

University of Jyväskylä

INDEPENDENCE AND INVOLVEMENT

**An Actor-Perspective on Building Intercultural Local
Societies in a Globalised, Postmodern World**

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<i>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</i> One of the biggest challenges facing Western European contemporary societies is how to build social cohesion on the local level, responding to challenges of globalisation and postmodernity. This thesis is based on Touraine’s notion of the <i>subject</i> , linked to the model of independence and involvement in face-strategies as described by Scollon and Scollon, and thus it aims at exploring the <i>actor-perspective</i> on building intercultural local societies. That is achieved through a qualitative case study performed in the suburb of Tensta (Stockholm) based on eleven theme interviews with so called “fire-souls” concerning (1) prerequisites for becoming an independent and involved actor in the society; (2) reasons they see for other people not being as involved and; (3) how they experience institutional support they get or do not get from politicians and civil servants. This is analysed and put into a model illustrating possible entry points for getting in the “activist’s circle” as well as possible exit points due to e.g. disappointments or lack of institutional support. The research helps to identify and understand the process for people to become actors or non-actors in relation to the society and points at serious institutional and political problems that gives food for thought concerning local organisation and models for funding and decision making.	
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Motivation for the Study

One of the biggest challenges facing Western European contemporary societies is how to live together in a multicultural and multi-religious reality, and how to learn not only to live together, but even to act and interact as citizens (and non-citizens) in a democratic society. A keyword here is social cohesion – the horizontal links and mutual commitments in society that keep it together. The French sociologist Alain Touraine states that the question on how to rebuild social bounds; “*Wendung*”, is the main preoccupation of contemporary sociology.¹

The theoretical perspectives embedding my study are mainly the realities and discourses on globalisation and postmodernity. The globalisation of the economy under neo-liberal premises has brought about big migration flows and extended social exclusion.² In many European countries the support for xenophobic political parties such as Jürg Haider’s *Freiheitspartei* in Austria, Jean-Marie Le Pen’s *Front National* in France and Pia Kaersgard’s *Dansk Folkeparti* in Denmark is remarkably high. People who vote for them are probably frightened by the quick transformation of their society to a multi-cultural and multi-religious one - but perhaps mostly they are attracted by hearing a politician speak of solidarity with fixed borders and a clear idea about identity that incites longing back for a world that at least in distance seems easier to comprehend.

Postmodernity implies that big ideologies and clear answers are left behind, leaving us a fragmented reality where it seems more difficult than ever to build social cohesion and collective identity around a political project.³ This tendency has been reinforced after the

¹ Lecture by Alain Touraine in Jyväskylä University 19/11 2002

² Portes (1998)

³ Bauman (1997)

end of the Cold War and today the waterline is said to be not between the political affiliations of capitalism and socialism but between Christians and Muslims.⁴ Without adhering to the too-often-quoted doomsday prophecy of Samuel Huntington (1996) concerning “Clashes of Civilizations”, one can not disclaim that there is a move from political identifications towards ethnical or religious. In a world where in fact every society is multicultural this is an obvious problem. We desperately need to search for other strategies for building common identities than ethnicity.

In his book “*Can We Live Together? Equality and Difference*”⁵ Touraine elaborates on the dilemma for society and the individual how to respond to both an increasingly global market and at the same time increasingly fragmented cultural identities. He suggests that the only possible entity that could bridge and possibly overcome this division is *the subject*, the capacity of human beings to be *actors* in the world and in their own life, and to create a space between the ethnic enclaves and the global capitalistic market. The experience of being a subject is therefore also the basis for our ability to be open to a diverse “we” and Touraine sees it as a condition for true intercultural communication.⁶

Touraine (2002) describes the subject as a *quest for personal unity and freedom from communitarian culture* as well as *commitment to social transformation and respect for others*. The sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (1997) puts it in the words of *liberty and difference* on the one hand and *solidarity* on the other. The intercultural communication theorists Ron Scollon and Susan Wong Scollon (2001) describe the face-strategies in human interaction as *independence* and *involvement* strategies, and their terminology I have used for the title of my thesis. The ability to be free but committed, different but in solidarity, independent but involved both in communication as well as in identity is described as the key to an intercultural society and is the starting point for my study.

⁴ See e.g. Juergensmeyer (2003) or Gopin (2000)

⁵ French original version published in 1997

⁶ Touraine (2002) p. 196

Margaret Thatcher, the former British Prime Minister, became famous for her statement “There is no such thing as society”⁷, meaning that there are only individuals; if you have a problem it is your personal problem and if you succeed in something it is your personal success. This is an extreme version of western individualization that would look quite bizarre to people from more collectivistic⁸ or communalistic⁹ cultures and also opposes the very heart of democracy. There is a need to counter-argue this idea; we do form part of something beyond ourselves and we can not choose who is in and who is out – we have to realise that everyone is in. But the borders for the “society” seem more and more blurry. Is a society a city, a country, a culture, a religion or the whole world? On what level and in what respect do we need to defend the idea of interconnectedness?

My research will focus on a local society since I believe that the local dimension is the most important one for understanding our ability to live together, not just as *imagined community*¹⁰, but something more tangible and less abstract.¹¹ Even if some researchers already have counted the local aspect out, e.g. Arjun Appadurai asserts that “people face increasingly difficulties of relating to, or indeed producing, ‘locality’”¹², I yet do not believe that the case is lost. Touraine supports the local perspective¹³ as well as Yasemin Soysal. She suggests that there are both increasing localizing as well as transnationalizing trends in the practice of citizenship in the post-war era, and exemplifies with Turkish immigrants in Berlin: “Regardless of their historical or cultural ties to the German nation, and even without a formal German nationality, Turkish immigrants in Berlin make claims on Berlin’s authority structures and participate in Berlin’s public institutions.”¹⁴ And Ulla Herlitz sees a trend in the village-action-movement in Sweden to re-establish the relation

⁷ Expressed in a interview in the magazine *Women’s Own* 31/10 1987, Kelly et al. (1996) p. 1

⁸ See Hofstede (1980)

⁹ See Moemeka (1997)

¹⁰ See Anderson (1983)

¹¹ I however do not refer to the discourse around community-building since this discourse as exemplified by e.g. Cohen (1985), Gudykunst & Kim (1997), Rose (1999) and Bauman (2001) pictures something quite much more small-scale and mutually linked than what is the focus for this study: A suburb of a metropolitan city with connections stretching out over the whole world.

¹² Vertovec & Cohen (1999) p. 13

¹³ Touraine (2002) p. 265

¹⁴ Soysal (n.b.) p. 307

between territorial identity and power and suggests that *politics of place* might replace party politics.¹⁵

Too often have solutions been imposed from above and it is time to search for new practices on the local level. This study focuses on a suburb of Stockholm called Tensta with a high degree (62% compared to 10% in Stockholm in total¹⁶) of residents with foreign background.¹⁷ I have interviewed the so called “*eldsjälar*”, a Swedish concept which literally means “*fire-souls*” (which I will use hence) and refers to people whose enthusiasm and energy is vital for the development in the local society, and searched for patterns that have led to their commitment – a commitment to the whole society and not just their ethnic group. I have also looked for barriers they see and frustrations they share regarding possibilities for a positive intercultural development of the suburb. In order to bring Touraine’s abstract *subject* down to earth, I have searched for both independent and involved fire-souls who manage to create a space between the ethnic enclaves and the globalised economy, thereby contributing to building intercultural local societies in a globalised, postmodern world.

1.1.2. Notes on Previous Research

The actor-perspective in relation to local societies has been highlighted in qualitative research before, and several studies have been made in Sweden concerning local development groups, including analysis on fire-souls, e.g. Herlitz (1998) or Forsberg (2001). But that research has so far focused on the country-side and the so called “village-action-movement” and it has not paid too much attention to the multicultural metropolitan suburbs and the challenges faced there. “*Mångkulturellt Centrum*” (The Multicultural Centre) in Fittja (outside Stockholm) makes substantial research on immigration and multiculturalism in Sweden, especially focusing on the ethnology of metropolitan multicultural suburbs, but their research has not highlighted the actor-

¹⁵ Forsberg (2001) p. 187

¹⁶ Spånga-Tensta Stadsdelsförvaltning (2003) p. 3

¹⁷ Meaning non-Swedish citizens born in Sweden or abroad, and Swedish citizens born abroad.

perspective to any large extent,¹⁸ and the scarcity of urban research in Sweden is underlined in one of their recent publications.¹⁹ Some of their research nevertheless touches on conditions for local development work and reasons for passivity, such as Hosseini-Kaladjahi (2002). Research has also been made which points at structural problems that inhibit immigrants in Sweden to take command over their own life, e.g. Kamali (1997). Several studies have explicitly addressed the situation in Tensta, for instance in evaluation reports from various integration projects.²⁰ The final report of the Plus-project²¹ from 1995 has nevertheless been the only study I have found that, despite having come from a different context, gives similar insights to the conditions for fire-souls in Tensta.

This research attempts to connect the structural theories from International Relations with the more person-centred and cultural based theories of Intercultural Communication. Whether structures or actors are what really matters is a classical question in Sociology, but for me they do not oppose each other. My framework is clearly structural, but within these structures I want to explore the actor-perspective, the possibility of “building” something, of contributing to something positive. Within International Relations there is no tradition of seeing humans as slaves of structures, and in Intercultural Communication there is no axiom saying that structures do not matter. I find the two frameworks highly combinable and the cross-synergies with such an approach extremely important, even if it makes the research more complex and the framework bigger. I have not found previous research made with this approach and intention, and I thus hope that this study can give some new inspiration for interdisciplinary work.

¹⁸ Oral communication with Oscar Pripp from Mångkulturellt Centrum, Stallet, Stockholm, 20/4 2004

¹⁹ Andersson (2002) p. 112

²⁰ See for instance Andersson (2004)

²¹ Sahlin & Söderlund (1995)

1.2. Aim and Research Questions

The aim of the study is to explore the actor-perspective on building intercultural local societies in a globalised, postmodern world. By interviewing the so called fire-souls in a local setting I want to explore the prerequisites for becoming a subject, an independent and involved actor in society, and what reasons committed people themselves see for others not being as involved as they are. I also want to know how they experience the institutional support they get or do not get from politicians and civil servants.

My research questions are in short: (I) What are the prerequisites for becoming a subject, an independent and involved actor and fire-soul in the local society of a globalised, postmodern world? (II) What reasons do the fire-souls see for others not being as involved as they are themselves? (III) Do they experience being supported by politicians and civil servants, and if not – what reasons do they see for this?

This research sketches the local society of Tensta and the situation there through reflections and statements from the fire-souls and aims at giving the picture of a multicultural suburb through the eyes of the committed. To what extent this material is unique for Tensta and how much that can be applied to other similar suburbs in Sweden or elsewhere is beyond my scope to answer. Nevertheless - my intention is to give insights, provoke thoughts and raise questions that are interesting also for other contexts, and thus make a modest contribution to one of the biggest debates of our times: how to make the growing diversity in our societies constructive, healthy and fruitful.

2. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES - MAPPING THE CONTEXT

2.1. Globalisation and Migration

“Globalisation” is the name that is used for most transformation-forces and social processes in the world after the Cold War. What globalisation actually stands for differs quite a lot depending on the context and on the person, and risks to become the “cliché of our times” that says everything and therefore nothing.²² Cliché or not - globalisation is still a word that provokes, a double-edged sword that can be used for quite different purposes and with different connotations. I would like to elaborate on and distinguish between two different discourses around globalisation that are often used – and often confused. I will then focus on the latter, the globalisation of economics, in order to define my way of using it and its relevance for this study. I also want to point out that whenever I use the concept “globalisation” without any attribute I refer to a general notion of globalisation (borrowing the definition of Held et al.) as the “widening, deepening and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness in all aspects of contemporary social life from the cultural to the criminal, the financial to the spiritual”.²³

The first discourse we could call the “one-world-phenomenon” and this kind of globalisation is not causing protests or bringing any demonstrations to the streets. It is characterized by a growing awareness in the world of living on one planet and of being interconnected. Partly this is due to the fact that we are facing global environmental problems, global migration flows (also high-skilled multi-directed migration) and global trade. People notice that we can not ignore what is happening in China or Senegal because in the end it will also affect us. Internet and other information and communication

²² Held et al. (1999) p. 1

²³ Held et al. (1999) p. 2

technologies connect people all over the world and make national information-systems less dominating. It is easy to make friends with people from other countries, making it possible to build extended solidarities with motivation to act for global justice and peace. A good example is the World Social Forum which unites thousands of people around other narratives than the ones springing from ethnical bounds.

