	21-24		Ulla-Sara		
L.	Engagement reporting	24				Malin-Sara
M.	Women's group meeting	24			group 4-Sara	
N.	Meeting with the gatekeeper	25			Ulla-Sara Malin-Sara	
O.	Disbandment of project	35	Ulla-Sara		Malin-Sara	