The second discourse is what is often called the globalisation of economics, implying increased corporate power on the cost of national control over economics. National borders do not act as a barrier for economic transactions and companies any more. Ever since the beginning of the 1980s the ruling theory in economics has been the free-market paradigm. National economies should be opened up, the social sector privatised and free trade promoted in order to benefit the global capital and thereby each and every country. These economic theories have had a remarkable break-through predominantly because of the growing external debt of the third world countries and what is called the “debt-crisis”. The free-market or neo-liberal policies were imposed on the majority of the countries in the world through the IMF “Structural Adjustment Programmes”. For the 2000 UN Geneva social summit, UNRISD²⁴ wrote in their report “Visible Hands”:

Faith in the ability of unregulated markets to provide the best possible environment for human development has gone too far. Too great a reliance on the ‘invisible hand’ of the market is pushing the world toward unsustainable levels of inequality and deprivation.²⁵

Today the model has partly been revised and it is acknowledged that the state has an important role to play for economic development, but still this is one of the big battlefields in the discourse around globalisation, resulting in movements such as “Attac”²⁶ and meeting-places such as the World Social Forum.²⁷ The critique is often based on the change

²⁴ The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development

²⁵ UNRISD (2000), p. 2

²⁶ Attac is a French-initiated movement lobbying for the implementation of a so called “Tobin Tax” on international financial transactions.

²⁷ That interestingly enough in themselves are illustrating a phenomenon linked to the first described discourse of globalisation.

in power-relations that the globalisation of economics has brought about, and the decreasing possibility for people to have control over their own livelihood. Held et al. write: "The stretch of power relations means that sites of power and the exercise of power become increasingly distant from the subjects or locales which experience their consequences."²⁸ In his book "The Politics of Storytelling" Michael Jackson describes the human and psychological consequences as:

Though those who control and profit from globalisation often glibly speak of the world as getting smaller, millions of people experience it as becoming bigger and more alien. The last decades of the 20th century saw a dramatic widening of the economic divide between haves and have-nots, both globally and within the affluent societies of the west. But the true meaning of this statistic lies in the *existential* crisis it signifies, for not-having tends to be experienced as a form of not-being, and marginality to both the global polis and agora finds expression in a sense of increasing insignificance, isolation, and powerlessness.²⁹

Touraine describes the ideology of the globalisation of economics with the words "the economy should be free from political and social restraints" which in practice means that what is not profitable is not justified – whatever good political or social arguments there may be.³⁰

Global migration is definitely something highly profitable. The economies of Western Europe (as well as of other rich countries) are dependent on a big flow of immigrants who are prepared to take the low-paid and low-status service jobs that the post-industrial society demands. It can even be better for an economy if they are illegal – they cost nothing for the society in terms of welfare benefits, and they are prepared to work for low salaries under almost slavery circumstances - which is the case for example with the immigrants from Morocco working in the vegetable-farms in Southern Spain.³¹ Trafficking

²⁸ Held et al. (1999) p.28

²⁹ Jackson (2002) p.34-35

³⁰ Lecture by Alain Touraine, 19/11 2002, Jyväskylä University

³¹ Migration News (2004)

of women is a highly profitable business in Europe today.³² This is an extreme case of migration, but nevertheless much more extended than we usually think.

Alejandro Portes (1998) suggests that the migration flows are driven by two major forces: (1) Labour needs of first world economies -“pull-effect” (2) Penetration of peripheral countries by the popular culture of the first world - “push-effect”. Of course there are also “push-effects” coming from bad political and socio-economical situations in many emigrant countries and the lack of control over one’s livelihood, but still he would claim that these are not the major driving-forces. He proposes that the biggest “push-effect” is the global spread of North American TV-programmes, transmitting the feeling that real life happens only there. You want to get to Los Angeles or London to be “part of the scene”.

Povrzanovic Frykman agrees with the economic analysis:

The economic context is clear: less than 25 percent of the population was appropriating 85 percent of world income in the beginning of the 1990s. Labour migration is thus the result of global economic asymmetries within which immigrant labour is an important component of economic growth in the developed part of the world.³³

But she also put emphasis to the fact that global migration as well comprises refugees stemming from human rights denial, terror and violence - in the early 1990s around 20 million people.³⁴

Portes (1998) speaks about the concept of “transnationalism” that has emerged from the process of globalisation. He defines transnationalism as the diasporic³⁵ identity of many immigrant groups that keep strong ties and sense of togetherness with their home

³² Human Rights Watch (2004)

³³ Povrzanovic Frykman (2001) p. 12

³⁴ Povrzanovic Frykman (2001) p. 12

³⁵ To use the adjective *diasporic* instead of the noun *diaspora* “hints at a process of *identity formation*” according to Povrzanovic Frykman (2004) p. 85

community even if they live for many years abroad. Because of exclusion they never become a part of their host society - or they might have only their “economic centre” in the host-country and their family and their heart still in their country of origin, and thus not be very interested in integration. Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen state that “one of the major changes in migration patterns is the growth of diasporic populations anchored (socially and culturally as well as physically) neither at their places of origin nor at their places of destination.”³⁶ I will come back to the notion of diasporic population and diasporic identity in my analysis.

This is not the place to elaborate on all the different meanings and aspects of diaspora and transnationalism, but it is important to note the complexity of the issue, and the links between the profit-driven globalisation of economy, migration and social exclusion. The globalisation of economy is a trigger for global migration but it hardly contains any incitement for building inclusive intercultural societies.

2.2. Culture

Culture, as globalisation, is a word with many meanings. In Europe we commonly distinguish between three connotations for the concept culture.³⁷ The first connotation is the classical humanistic notion of culture as the idea of creation or “work”, associated with a French tradition and derived from the Latin word for cultivation. It is about cultivating the human mind for reaching a higher and more refined state of mind. It asserts that it is the aesthetic sensibility that makes man distinctive from other creatures. The problem pointed out with this definition is that it seems to refer to culture as a quality in *individuals*, while culture is inherently a *collective* phenomenon. It is also clearly elitist in its understanding of culture, inescapably leading to a dichotomy of high culture versus low culture and the question on whose judgement is taken as the accepted standard.

³⁶ Vertovec & Cohen (1999) p. 1

³⁷ Tardif (2002) p. 2

The Anglo-Saxon meaning, more anthropological or ethnographic, includes modes of living, lifestyles, common knowledge, images and myths. While not being elitist and clearly illustrating that culture is collective, it produces another kind of problem: everything can be said to be culture and therefore culture means nothing, and consequently it has periodically been abandoned by anthropologists and sociologists.³⁸

The third notion, based on a German tradition, is closer to the idea of *civilisation* and includes values, representations, symbols and patrimony as shared by a community at a moment in history. In the words of Geertz it is about “culture as systems or patterns of *shared symbols and/or meaning*”³⁹. Laura Desfor Edles points out the advantages with this conceptualization of culture saying that:

...in contrast to the aesthetic definition of culture, the symbolic definition of culture underscores that culture is collective and *shared*. Like the ethnographic definition of culture, the symbolic definition of culture emphasizes that cultural systems are historically linked to specific social groups at specific moments, and intertwined in complex ways with other societal dimensions. The *collective* nature of culture is most evident in *language*, which is, as indicated previously, one of the most fundamental systems of meaning.⁴⁰

This symbolic notion of culture is the one most relevant for intercultural communication since it pays attention to language and different ways of making meaning of language and gives the basis for my own understanding of culture.

Culture further implies a tension between making and being made, between choosing and being given, between conscious and unconscious. I agree with Bhiku Parekh’s (2000) definition of cultural differences as differences that are not based on individual choice and therefore “carry a measure of authority and are patterned and structured by virtue of

³⁸ Desfor Edles (2002) p. 4

³⁹ Desfor Edles (2002) p. 6

⁴⁰ Desfor Edles (2002) p. 6

being embedded in a shared and historically inherited system of meaning and significance".⁴¹ Parekh further elaborates:

Human beings are culturally embedded in the sense that they grow up and live within a culturally structured world, organize their lives and social relations in terms of its system of meaning and significance, and place considerable value on their cultural identity. This does not mean that they are determined by their culture in the sense of being unable to critically evaluate its beliefs and practices and understand and sympathize with others, but rather that they are deeply shaped by it, can overcome some but not all of its influences and necessarily view the world from within a culture, be it the one they have inherited and uncritically accepted or reflectively revised or, in rare cases, consciously adopted.⁴²

He also stresses that all cultures are internally plural and grow out of conscious and unconscious interaction with each other.

Pierre Bourdieu has a similar understanding of culture as neither deterministic nor optional. He has introduced the concept of *habitus*, the cognitive and motivated structures and generative principles of objectively classifiable judgments that individuals act in accordance with. Masoud Kamali describes Bourdieu's notion of habitus as "a synthesis of structure and conscious, object and subject, which is structured by 'objectively classifiable conditions of existence' and itself structures 'system of schemes generating classifiable practices and works,' which, in turn, compose lifestyles."⁴³ Bourdieu links habitus with *practical mastery*, the ability to "get things right", which makes possible both an objectively intelligible practice as well as an enchanted experience of that practice.⁴⁴ Practical mastery thus also implies a combination of objectivism and subjectivism in relation to one's culture. The concepts of habitus and practical mastery have been helpful for my analysis and I will come back to them.

⁴¹ Parekh (2000) p. 3

⁴² Parekh (2000) p. 336

⁴³ Kamali (1997) p. 40

⁴⁴ Bourdieu (1977) p. 4

2.2.1. Too Much Emphasis on Culture?

In the 1980s “culture”, referring to social customs and values, came to be increasingly used as part of a neo-liberal unwillingness to talk about unequal distribution of power and resources as explanations to economic failure or class-differences,⁴⁵ and cultural explanations are therefore often seen with a certain scepticism in the field of international relations as well as in other system-critical disciplines. Nevertheless, the tradition of cultural studies, springing from different critical approaches such as feminism, class-conscious ethnic and race studies, gay, lesbian and queer studies, postcolonial and diasporic research and indigenous people’s scholarship⁴⁶, is defending the right to talk about differences in culture - though being aware of the danger and pitfalls.

Charles Taylor reminds us that a difference-blind politics is a reflection of a hegemonic culture and could be called a “particularism masquerading as the universal”.⁴⁷ It can be compared to Milton Bennett’s (1988) minimization stage in his theory for developing intercultural sensitivity. If you say “all humans are basically the same” you usually take for granted that they are all just like yourself, and you are unable to relate to the otherness of the other and respect that and be curious about that. Povrzanovic Frykman observes that focusing on the individual and not his/her culture can be good but can also separate the individual from those cultural and historical contexts that Swedes are unfamiliar with.⁴⁸

Culture is nevertheless not an un-problematic term and in the same way as we stress the need not to be “cultural-blind” one should not forget to see also other aspects of reality that shape our conditions and make sure that people are not made prisoners to explanations of behaviour based on ethnic or cultural traits. It is very difficult but nevertheless imperative to find balance between not judging people on the basis of group-belonging or background and not denying differences either.

⁴⁵ Frow & Morris (2000) p. 315

⁴⁶ Frow & Morris (2000) p. 317

⁴⁷ Taylor (1994) p. 85

⁴⁸ Povrzanovic Frykman (2001) p. 31

2.3. Interculturalism

Societies have always been more or less plural, but the speed of globalisation, migration and communication of today makes this more and more an issue that requires new approaches and policies. Different languages, religions, traditions and backgrounds inhabit what in Europe used to be thought of – falsely, but nevertheless an imagined reality - as national cultural homogenous spaces. The spread of ideas of human rights (also the right to one's culture) and democracy has also made the minority communities refuse to accept a subordinate status, as was common practice in pre-modern multicultural societies.⁴⁹ This new situation and its search for policies have among other things created a lot of terminology, such as plural societies, multicultural societies, multiculturalistic societies, cultural diverse societies, intercultural societies, transcultural societies...

Some scholars like for example John Berry et al. (2002), would claim that the concept of a *multicultural society* in contrast to a *plural society* implies that there is interaction and mixture to some extent. Parekh (2000) makes an attempt to another definition by distinguishing between a multicultural society as a descriptive term for a diverse reality, and to use the term *multiculturalistic society* for a society with strategies for developing the potential of the diversity.

Jean Tardif (2002) proposes that it is important to make a clear distinction between *multiculturalism* and *cultural diversity*. The first term appeared in Canada in the 1970s as an expression to describe policies promoting public recognition of cultural diversity and plural ethnicities. It was conceived in opposition to a policy of assimilating immigrants. Tardif sees multiculturalism as an internal concern of states while cultural diversity is about trans-national concerns.

Cultural diversity usually implies, apart from ethnic and religious diversity, also diversity in terms of class, sexual orientation, ethnicity or gender and self-expression of (cultural,

⁴⁹ Parekh (2000) p. 7

political, social) ideas.⁵⁰ Cultural diversity is however also used by the EU as a defence against the unrestricted penetration of North American culture in Europe and was one of the strongest arguments of the EU in the recent GATS⁵¹ discussions in the World Trade Organisation.⁵² It is also used in relation to economic strategies as in the following quote from the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers:

Cultural diversity has an essential economic role to play in the development of the knowledge economy. Strong cultural industries which encourage linguistic diversity and artistic expression, when reflecting genuine diversity, have a positive impact on pluralism, innovation, competitiveness and employment."⁵³

Another term in use is that of *interculturalism* implying a society where the different cultures to some extent meet and transform in their encounter. I have chosen to use the term *multicultural society* as a descriptive term for a society comprising many cultures, and to use *intercultural society* for a society where people, though with different cultural backgrounds, actually interact, meet and reach some kind of common identity and cohesion. My focus is however on the local and I do not refer to policies for national or European interculturalism, even if those policies of course also have an impact on the local level.

In every society there is a host-culture that is present through e.g. legal frameworks, institutional policies and usually the majority population. But there are indeed immigrant suburbs in many places in Europe where very few inhabitants come from the host-culture. Then the issues of interculturalism, social cohesion and negotiating a local identity become even more of a challenge and very important in order not to clash with the host society but not to request assimilation and "business as usual" either. Parekh suggests:

⁵⁰ Emmeier (2003) p. 1

⁵¹ GATS refers to liberalisation of the service industry

⁵² Emmeier (2003) p. 1

⁵³ Council of Europe (2000) paragraph 2.2.

Like any other society, a multicultural society needs a broadly shared culture to sustain it. Since it involves several cultures, the shared culture can only grow out of their interaction and should both respect and nurture their diversity and unite them around a common way of life.⁵⁴

Kamali is optimistic, stressing the dynamic and always-changing nature of culture and life-styles that make living together possible:

The Swedish lifestyle cannot be ingrained into the immigrants to replace their accustomed one. But, this does not mean that the immigrants' lifestyles remain unchanged and static. As soon as the immigrants arrive into the new social context, Sweden, they simultaneously engage in a process of interaction with other groups surrounding them, both the Swedes and the other immigrant groups. (---) *Such a process does not completely change the people's lifestyles, but it modifies them and equips the people with the appropriate and necessary means of living together.*⁵⁵

There is a need for dialogue. But in order to establish a good dialogue, first the question of equality needs to be addressed. Parekh states that "The dialogue is possible only if each culture accepts others as equal conversational partners, who need to be taken seriously as sources of new ideas and to whom it owes the duty of explaining itself."⁵⁶ He goes further than Taylor's (1994) advocacy for recognition in terms of equal value when he describes the climate of equality as one where different cultures can "enjoy more or less equal respect, equal opportunities for self-expression, equal access to private and especially public spaces, equal ability to interrogate each other, and more or less equal power and resources,"⁵⁷ thus also including aspects of economic and social equality. But he also sees it naturally that the intercultural society would have a bias towards the host culture.

Another important debate in multicultural societies is if to see cultural differences as resources and positive factors for intercultural interaction, or as causes for clashes and conflicts. The "culture-shock-industry" in intercultural communication has in the last years been challenged by the "knowledge-management-approach", advocated by e.g.

⁵⁴ Parekh (2000), p. 219

⁵⁵ Kamali (1997) p. 190

⁵⁶ Parekh (2000) p. 337

⁵⁷ Parekh (2000) p. 221

Nigel Holden (2002), where cultural differences are seen as resources and the focus is on how to manage diversity and make it constructive and not the diversity as such.

It is also central to see cultural encounters from the point of view of *communication*, and possible failures in interpreting the message from others, especially if they come from a culture which for example organise discourse in a different way, use pitch in a different way or uses a different verbal style. As shown by Berndt Müller-Jacquier (2003) it is problematic to interpret foreign communication conventions as expression of foreign value orientation since this can lead to fundamental attribution errors. Or in the words of Anthony Cohen: “What passes as understanding is often based on interpretation, and the interpretation is generally accomplished by reconstructing other people’s behaviour as if it was our own.”⁵⁸

I adhere to those scholars focusing on the positive potential in intercultural encounters, though not denying that it is not all easy. I believe Tardif (2002) has a point when asking how we can conceive and organise genuine intercultural dialogues if we refuse to accept culture as a source of clashes of civilisation or as an instrument of power.⁵⁹ A committed young woman in Brussels who has worked for a long time with immigrants, arts and integration said to me: “There are black men who think that all white women are whores and one shouldn’t be naïve about that”⁶⁰. It is probably counterproductive to pretend that it is uncomplicated to live together – it is not, not even in the public space. Diversity in value-systems and expectations concerning gender-roles can cause a lot of frustration on all sides. The difficulty in drawing the line between public and private, and the fact that different cultures tend to draw the line somewhat different, complicates it further. As suggested by John Frow and Meaghan Morris “we need to see culture as processes that divide as much as they bring together”.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Cohen (1985) p. 73

⁵⁹ Tardif (2002) p. 1

⁶⁰ Carine Meulders, oral communication, Brussels, 27/11 2003

⁶¹ Frow & Morris (2000) p. 317

2.4. Postmodernity

The concept of postmodernity is widely discussed and widely criticized. It is frequently used in texts of Zygmunt Bauman, and his understanding of postmodernity has been central for this study. Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens (1994) use the concept *late modernity* or *reflexive modernity* instead of postmodernity, thus reminding us that our times are still modern, though in a different way. Alain Touraine (2002) agrees on their concepts and finds the discourse of postmodernity only useful as a critical instrument. In other aspects he disapproves on the term postmodernity since he believes that it does not help us to draw necessary conclusions about how to proceed. He rather speaks about *de-modernization* as phenomenon of our times and gives different strategies for fighting for modernity, but in new forms. Even though I can see their points, I believe as Bauman that there is something fundamentally new in our times, a shift in thought and matter going hand in hand with the end of the cold war and the processes of globalisation, and have therefore decided to stick to the term postmodernity.

There is further often some confusion between the uses of the terms postmodernism and postmodernity. But while postmodernism is considered a philosophy and can also refer to a theoretical standpoint in research, postmodernity could be said to be its sociological fruit. I use the term postmodernity since I am interested in the discourse from a sociological point of view, how it influences our interaction and potential for living together in society.

There are no clear-cut time-periods in which to place postmodernity. The concept first appeared in the middle of the twentieth century, and has grown stronger as a discourse since the beginning of the 1980s (with Jean-Francois Lyotard publishing his famous book *"The Postmodern Condition"* in 1984) and especially after the end of the cold war with writers such as Jean Baudrillard and Zygmunt Bauman. But premodernity, modernity and postmodernity over-lap each other, and which concept to use depends not only on the époque but also on geographic and social context, as well as the eyes of the narrator.

Central for my understanding of postmodernity is that - more than a certain time-period - it is a matter of discourse, a way of framing reality. More than a real condition, it is a way of understanding.

“Modernity was born under the sign of suicide,”⁶² wrote Walter Benjamin, indicating that postmodernity was a consequence of modernity. The struggle to create an always better world and find new answers resulted in the postmodern answer that there is no answer. There is no end of the road, no end of history. Life is a constant flux and there is nothing constant, no fixed borders, no order and no paper where to draw a line.

The postmodern society changes very fast. Insecurity experienced is not just about one’s own destiny, but about the future of the whole planet, what the right way of living is and what the criteria for right and wrong look like. The growing ambivalence is also a result of the fact that our concepts and classifications less than before seem to succeed in saying something valid and relevant about the world. The rapidly changing reality can not be trapped in our categories. And there seems to be no cure – insecurity is experienced as permanent with no hope for a change.

Bauman (1997) gives four main reasons for this permanent insecurity.

- 1) The new world order that does not seem to make sense. There is no ideological battlefield anymore, no context to relate to.
- 2) General deregulation that gives priority to the irrationality and moral blindness of the market over the state-project. The law-of-the-jungle creates a growing polarization between the rich and the poor. Quick changes create a psychological stress also for the rich – social status and jobs seem to be able to vanish over one night.
- 3) Weakening of primary social network when a sort of consumerism also influences close relationships. Fear of commitment in relationships weakens the psychological and social stability in one’s personal life.

⁶² Bauman (1997) p. 22

- 4) Also self-image loses coherence and splits up into a collection of snap-shots where the art of forgetting has become as important as the art of remembering.

The conditions described in the postmodern world-view are thus evidently closely connected to processes of globalisation and the neo-liberal economic ideology. The strongest statement of modernity was that we are what we do. In postmodernity we increasingly experience that we no longer are what we do and that we feel more and more alien to the behaviours that the economic, political and cultural apparatus require of us.⁶³ Touraine believes that the human subject is today as threatened by a manipulative consumer-society and the quest for pleasure that makes us slaves to our passions, as it once was by the compulsion to submit to God's law or the laws of society.⁶⁴ He sees the big trauma in the fact that social connections between globalised economy and fragmented cultures are vanishing or falling into pieces and describes the de-modernization of today as the process of breaking the ties between spheres of economy and spheres of culture, instrumental reason and collective memory, symbols and meanings, body and soul and exchanges and identities.⁶⁵ The result is that both society as well as individuals experience being torn apart with a centrifugal force.

2.4.1. Postmodernity, Interculturalism and Fear

Bauman writes in his essay "Modernity and Ambivalence": "There are friends and enemies. And there are *strangers*."⁶⁶ The presence of strangers disturbs the master-opposition between inside and outside, friends and enemies. In the eyes of modernity the strangers irritate the most, because they destroy the possibility to predict, they destroy the logic of a given society. Enemies stay on the other side of the battle-line, but strangers don't maintain the distance. No one knows if they are friends or foes. They are what the French philosopher Jaques Derrida calls "undecidables" – they are nothing and they may

⁶³ Touraine (2002) p. 35

⁶⁴ Touraine (2002) p. 82

⁶⁵ Touraine (2002) p. 43

⁶⁶ Bauman (1990) p. 143

be all.⁶⁷ Cognitive clarity is closely intertwined with behavioural certainty and thus the failure of classificatory ability leads to behavioural paralysis.

Modernity had two strategies concerning the disturbing element of strangers. One strategy belongs to the liberal modern project and implies assimilation. The other strategy belongs to a nationalistic modern project and implies exclusion. Both strategies are about abolishing strangers. In the modernistic framework there was no need to find a solution for a permanent co-existence with strangers – the new all-embracing order was going to be created and the state that had taken on the task of building the future was ambitious and strong. There was still a political project to unite around, a common purpose which would, if not eradicate, make cultural differences unimportant, and make everyone work side by side for the same aim. The father of modern sociology, Émile Durkheim, described society as more than the sum of its individuals and presented the idea of collective or common consciousness, defined as “the totality of beliefs and sentiments common to average citizens of the same society (which) has its own life.”⁶⁸ And Hegel argued that a common purpose in society “in which there is a ‘we’ that is an ‘I’ and an ‘I’ that is a ‘we’” is the best way to build solidarity.⁶⁹

But the modern project succeeded in neither assimilation nor keeping the strangers out. “The point is, however, that no attempt to assimilate, transform, acculturate or absorb the ethnic, religious, linguistic, cultural and other heterogeneity and dissolve it in the homogeneous body of the nation has been thus far unconditionally successful.”⁷⁰ If the strangers of modernity were here temporary while the optimal solution was to be found, strangers in postmodern society are here to stay. Thus the question of their being friends or foes is more relevant than ever. The central question is not anymore how to get rid of them, but how to live with and handle the difference in every day life. If in previous times the long-term commitment of the stranger was doubted – he or she could possibly return

⁶⁷ Bauman (1990) p. 145

⁶⁸ Thompson (1982) p. 60

⁶⁹ Taylor (1994) p. 88

⁷⁰ Bauman (1990) p. 155

to “the place where he belongs” any day - in today’s world the stranger is not more likely to leave than anyone else.

But the “common purpose” seems more abstract and distant than ever before and social cohesion seems nothing but a political slogan. Touraine (2002) asserts that *society* was in modern times the idea that was able to bridge the gap between economic life and individual experience and to give a framework for integration even in a society that had been radically changed by industrialisation, urbanisation and revolutionary ideas. But in postmodern times, society as a model for order and integration has vanished and left a social crisis.⁷¹

With postmodernity we have seen two political demands growing stronger and stronger. The first is to privatise, individualise, prevent collectivistic power over private life and increase consumption-freedom for free consumers. The second demand is for law and order. Victims of the downsizing of the welfare society should be controlled. If in modern times the poor were considered a reserve army for the industry and should rather be educated and mobilized, in postmodern times the poor are just a problem of law and order.⁷² The poor are no longer seen as victims of injustice - they are considered to be unnecessary, criminal and dangerous. And if the cheapest solution is to exclude them or lock them in – why not? After all they are just burden for public spending.

Fear is thus becoming the meta-story of our societies. And fear of others is also profitable, because “when people are afraid, they buy things” (gasmasks, security services) as pointed out in the documentary film “Bowling for Columbine”⁷³ describing post-September 11th American society - leading us back to the logic of the globalisation of economics.

⁷¹ Touraine (2002) p. 45

⁷² Bauman (1997) p. 84

⁷³ Moore (2002)

The risk is that segregation becomes the answer, both class-wise and ethnicity-wise. As Touraine has pointed out, the tendency today is not so much towards multi- or interculturalism but towards multi-communitarianism where different ethnic groups live in different cultural enclaves in the same city.⁷⁴ And Bauman quotes Jonathan Friedman who contests the image that borders and boundaries are disappearing in the globalisation process: "Rather they seem to be erected on every new street corner of every declining neighbourhood of our world."⁷⁵ This goes hand in hand with the increased tendency for religious and/or ethnic clashes both in global and local conflicts.

There is a tendency that both leftwing and rightwing sympathizers consider it better if all cultural groups have their own place and keep distance. Bauman considers this attitude more anti-modern than postmodern, since the postmodern reality is a pluralist reality. Segregation makes the possibility of reducing misunderstandings between cultural groups impossible and Bauman refers to Mikhail Bakhtin's theory on monologic and dialogic discourses. In a society marked by "mix-phobia" the dialogic discourse would die and there would be just monologues that no one listened to.⁷⁶ The television is just another monologic channel and it is evident that the possibility of learning about other cultures and other people's life on the TV-screen has not reduced the mix-phobia. And tolerating, accepting or even appreciating the difference is not enough. Baudrillard argues that the acceptance of difference and multiple ways in postmodern society has also created a sort of intolerance for expression of disgust – which in turn creates a feeling of no-reaction and apathy.⁷⁷ The communication dies if "anything goes". Apart from acceptance and appreciation there must also be a dialogue, mutual influence and ways to build interculturalism. In order to establish a dialogue real meeting places are needed. Touraine finds our society more and more resembling an air-port or a super-market where

⁷⁴ Bauman (1999) p. XXXIX

⁷⁵ Bauman (2001) p. 16

⁷⁶ Bauman (1997) p. 112

⁷⁷ Johansson (1992) p. 95

principles for conflicts and identity are disappearing and no real encounter or dialogue is possible.⁷⁸

2.4.2. Postmodernity, Interculturalism and Identity

Touraine describes modernity as the victory of the *achieved status* over the *ascribed status*, and asserts that postmodernity – or in his words *de-modernization*, has ruined the individual's possibility to define him/herself through citizenship, profession or even social class at the same time as globalisation has deprived the society its normative role.⁷⁹ In postmodern society identities are not constructed or achieved anymore - they are *created*. And they need to be created over and over again – depending on the situation, mood and changes in society. It is like IKEA-furniture that allows you to combine different elements, substitute them, and easily take it all apart again. Bauman describes it:

Identities do not rest on the uniqueness of their traits, but consist increasingly in distinct ways of selecting/recycling/rearranging the cultural matter which is common to all, or at least potential available to all. It is the movement and capacity for change, not the ability to cling to once-established form and contents, that secure their continuity.⁸⁰

This is a non-essentialist view of identity that puts emphasis on variation, change and diversity. Within a culture there are myriads of languages and cultures operating. Every encounter carries a special culture and a specific socio-ideological language. Identities are thus both *situational* (i.e. dependent on which social role is judged by the individual to best suit the context) and *relational* (e.g. identity defined in relation to, and through interaction with others).⁸¹ The Singaporean theatre director Ong Keng Sen expresses it:

Everyday life is about multiple realities and living with different kinds of identities. I went to a protestant school where we would have chapel and prayers. There is religious activity surrounding the studies. At the same time I will go home to Chinese ancestral worship and to Buddhism and my

⁷⁸ Touraine (2002) p. 81

⁷⁹ Touraine (2002) p. 52

⁸⁰ Bauman (1999) p. XLV

⁸¹ Ellmeier (2003) p. 2

parents are Buddhists. So you become a master in switching codes. Switching from one religion to another religion and yet feeling that you are not betraying either religion. That you are giving what you can give fully, in both religions. That you are many different people in one body and many different spirits in one body. It also goes down to language. I speak Chinese with my parents. But I speak English with all my siblings, with my friends and with the world outside. These are the multiple selves in one. As I become older some of these selves start to shrivel and disappear. I think as a child you have many different identities, many different imaginary worlds. And these disappear as you grow older.⁸²

Thus it is about expanding our potential for code-switching and multiple competencies, accepting that life is messy and that no easily explained identity is at reach. Touraine asserts that this is positive since it liberates cultural diversity from the iron-cage that was created by the rationality of enlightenment, and argues that it is time to substitute the idea of rational actors in a rational society with the idea of multiple roads and methods, actors that are defined both by individual identity as well as by individual or collective heritage.⁸³ Postmodern times see difference as positive and precious and as something in need for protection and cultivation. There is a growing interest for protection of minority rights and especially the rights of indigenous people.

Does postmodernity then imply the end of the position of the *stranger* as a victim and martyr in the service of purity? Bauman's answer is "Not necessarily." He recognizes that postmodernity carries a tolerant attitude and an appreciation of difference. But there is a purity-test also in the postmodern society – you have to be enchanted by the never ending possibilities and continuous changes putting on and taking off identities and spending your life in a continuous hunt for always more intense sensations and more exciting experiences. You have to have what intercultural communication theorists call *tolerance for ambiguity* and feel thrilled when you hear someone challenge you like the American opera-director Peter Sellars:

⁸² Keng Sen (2003)

⁸³ Touraine (2002) p. 53

This question of how we take in that thing which is most opposed to us and who we are, who we think we might be, and that who we might be - who we think we might be is maybe a conclusion we reached prematurely, maybe there is more to come in our lives, and maybe too early on we accepted a certain identity, and maybe life has something larger in store. Are we open to that or are we closed to that? Every day the entire world is knocking trying to change your life and say 'wait a minute, you have no clue yet'.⁸⁴

Not everyone stands the test. And those who do not are the dirt of the postmodern purity.

Another relevant aspect is that the market has profit-interests in an always-changing identity. An advertisement for an exclusive watch had the text "Who do you want to be today?" combined with an image of a beautiful woman. More and more the world seems to be a place for successful people who have the luxury to buy assets needed to create whatever identity they want.

Bauman (1997) underlines the importance of everyone being able to choose his or her identity. Strangers should not be classified neither by the state nor the tribe. But today the right to individualism is deprived from many people. Some people can choose when and where and to what degree they want to mix with strangers. They enjoy "ethnic" restaurants and find the difference interesting and exotic. Or they find life in a new country exciting and rewarding. They usually do not live in immigrant-dense suburbs; they have their own laundry-machines and their own private space.

Those who can not choose, those who are not part of the scene, those who feel they lack power over their own life, those excluded from the free choice – these people tend to experience the presence of strangers much more stressful. Jean-Paul Sartre has compared it to "Le visqueux" - the slimy.⁸⁵ The experience of swimming in water is refreshing and enjoyable. But when people feel invaded by strangers and feel they do not control the situation it is experienced like swimming in something slimy, e.g. honey or tar. Bauman

⁸⁴ Sellars (1999)

⁸⁵ Bauman (1997) p. 41

asserts that “the sliminess of the slimy” depends on how strong a person’s muscles are and how big wallet he or she has. Thus it is about power. The feeling of loss of freedom is due to lack of power and the psychological stress and anxiety this creates.

3. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

3.1. Research Tradition

My research is inspired by critical hermeneutics as a research tradition and way of understanding the research process. Critical hermeneutics, as all *critical* studies, traditionally examines structures of domination and power relations in the context of construction of social systems. Despite the fact that power is not conceptualized as a central theme in this thesis, power relations form an important part of my understanding of globalisation of economics and postmodernity and as such connect to the tradition of critical theory.

Critical hermeneutics is also about *hermeneutics*, a tradition which does not pretend that the role of the researcher as the interpreter is unimportant - a starting point going hand in hand with the sensitivity to one's background and one's cultural presumptions stressed in intercultural communication. I have also been inspired by the image of thinking and working in terms of *the hermeneutic circle*. Geertz defines the hermeneutic circle as "a continuous dialectical tacking between the most local of local detail and the most global of global structure in such a way as to bring both into view simultaneously."⁸⁶ It implies that there is an ongoing encounter between reality, theory and data collected which makes a continuous review and rethinking necessary. More than a circle, I would agree with Pål Repstad who describes it is a spiral⁸⁷ where you never come back to exactly the same point and where there is progress in every new encounter between reality, theory and data even if you touch on the same material over and over again.

Schwandt (2000) points out that for being able to understand the parts, one must try to grasp the whole and vice-versa. My research is based on this premise and start out from

⁸⁶ Schwandt (2000) p. 193

⁸⁷ Repstad (1999) p.103

global structures for working its way down to the local and the specific– which in turn aims at increasing the understanding of the general and feed into the global. Critical hermeneutics focus on the dialectics between subject and structure⁸⁸ which corresponds well with the approach in this study, as well as it implies coming back from the specific to reach a larger understanding of *social forces*⁸⁹, which is also the intention here.

My knowledge claim is partly constructivistic, an attempt to understand the meaning people bring to concepts and phenomena and what building-blocks they are comprised of. But it is also pragmatic in the sense that I am interested in policies and ways of working that function in the field, in the actual society, and that can contribute to the debate in a constructive way. And yet still, there is an aspect of an advocacy knowledge claim, as in any research aiming at emancipation from unjust power-structures and destructive praxis.

In this context it is important to reflect upon the fact that *making meaning* is a fundamental human character that a researcher can not avoid being part of as well. The hermeneutic tradition sees *the wish to understand* as a fundamental structure in our lives. One should always intend to be as objective as possible, but the personal project, the passion for the problem and the possible outcomes will always colour the results. Certainly that is true also in my case: I have a personal background and ways of understanding that makes my interpretations subjective. But to overemphasise this point is not very interesting either; the research is based on seriously collected data that have been analysed in the light of theory from various disciplines with as much objectivity as possible. This is my text, my way of putting it, but it has nevertheless something to tell about the reality we share.

⁸⁸ Morrow (1994) p. 91

⁸⁹ Kincheloe & Mc Laren (2000) p. 287

3.2. Method

This research is based on a *qualitative method* for many reasons. With an aim to understand, to explore and to use a hermeneutic approach, the qualitative method which implies research in natural settings comes quite natural and helps me in the best way to answer my research questions. In my understanding it is in field research we can come closest to real issues and what really matters since we then step outside what could be called the academic comfort-zone and confront ourselves with the stories and experiences of people who are relevant for the problem we want to address and who might benefit from our research.

The research is a *case study* since it is placed in a well defined local setting, namely the suburb of Tensta at the outskirts of Stockholm - an actual multicultural reality with political programmes for breaking segregation and socio-economic problems. My research focuses primarily on the *fire-souls* in Tensta; the very active and enthusiastic persons that are strongly committed to the idea of living together and create a “we” in the midst of the diversity. They set the boundaries for my case study.

I chose Tensta mainly as a consequence of having contacts there from a study visit a few years earlier. I wanted to do research in one immigrant-dense low-status suburb of Stockholm, and Tensta seemed to be a good choice. I was also attracted by certain phenomena in Tensta such as the Art Gallery and the Cultural Café. My intention was to find a representative case, trying to explore something that is not only about the situation in Tensta but about conditions for multicultural postmodern societies as such. During the research process - confronted with quite remarkable data - I however often came to ask myself if Tensta is a more special case than I had assumed, but this is beyond the scope of this study to answer.

I have mainly used *theme interviews* for my data-collection. The choice of doing interviews is obvious since I am mainly interested in the feelings and perceptions of the respondents;

how they experience their engagement, how they look at Tensta and explain non-activism, and support they experience from politicians and civil servants - such information that is very difficult to gain through other methods than interviews. To base my research on direct or participant observation would have required much more time in order to get the same amount of material. I used *direct observation* only as a way to get more acquainted with the neighbourhood and to identify some of the interviewees.⁹⁰ Concerning *documentation and archival records* Per-Eric Siljestam from the department for integration and development in Tensta provided me with a lot of reports of the development programmes for the neighbourhood. This, just as other studies and reports I had read, was very useful in order to familiarize myself with the area and the issues, but was not material that could really help me to answer my research questions since they required other kinds of data. In short, doing interviews appeared to be the most useful method for collecting data. It also gave me the opportunity to use direct quotations in my text in order to give the voice to the respondents, which is quite common and valued in qualitative research.

I chose to do *theme* interviews since I - considering my respondents experts, wanted to be open to new information that my respondents could give me and not lock myself into too tight a structure. The questions that I put to the respondents were based on my research questions and were chosen with the aim of finding keys to their involvement and what motivated them, their explanations of non-involvement and their comments on support from civil servants and politicians. Consequently questions dealt with their background, their family, the process that led to their involvement in Tensta, their joys, sorrows and frustrations in their work, their hobbies, their views on Tensta and on the development work there as well as asking if they could see any central theme or persons or incidents that had meant very much for them. It was also evident that with each interview I knew better what follow-up questions were relevant and I could also bring in material from previous respondents for comments - though being very careful of not putting words into

⁹⁰ I attended two open meetings of the City District Renewal Programme (5/2 and 7/4 2004) and I also participated in a meeting of the association "Friends of Tensta Art Gallery" (29/3 2004).

their mouth. The better informed I was myself about the situation (thanks to the previous interviews) the more respect and confidence the respondents seemed to have in me and the more they would tell me also concerning sensitive issues. But the main questions I kept the same all through the interviews and they proved to give a lot of valuable information feeding into my research-questions. Before conducting the interviews I had also tested the questions and discussed them with a friend who has foreign background and is very involved in the society in a similar way as the fire-souls in Tensta. For the main questions of the interviews, see Appendix 1.

With the help from Ricardo Osvaldo Alvarado, currently a coordinator of the City District Renewal Programme in Stockholm and previously working at the Department for Integration and Development in Tensta, Per-Eric Siljestam and Sirpa Rydh, both working at the Department for Integration and Development in Tensta, as well as using the snow-ball method (the interviewees could suggest other people to interview), I identified my respondents. Two respondents were however identified in open meetings for the City District Renewal Programme in Tensta and one respondent from the meeting of "Friends of Tensta Art Gallery". In most cases I applied cross-checking of names for the interviews.

My criteria were to find people with commitment to the local society beyond their ethnic group - people that seemed both *independent* and *involved*, as well as to be residents of Tensta. This was achieved in all cases except the last when I made an exception to the latter criteria and interviewed one woman who no longer lived in Tensta. She had an experience of working as a fire-soul in Tensta a few years earlier and since I found her story very interesting I decided to include her among my respondents.

It is important to note that "to be an immigrant" was not a part of the criteria. I aimed at a diverse group in terms of ethnicity, age and sex, and in such a diverse place as Tensta this wasn't difficult to accomplish. Three of the persons I interviewed had been born in Sweden - two of them with parents that had immigrated to Sweden from other European countries. But it was a conscious choice not to exclude "ethnic Swedes" from the research.

In the conference “Crossroad Fittja” in December 2003, Maja Povrzanovic Frykman concluded the debate with saying that we need qualitative research that does not focus on immigrants only, but also include “Swedish Swedes” in the same studies.⁹¹

In the period between 24th February and 5th April 2004 I made twelve interviews, each between 45 minutes and 2,5 hours. The interviews took place in different settings, chosen by the interviewees. I found it important that they themselves could choose a place that was convenient for them and a place where they would feel comfortable, at the same time recommending them to suggest a place where we would not be disturbed. Nevertheless this resulted in the venues not being all ideal concerning external disturbances. Seven interviews took place in the respective office of the respondent, two in a café, two in a closed study-room in the library in Tensta and one in the home of the respondent. In two cases we were continuously interrupted by the telephone in the office and by people passing by, and in another case the interviewee had a child with him which requested quite much attention. Despite this I believe that if I had been very strict about the setting and not being disturbed this could have influenced the interviews more negatively by making the situation more forced, or making it difficult for the respondents to fit the interview into their tight schedules.

One of the interviews did not function very well, perhaps due to the lack of confidence of the interviewee in me or because it was not the right person from the beginning. I have not included this interview in the analysis. In two cases the interview has been followed by a later conversation of a more informal kind, in order to hear reactions from previous interviewees on reflections and information given by later interviewees.

I have recorded and transcribed all interviews. I have also promised the respondents anonymity and that it shouldn't be possible from the text to identify who said what.⁹² Therefore I mainly refer to the interviewees as “a man” or “a woman” and sometimes

⁹¹ Povrzanovic Frykman in the final debate of the conference Crossroad Fittja, Stockholm, 5/12 2003

⁹² An English-version of the written information I gave the respondents before conducting the interview can be found in Appendix 2.

exclude details that can link the quote to a certain project or country of origin. From the beginning I planned to ask the respondents to suggest a “code-name” that I could use in the thesis, but this seemed a bit strange to the first respondents and later on I decided to just give numerical indications. Each interviewee has consequently been given a number (1-11) in correspondence with the chronologic order of the interviews. After each quote a number can be found in order to be able to follow the frequency of quotes from different interviewees.

All interviews were done in Swedish, and in most cases this did not seem to cause any problem. Of course one always expresses oneself better in one’s mother tongue, but since the reality in which these people act has Swedish as lingua franca, I found it quite appropriate to use Swedish for the interviews. Many concepts used are specific for the local setting and would for sure be difficult to trace back to e.g. Arabic. All quotes in the text appear in the Swedish original version *in italics* followed by my translation into English within brackets in order to make the process and my role as a translator more transparent.

After transcribing the interviews I read them carefully two times, searching for code words and concepts appearing many times. I then coded or categorized the material based on the findings in the interviews put in relation to the relevance for my research questions and in the light of the theory, thus finding the final structure step by step in an inductive process of continuous rethinking and learning with the hermeneutic circle or spiral as a model. Coding is always difficult as it implies selecting and choosing the pieces of the puzzle that you want to put together, with the tendency to throw away those pieces that don’t fit to the picture. By being careful and self-critical both in the process of coding and analysing, and also by continuously coming back to the interviews also after having written the first draft, I nevertheless feel that I have been fair to my material and that no conclusions have been drawn prematurely.

A method often used in qualitative methods for increasing the reliability of the text is *triangulation* that can imply coming back to the respondents after producing the text in order to have their reaction and comments before producing the final version. I have not had the opportunity to do that, mainly due to time-restrictions. I will nevertheless send the final thesis to all my respondents and also invite them for a presentation and discussion of the research. The process towards learning and understanding will in this way continue beyond the actual production of the text. I also believe that to offer such a meeting-place is important from an ethical point of view; it is part of my responsibility as a researcher towards my respondents.

I have however used triangulation in the sense that I have compared my findings with similar findings in literature and theories from various disciplines before drawing conclusions.⁹³ I also had the privilege to get professional feedback and advice during the process. Apart from mentioning the good guidance from my professor and supervisor Liisa Salo-Lee, I want to give a special acknowledgment to few persons from the academic world who, without being obliged to do so, have supported me along the way - namely Ana Paula Beja Horta from University Aberta in Lisbon, Lars Buur from the Nordic Africa Institute in Uppsala, David Hoffman from University of Jyväskylä and Maja Povrzanovic Frykman from IMER in Malmö.

⁹³ This understanding of triangulation can e.g be found in Creswell (1998)

4. INDEPENDENCE AND INVOLVEMENT - THE ACTOR-PERSPECTIVE

4.1. The Subject

Touraine (2002) asserts that the only thing that can save us, that can form a bridge between the global market on the one hand and cultural fragmentation on the other, the need for common principles on the one hand and rejection of the idea of universal rationalism on the other - is *the subject*. He writes:

In a world that is in constant change in an uncontrollable way there is no other support than an individual's endeavour to transform the lived experiences to a construction of the self as an actor. It is this endeavour of the individual to be an actor that I designate as "the subject", which should not be confused either with the experience as a whole or with some kind of higher principle that could be thought of as ruling the individuals or give them a mission in life. The subject has no other mission than to produce itself. It does not serve any purpose and is not ruled by any other values or laws than its own need and desire to resist its own disruption in a world in constant flux, without order or equilibrium.⁹⁴

The "subject" is commonly used in a philosophical-oriented discourse and deals with how individual persons or groups experience and look upon themselves. The term also strongly puts emphasis on the "actor-perspective". The understanding of the self as a self-aware, rational and critical subject appeared as a result of the enlightening-thoughts and has become deeply anchored in the western culture as well as the modern bourgeoisie.

There could be a bridge to Touraine's (2002) understanding of the subject, though it is clear that he partly breaks with the enlightenment-tradition, as necessary in a postmodern framework. Touraine argues that projects aiming at subordinating all humans under same

⁹⁴ Touraine (2002) p. 30, translation K.H.

universal laws of rationality (or same religious ideas) have always ended up as nightmares or instruments of power. Thus he does not endow the subject with more content than its own desire to bring meaning to life and he does not want to give the illusion of the existence of a perfect recipe. The intention is not to build a new society and a new humanity but rather to aim at happiness for each and everyone even if this requires an ongoing protection of a space that is continuously invaded.

The subject is both a personal identity and the right to a special culture combined with participation in the rational, instrumental and globalised world, as well as a claim for the subject's freedom and responsibility. Touraine asserts that the subject is defining itself more in resistance than in affirmation, more in a wish to reduce suffering than in hope and more in attempts than in achievements. It is the individual's pursuit to become an actor in his or her own history. Touraine thus breaks with Gert Hofstede's (1980) classification of individualism and collectivism as opposite cultural values and puts forward an individualism containing collectivistic aims and common visions; the free actor who at the same time knows and recognizes that he or she forms part of something beyond the personal project, and that our postmodern confusing society requires strong individuals in order to engage with the community in a non-exclusive and open way.

Nikolas Rose goes along the same line of thoughts when stating that the only thing that can give some ground for optimism concerning the ability to live together in a diverse society is an "ethic of creativity". He suggests that we must search "forms of collectivization that create such new types of non-individuated subjectivity and bring new mobile forces into existence."⁹⁵

Bourdieu also talks about the subject, the actor, and sees the individual as an "*intelligible* agent embedded in a social context"⁹⁶, who is neither a free creator of social reality nor the mechanical determinant of structure. Bourdieu intends to put forward the individual as an

⁹⁵ Rose (1999) p. 196

⁹⁶ Kamali (1997) p. 39

active and conscious agent - not a simple bearer of structure; who acts in a social space, *a field*, which structures and gives meaning to his or her activities. "The agent is a socio-historical phenomenon acting in social spaces, or fields, in accordance to his or her specific habitus".⁹⁷

Pablo Freire also claims the need for human beings to develop into subjects.⁹⁸ He believes that this can be achieved by reflecting over one's situation and environment and by engaging in the milieu that one belongs to. He also puts emphasis on the human relations and that it is only in the encounter with others that we can transform into subjects.

Bauman (1997) describes the conditions for being constructive in the postmodern confusion in the words of *liberty and difference* on the one hand and *solidarity* on the other. It is about increasing the personal space, not feel invaded, not feel like trying to swim in something slimy - but rather to be like a fish to the water. To know that the surrounding water is what gives life, but not to wonder where the border goes between oneself and the environment, not to feel threatened or invaded by it.

And Ulrich Beck means that we need to search the "cosmopolitan eye", which implies respecting *the other* as both equal and different, as citizens of a global society of individuals. He puts this as a constructive alternative that can break the dichotomy between the neo-colonial universalism and the multicultural relativism.⁹⁹

4.2. Independence and Involvement in Communication

I believe that Scollon and Scollon (2001) touch on something similar as Touraine, Rose, Bourdieu, Bauman and Beck when using the concepts *independence* and *involvement* for

⁹⁷ Kamali (1997) p. 40-41

⁹⁸ Sahlin & Söderlund (1995) p. 186

⁹⁹ Jönsson (2004) p. 7, quoting Beck's recent book: "Der kosmopolitische Blick. Oder: Krieg ist Frieden"

describing face-strategies in human interaction. Their reference is mainly to communication and not as Touraine's to identity and actions. But the way we communicate reflects so strongly our identity and our expectations on ourselves and others¹⁰⁰ that it is not farfetched to make the connection.

Face is the "negotiated public image, mutually granted each other by participants in a communicative event"¹⁰¹. Scollon and Scollon elaborate on the concepts *independence and involvement* in relation to face and suggest that:

The involvement aspect of face is concerned with the person's right and need to be considered as normal, contributing, or supporting member of society. This involvement is shown through being a normal and contributing participant in communicative events. One shows involvement by taking the point of view of other participants, by supporting them in the views they take, and by any other means that demonstrates that the speaker wishes to uphold a commonly created view of the world. (---) The independence aspect of face emphasizes the individuality of the participants. It emphasizes the right not to be completely dominated by group or social values, and to be free from imposition of others. Independence shows that a person may act with some degree of autonomy and that he or she respects the rights of others to their own autonomy and freedom of movement or choice.¹⁰²

If we can balance the independence and involvement in our communication with others, assuming that this is thus reflected in our actions, then we are coming close to what Touraine means with being a subject. Touraine also suggests that a *subject* communicating with another person should resemble a friendship that respects the distance and doesn't build on the blind acceptance that comes from possession¹⁰³ and this reminds of the phrasing of Scollon and Scollon concerning independence and involvement.

Jackson refers to the concept of *intersubjective life* which Touraine surely would subscribe to and suggests that it is by reclaiming the "power to speak and act in relation to others

¹⁰⁰ Scollon and Scollon state that "Any communicative change is a change in identity" (S & S (2001) p. 284)

¹⁰¹ Scollon and Scollon (2001) p. 45

¹⁰² Scollon and Scollon (2001) p. 47

¹⁰³ Touraine (2002) p. 117

and to the world that we may locate the key to what it means to be human.”¹⁰⁴ He develops the concept of being an actor and allowing others to be actors as a fundamental struggle for identity and of being-at-home in the world:

This oscillation between being an actor and being acted upon is felt in every human encounter, and intersubjective life involves an ongoing struggle to negotiate, reconcile, balance, or mediate these antithetical potentialities of being, such that no one person or group ever arrogates agency so completely and permanently to itself that another is reduced to the status of a mere thing, a cipher, an object, an anonymous creature of blind fate.¹⁰⁵

Michael Traber calls this freedom in solidarity and states that: “Without the acknowledgement of mutual freedom, no genuine communication is possible. Communicative freedom, however, can only blossom in solidarity: that is, in an attitude of responsibility for each other.”¹⁰⁶ For Freire intersubjectivity is one of the main components in his theoretical model.¹⁰⁷ He asserts that in order to achieve intersubjective interaction or dialogue between two human beings they need to share the same state of mind, be able to tune into each other and meet each other on the same level, not hindered by e.g. the idea of helping another person without understanding that you are also being helped and transformed in the meeting. And Jürgen Habermas sees the web of intersubjective relations among people, created in communication, as what makes possible both freedom and mutual dependence.¹⁰⁸

Touraine asserts that the double emancipation of the subject – emancipation from market forces or empires and emancipation from closed communities – is a necessary prerequisite for real communication between different subjects, but also for the principles of justice, solidarity and shared responsibilities.¹⁰⁹ Needed for this emancipation are individual courage (that takes distance from power) and the collective ability to act (that protects

¹⁰⁴ Jackson (2002) p. 133

¹⁰⁵ Jackson (2002) p. 13

¹⁰⁶ Traber (1997) p. 328

¹⁰⁷ Sahlin & Söderlund (1995) p. 192

¹⁰⁸ Wuthnow et al. (1984) p. 190

¹⁰⁹ Touraine (2002) p. 86

individual rights and makes the survival of the subject possible). Touraine describes the subject not as a green-house-product but as a wild flower. By no means being just rationality - it is also freedom, liberation and protest.

4.3. The Fire-Soul

Åke Philips suggests the following definition of a fire-soul: "Fire-souls are those persons that are strongly engaged in an activity or a business. Their driving-force is a strong enthusiasm. In development work fire-souls and their efforts can be of great importance for the work to result in innovative changes."¹¹⁰ Bryntesson describes fire-souls as movers and shakers; people that overcome barriers and have a strong commitment and will to improve things, find new ways of working and see new possibilities.¹¹¹

Bergström et al. (2003) reflect on that the concept fire-souls is comprised of the notion to burn for something and to be *besjälad*, a Swedish word meaning to be inspired, but literally it can be translated as to be "souled" or soul-full, thus implying having warm and strong feelings and not mainly seeking financial rewards. The fire-souls can be compared with entrepreneurs who have connections outside the local society and strive for creating some kind of social or cultural gain for the local society. This reflects very well what Caroline Kelly and Sara Breinlinger state in their book *The Social Psychology of Collective Action*, namely that collective action often starts with unusual individuals, activists, who are less self-centred, willing to bear personal costs and who think that they can make a difference.¹¹²

The risk that local processes get too dependent on few fire-souls that can burn out is widely discussed in the literature.¹¹³ In order to avoid this, Bryntesson suggests the

¹¹⁰ Uggelberg (1997) p.14, translation K.H.

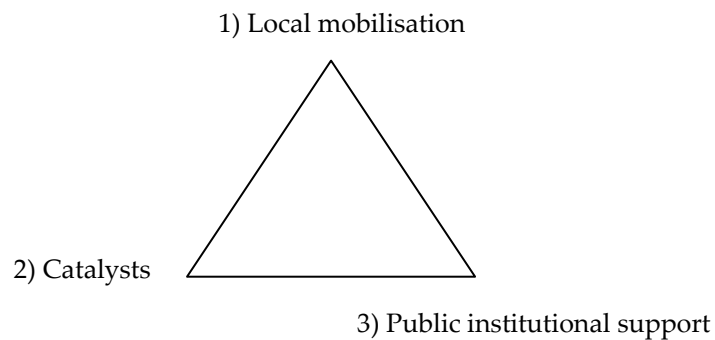
¹¹¹ Bryntesson (1995) p. 67

¹¹² Kelly et al. (1996) p. 13

¹¹³ E.g. Bryntesson (1995), Sahlin & Söderlund (1995), Forsberg (2001) and Bergström et. al (2003)

importance of a sustainable project-organisation and access to networks.¹¹⁴ In Sweden the model for local development is often described as the “necessary triangle” composed of (1) local mobilisation, (2) catalysts or external stimuli and (3) public institutional support, where fire-souls are described as the catalysts that burn and give energy without blasting.¹¹⁵

Figure 1) The Necessary Triangle



The metaphor of the fire is very illustrative and is also sometimes used by my interviewees, such as “to take care of sparks so that the fire can grow”. A similar metaphor is used in the bonfire-model of intercultural communication competence where the importance of the spark, passion and constant care and feeding of the fire in order to sustain it is underlined.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Bryntesson (1995) p. 68 and 75

¹¹⁵ Based on a model by Reidar Almås, see Almås & Lawrence (2003)

¹¹⁶ Hellqvist et al. (2003)

5. THE CASE OF THE FIRE-SOULS IN TENSTA

5.1. Tensta in a Swedish Perspective

The phenomenon of large-scale immigration is relatively new to Sweden compared to other western European countries.¹¹⁷ But after World War II immigration increased substantially, mainly due to the need for labour force in industry. In 1950 less than three percent of the population in Sweden had been born in another country while by 2000 this figure had grown to a bit more than eleven percent.¹¹⁸

Kamali points out that the government investigation published in 1967 lacks a discussion about the social status and integration of immigrants in the Swedish society, but adjustment policies were suggested in order to reduce problems and obstacles faced by immigrants in adapting to the Swedish society.¹¹⁹ This assimilation policy changed into an integration policy in the beginning of the 1970s, based on three principles: (I) Equality, (II) Freedom of Choice and (III) Co-operation. Kamali explains:

The principle of Equality meant that immigrants should have the same rights as the majority, but also share the same obligations. Freedom of Choice meant that immigrants should be free to choose the extent to which they wanted to be part of Swedish cultural identity, including the right to keep their own cultural identities. Finally, Cooperation meant that immigrants and the majority should cooperate with each other to create tolerance and solidarity in society.¹²⁰

Dan-Olof Rooth explains that these principles “clearly disclaimed the word ‘assimilation’ of immigrants, instead leaving the decision as to the degree of integration to the immigrant”. He further notes that “the goals themselves have not been criticised or

¹¹⁷ Kamali (1997) p. 57

¹¹⁸ Utrikesdepartementet (2002) p. 8

¹¹⁹ Kamali (1997) p.58

¹²⁰ Kamali (1997) p. 59

questioned, but the methods used to accomplish them have” and that “it can hardly be claimed that immigrant policy programmes have produced satisfying results as regards the primary goal of equality between immigrants and native Swedes”¹²¹. Comparisons between OECD-countries show for instance that differences in employment-rates between immigrants and natives are nowhere as big as in Sweden.¹²² While these findings are being questioned by the Ministry of Integration in a newly published report¹²³, there is still a consensus on the fact that much more needs to be done.

The three principles mentioned above are still the fundamentals for the Swedish integration policy, but in order to address the discrepancy between the policy and the reality the government as well as some municipalities have during the last decade invested more money and effort into breaking the growing economic and ethnic segregation and support the city districts with large immigrant-groups. The aims of these efforts that since 1999 have been part of an established policy are to (1) give conditions for sustainable long term growth and thereby new work opportunities and to (2) break social, ethnic and discriminatory segregation and promote equal living conditions.¹²⁴ The current development-programme for vulnerable districts of Stockholm is called “*Stadsdelsförnyelsen*” (The City District Renewal) and is succeeding to previous programmes such as “*Ytterstadssatsningen*” (The Outer City Investment) and “*Storstadssatsningen*” (The Metropolitan Investment). But there is nevertheless a continuously serious division concerning welfare and status between different city districts, especially in Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö. A governmental investigation published in 1997 states that: “The situation is to be labelled as serious. Economic, social, ethnical and demographic segregation has in total increased. The common idea that this is only ethnicity-based is not accurate. It is rather clear economic and social segregation that has developed.”¹²⁵

¹²¹ Rooth (1999) p. 29-30

¹²² Schierenbeck (2003) p. 13, quoting Ignacio Visco from OECD

¹²³ Dagens Nyheter 22/6 2004, p. 4

¹²⁴ Andersson (2002) p. 97

¹²⁵ SOU 1997:118, p. 3, translation K. H.

This also reflects a development of the Swedish society at large since 1993 with higher rates of unemployment, a shift in working-class employment from high-paid industry jobs to low-paid service-sector, lower political ambition concerning redistribution and decreased resources for welfare¹²⁶ – tendencies reinforced by the globalisation of economics as discussed in chapter 2.1.

Tensta forms together with Spånga one of eighteen city-districts in Stockholm, but the two areas are quite divided in social terms. Spånga is rich and mainly “ethnic Swedish”, while Tensta is a low-status and low-income area with 62% (compared to 10% in Stockholm in total)¹²⁷ of residents with foreign background.¹²⁸ Spånga-Tensta has around 34 500 inhabitants and around half of them live in Tensta, comprised of Tensta and Hjulsta. Tensta belongs to *Järvaområdet*, a former military training ground, and the houses were built in the sixties as part of “*Miljonprogrammet*” (The Million Programme) when the lack of housing was urgent and a lot of new districts were built at the outskirts of cities, envisioning a new modern life with access to nature and good facilities. The aesthetic considerations in the erecting of Tensta (as well as other suburbs in the Million Programme) were influenced by modernism and today one problem for Tensta is that the neighbourhood is from architectural point of view considered as not beautiful. The city district committee writes in a folder about Tensta that “the area is characterised by one-sided architecture but diversified population”¹²⁹ which is quite true. The most common countries of origin of the immigrant groups in Tensta are Iraq (mainly Kurds), Somalia, Finland, Turkey, Syria, Iran, Greece, Chile, Ethiopia and Lebanon.

Many different indicators witness that the development in Tensta does not match the development of Stockholm at large. The average income is only 57 % of the average income in Stockholm, the educational level is quite much lower also concerning young

¹²⁶ Initiated by a crisis in the monetary policy in Sweden

¹²⁷ Spånga-Tensta Stadsdelsförvaltning (2003), p. 11

¹²⁸ Meaning non-Swedish citizens born in Sweden or abroad, and Swedish citizens born abroad.

¹²⁹ Spånga-Tensta Stadsdelsförvaltning (2003), p. 7, translation K. H.

people, and the level of unemployment is higher.¹³⁰ Hosseini-Kaladjahi points out that it is *relative* poverty and not *absolute* poverty which creates a perception of ghetto in the minds of people.¹³¹ Tensta is a transit-place for many newly arrived immigrants. Established immigrants as well as established people in general tend to move away from Tensta and new groups move in and the population changes every five to ten years.

There is a stigmatization of the suburb, as of many other immigrant-dense suburbs built during the Million Programme. Per Wirtén writes about ethnic housing-segregation in Sweden that: “There is a widespread fear for areas such as Flemingsberg, Tensta and Fittja. They are some kinds of black spots. Like southern Sudan or eastern Zaire on the map.”¹³² And he describes how these areas transformed during the eighties, from being fairly balanced concerning ethnicity and social class to become dominated by non-European immigrants and weak social groups.

5.2. Description of the Group of Respondents

The eleven respondents in my research are between 20 and 63 years old, with an average age of 44 years. Five are women and six are men. Their background varies quite much. I see the diversity of the respondents as important since in that way they can provide a broader picture of the different reasons and ways to become involved and active.¹³³

Three of my respondents were born in Sweden, but two with parents coming from other European countries. Two of them come from Somalia, one from Chile, one from Bangladesh, one from Lebanon, one from Iran and two from Turkey of which one has Kurdish ethnicity. This reflects more or less well the composition of immigrants in Tensta.

¹³⁰ Spånga-Tensta Stadsdelsförvaltning (2003)

¹³¹ Hassan-Kaladjahi (2002) p. 57

¹³² Wirtén (1998) p. 7, translation K. H.

¹³³ It is interesting to notice that I didn't have to put in efforts to find a diverse group concerning countries of origin and fields of specialisation e.g. I didn't come across four interesting Somalis and chose to exclude two for the sake of diversity.

The average time spent in Sweden among the eight of my respondents who have immigrated is 23 years, in a scale between 14 and 33 years. All except two, who came as children, arrived at the age of 20-23. Five out of eight came with a refugee-status.

Education-wise they also differ quite much. Most of them have a university degree either from their country of origin or from Sweden, but some have only vocational training. Many of them could also be said to have middle-class background allowing for education and certain economic space, either from their family or from later developments in their life. All of them are very well-equipped when it comes to language skills. Apart from the Swedish language they all know at least two more languages, but some as many as five or six. The absolute majority also shares a certain fascination and love for languages.

The respondents are involved in different types of work and activities in the suburb, most as professionals but some of them only in their spare time. All of them have a commitment beyond their actual salary or work-contract, either by working much more than being paid for, or being voluntarily involved in other activities for the suburb as well. The thematic areas they are involved in are e.g. education, training, employment-facilitation, culture and arts, women, youth, children, drug-prevention, health, integration and environment.

All of the respondents share a political interest and awareness. Six out of twelve are members of the Social Democratic party in Sweden, four with commissions of trust in the party. Most others categorize themselves as "leftists" though being sceptical to party-political belongings. One of the respondents advocates a "networks-politics" voting for different parties depending on the question and the forum, and one rejects political parties since they are all based on patriarchal structures.

Six of the respondents are Muslims and three Catholic Christians but they vary quite much according the importance they attribute to their religion. For some it is the source of strength and something that supports their commitment, for others mainly something in the background that is not very much reflected over and yet for others something from

their childhood that they have left behind but nevertheless recognize a certain influence from. One respondent sees Human Rights as his religion and one expresses happiness for having been able to stay out of religions but also that he respects religious people.

5.3. Becoming an Independent and Involved Actor

Kelly et al. reports that recent studies defy theories of collective action as driven by self-interest - rather there are not usually very rational or easily explained reasons behind it.¹³⁴ This chapter gives the view of my respondents concerning important factors behind their commitment.

5.3.1. Culture of Action – Personal Attitude and Social Norms

According to various theories on reasoned action and planned behaviour¹³⁵ there are two main clusters for explaining collective action. One is on the individual level and deals with *attitudes*, mainly personal characteristics and individual decision making processes based on personal beliefs about possible positive/negative outcome of performing a specific action. The other cluster focuses on *social norms*, mainly intergroup context, social pressure which promotes or inhibits participation in collective action.

Certainly there are *personal attitudes* and traits that are predominant among the fire-souls that I have interviewed, such as civil courage, persistency, ability to overcome barriers, curiosity, empathy, social facility, humour and self-confidence. One man says: “Jag är säker på att det går att göra någonting” [5] (I am sure that it is possible to make a difference) and another that: “Jag gillar att utmana, jag ser möjligheter och jag vill förändra saker och ting. Det är därför jag sätter igång det här projektet. Det är något som jag brinner för... för att kunna förändra.” (I like to challenge - I see possibilities and I want to change things. That is why I

¹³⁴ Kelly et al. (1996) p. 13

¹³⁵ Ajzen and Fishbein's theory of reasoned action and Ajzen and Madden's theory on planned behaviour, described in Kelly et al. (1996) p. 26-27

started with this work. It is something I am burning for... to change things.) [1] He tells about his first encounter with Sweden:

Min bild av Sverige I början har varit strålande. Jag såg att det finns möjligheter. Och det var då jag började trotsa alla de här barriärerna. Trotsa alla de här hindren. Vi skulle sitta där på den där förläggningen men jag valde att läsa på Komvux, matematik och samhällsvetenskap med svenska elever. Det här var otillåtet, det var inte inom regeln, men jag har ändå lyckats att skriva in mig där. Chefen på förläggningen, jag sa till honom att jag vill göra något, jag vill inte bara sitta där. Konsten, varför jag lyckas, är att jag trotsar de här olika barriärerna. Människor kan inte bara vara ett paket som man ställer någonstans och för att flytta det här paketet behöver man en order. (I had a good first impression of Sweden. I saw that there were possibilities. And then I started to defy all these obstacles. We were supposed to just sit in the refugee station but I chose to study at the adult educational centre, mathematics and social science with Swedish students. It was not allowed, it was not within the rules, but despite that I managed to get a place there. I told the director of the refugee station that I wanted to do something - I did not want just to sit there. The reason why I succeed is that I brave all these barriers. Human beings can not just be a package that you place somewhere and for moving the package an order is needed.) [1]

But the optimistic attitude is often not based on rational reasons, as expressed in one interview:

Om vi återgår till varför man gör saker här som aktivist och som eldsjäl och så vidare, då, ja vi brinner ju på något vis av en ambition att göra något i sociala sammanhang som är positivt. Som kan bidra till en förändring i positiv riktning för Tensta. Men jag tycker nog att jag närs av en sån här... vad ska man säga... "trots allt". Men i grund och botten har jag en ganska pessimistisk inställning, jag är tvungen att försöka se positivt på just det jag gör, att det förhoppningsvis skulle ha en positiv funktion. (If we talk about why one does things here as an activist and fire-soul, yes, I mean, we are burning for an ambition to make something in social contexts that is positive. That can contribute to a positive change in Tensta. But I would say that I am nurtured by... what should I call it... a kind of "despite all". I am quite pessimistic deep inside, but I am obliged to try to look positively at what I am doing - that it hopefully could have a good effect.) [9]

This "despite all" attitude recurs in many of the interviews, and the reason for action is not really a belief in the last battle that will change everything to good, but rather in making a

small difference. This reflects very well the attitude that Touraine describes for the subject that arises in the space between pure will and total powerlessness.¹³⁶

Empathy and ability to identify is another personal characteristic that reappears in the interviews. One woman says: *"Jag kan inte förklara lidelsen, när du ser dem, när jag har sett dem här på svenska lektionerna, du vet kroppsspråket säger mycket, man ser på dem, men när de berättar, herregud, hur orkar de, hur orkar de?"* (I can not explain the compassion, when you see them, when I have seen them here in the Swedish classes, you know the body language tells so much, you can understand by looking at them, and when they tell their stories, oh my god, how do they cope, how do they cope?) [4]

Many speak about how hardships in their childhood and youth formed them and gave them the ability to feel empathy and to know what it is to struggle. The nomad life in Somali, a long illness, a violent stepmother, persecution or killing of family members, the shame in front of others for parents not speaking Swedish, the feeling of being part of a strange minority in society or a problematic early marriage and the struggle for divorce. One man who could be called a second-generation immigrant describes his experience in Tensta like this:

Och jag drivs dels av idéer som jag haft i min yrkesverksamhet då, men där det naturligtvis finns någon personlig sida av det där också. Jag känner mig engagerad i min stadsdel, min bostadsort, därför att jag har levt här i över tjugo år och skall man säga - jag har blivit en socialt engagerad Tenstabo, och kanske också av personliga skäl eller så där, det är lite svårt för mig att riktigt sätta fingret på det där va. Men som jag har väldigt lätt att identifiera mig med dom unga människor som växer upp här eftersom jag har någon slags liknande bakgrund som dom men från 50-talet då. (---) Det fanns ju inte sådana massor med invandrare där jag växte upp, men jag känner till problematiken med att ha föräldrar med låg utbildning som inte är så intresserade av det som händer i Sverige. (My driving force is partly ideas from my professional life, but there is of course also a personal side to it all. I feel engaged in my district, my neighbourhood, because I have lived here more than twenty years and what can I say – I became a socially engaged Tensta-inhabitant, perhaps also due to personal reasons or so, it is difficult to really put my finger on it, but I very easily identify with young people who grow up here because I have a similar

¹³⁶ Touraine (2002) p. 96

background like them but from the fifties. (---) There were not that many immigrants then of course, but I know the problems associated with having low educated parents without any interest for what happens in Sweden.) [9]

Many of my respondents speak of the refusal to engage only with a “small world” and with “small thinking” and that they have always been interested and curious in other cultures and languages, wanting to see more, to know more. *“Och som person liksom, man själv liksom, skall man begränsa sig till små religioner, små föreningar och små gäng eller vill man vara global tänkande och ha en tankestruktur som gäller samma frågor, utvecklingsfrågor, mänskliga frågor...”* (As a person then, as oneself sort of, should one only get engaged with small religions, small associations and small groups or does one want to be a global thinker and have a structure of thought concerning common questions, the questions of development, of humanity...) [5] Or as expressed by another respondent: *“Jag tror inte att jag skulle ha tyckt om en sån enskild organisation som bara hade ett folkslag och drev vissa frågor. Jag tror faktiskt att jag trivs bättre med det här i så fall.”* (I do not think I would have liked to be involved in a particular association that only engages with one people and promotes their questions. I actually think I prefer this.) [7]

Despite religious and political affiliations all of the respondents express independence in one way or the other from absolute authorities - something that both Touraine (2002) and Bauman (1997) give importance to, expressed in the interviewees’ statements such as *“Även om man har partitillhörighet skall man inte blunda för det man tycker”* (Despite political affiliation one should not close one’s eyes to one’s opinions) [1] or *“Det är OK för mig att kalla mig muslim, men det finns inte en enda religion som jag gillar 100%”* (It is OK for me to call myself a Muslim, but there is not one religion that I like 100 %). [10]

Another personality aspect that pervades the material is courage and self-confidence. Courage to say one’s opinion, not to be afraid of making mistakes when trying to learn a language, to naturally feel the right to take up space, to demand things, to speak out...

“Jag är inte rädd för att göra bort mig. Man lär av sina misstag!” (I am not afraid to make a fool of myself. You learn from your mistakes!) [4] Or another respondent says:

Att vara invandrare det är en lång process. (---) Men du skall alltid sträva efter att du vill vara en person, en person i ett samhälle, att folk ska räkna dig som en person. Men då måste du gå igenom en lång process, för att visa samhället att du finns. Och man ska också inte skälla bara på samhället! Alla har sitt ansvar. Absolut. Jag brukar säga till kvinnor: Tvinga er fram! Du måste få ditt men det räcker inte att du ska ta bara. Du måste ta och ge så att du ska få resultat. Och det är skyldighet. Det är skyldighet för alla människor, inte bara i Sverige. (It is a long process to be an immigrant. (---) But you should always strive for being a person, a person in society, that people should count you as a person. But then you need to go through a long process, in order to show to the society that you exist. And one should not just blame the society! Everyone has their responsibility. Absolutely. I use to tell the women: “Fight your way through!” One must get support but it is not enough just to take. You must take and give and then you will see results. And that is an obligation. It is an obligation for all human beings, not only in Sweden.) [10]

For Touraine (2002) the most important characteristics of a subject is individual courage and collective ability to act and this is very well reflected among my respondents.

It is clear that the *social norm* of activism and commitment in most cases comes from the homes where they grew up. In terms of role-models, many speak about their parents - either that their parents passed on a tradition of political activism or that they had other qualities such as democratic spirit, ability to listen, humbleness or certain values that influenced them in one way or another.

Two thirds of the respondents grew up in a home that was politically involved in some way. *“Vi har alltid diskuterat hemma, eller hur skall jag säga... Hemma har man alltid haft åsikter om det mesta”* (We have always discussed things at home, or how should I put it... At home there have always been opinions on most things) [7] or *“I vårt hem var det så mycket politiska människor som kom och träffades och gjorde revolutioner här och där och så.”* (In our home there were always political people who made revolutions here and there and so forth) [10] or *“Min farsa har väl betytt den del. (---) Han hade ett rättvisepatos och han blev förbannad när han blev oschysst behandlad.”* (My father meant a lot to me. (---) He had a

passion for justice and he got angry when he was treated unfair) [3] or “*Min mamma var en ovanlig mamma. Hon tog strid för andra människors rättigheter*” (My mother was quite an unusual mother. She fought for other people’s rights) [11].

Almost all of the respondents also speak about a certain discipline and work commitment that their parents passed on to them as a value. One woman says: “*Jag har jobbat väldigt, väldigt hårt för min pappa var en sådan person, man skulle tjäna sitt levebröd, säger man på svenska. Man skall jobba för brödet med sitt svett alltså, man skall inte få det gratis.*” (I have worked very, very hard because my father was such a person. You were supposed to earn your living as you say in Swedish. You should work for bread with your sweat and not get it for free.) [4]

Most of the respondents also have a role-model from their childhood or youth in terms of overcoming barriers and finding new ways.

Jag har haft det sen jag var liten, med en mamma som var så utåtriktad och intresserad av det mesta och så. Och en mamma som har aldrig har förstått att det inte är självklart att hon kan stoppa näsan precis där hon får lust, hon skall gå precis där hon får lust - utan hon bara gör det, så lite av det har jag också. (---) Jag har aldrig stannat upp, om jag har gått och det är intressant varför skulle jag inte vara där? Den styrkan har jag fått ifrån min mor faktiskt. (I had it from my childhood with a mother who was so extrovert and interested in everything. And a mother who never understood that it is not a matter of course that she can put her nose wherever she wants, go wherever she wants – she just does it, so I am a bit like that as well. (---) I have never stopped, if I went somewhere and found it interesting why shouldn’t I stay? This strength I got from my mother actually.) [11]

If not the parents it is an uncle, an aunt, a neighbour or a teacher in school that passed on the norm of questioning and breaking rules. One man says in answer to the question on why he became politically involved:

Jag vet inte faktiskt. Men det var en person som jag hade stor respekt för som hade suttit i fängelse, han var granne med oss, och verkade bra person, intellektuell, sa saker som var förbjudet i skolan och så där, och sen, jag blev påverkad, egentligen blev jag, att jag skulle läsa ett par böcker som var förbjudna, han lämnade till

mig, och sedan det...det sa klick liksom, aha, det finns en annan värld också. Annars jag hade en medelklassfamilj, inga andra syskon eller föräldrar var engagerade – min farfar han säger fortfarande "vad har du gjort?". (I don't know actually. But there was a person that I had a great respect for who had been in prison, he was our neighbour and he seemed to be a good person, intellectual, said things that was forbidden in school etc., and so I was influenced. In fact I was influenced to read a couple of books that were forbidden, he lent them to me and then...it sort of said "click", aha, there is another world as well. I came from a middle-class family and my siblings and parents were not involved and my grand-father still says to me "what have you done?") [5]

Especially the six respondents who were in Sweden during the seventies also speak about a certain spirit in the society that influenced their social norms, a discourse about solidarity, common action and fighting discrimination. One man says that *"det var ju ganska rätt att engagera sig på den tiden, det var ju i alla fall lättare än nu"* (to be engaged was the thing to be in those days, it was in any case easier than it is now) [3]. And another man explains his passion for justice saying:

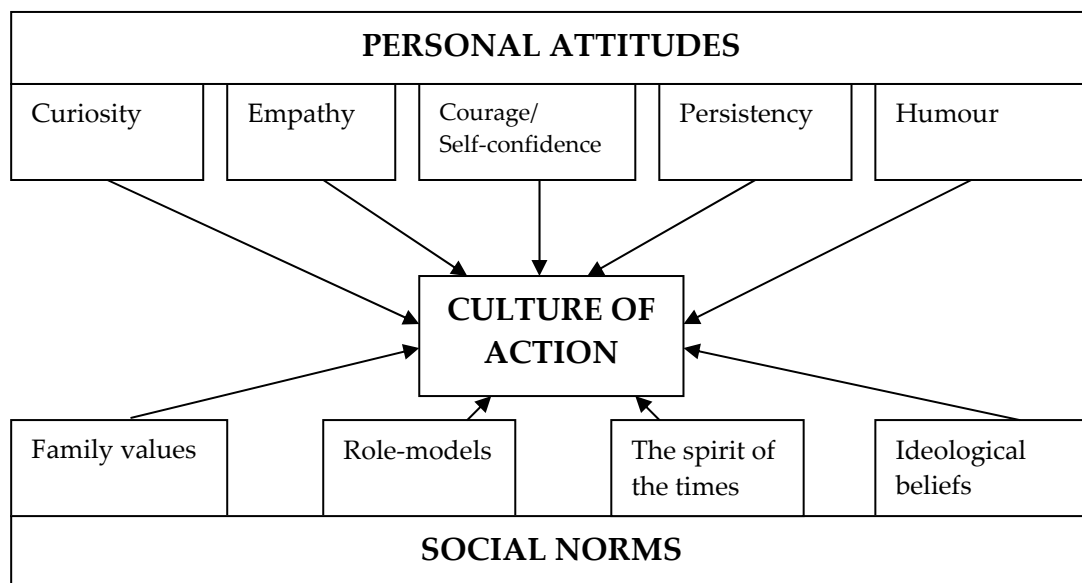
Jag kan inte... det kan hända att det finns händelser som påverkat mig men jag kan inte komma på det så här. Det står inte så klart för mig att då hände det något som blev bestämmande, utan att det handlar mer om att det har varit naturligt för mig. På något sätt har jag kanske fått det hemifrån också. Mina föräldrar tycker ju inte att vissa människor skall vara rika och andra fattiga och så där. Jag vet inte. Jag har väl fått mycket av det hemifrån gissar jag. Och så en allmän tidsanda kanske, den tid som man gick i gymnasiet på 70-talet. (I can't really... I guess there might be incidents that have influenced me but I can not really think of any right now. It is not very clear for me that at that particular moment something happened that made the difference - it was more that it was just natural for me. In a way I guess I got it from home as well. My parents were not of the opinion that some people should be rich and others poor etc. I don't know. I got a lot of it from home I guess. And then a certain spirit of the times perhaps, the times when I went to high school in the seventies.) [8]

Ideological beliefs can also function as social norms and be motivations behind actions. One woman says that she has a fundamental belief that human beings can be of sound mind and take responsibilities. She says: *"Man skall inte tro på att varken kung eller gud eller något väsen någonstans ska fixa allt åt oss. Nej, tillbaka till grunderna, att vi kan ta ansvar och förändra vårt liv."* (We should not believe that either a king or a god or some other being

will fix everything for us. No, back to the basis, that we are able to take responsibilities and transform our life.) [11]

Overall, culture of action can be understood by looking at the following figure that highlights different components:

Figure 2) Explaining culture of action



5.3.2. Reason to Act- Motivation

Concrete incidences and happenings in life can bring about motivation and the boost for activism. One woman among my respondents describes that she started to get involved in society through her children. When she found out that there were drugs in the school she realised that she had to do something about it. *“Det måste finnas något skäl för att börja. Tror jag. (---) Och jag tror att jag blev engagerad p.g.a. att min son hade problem, och det var han som drog mig till samhället.”* (There must be a reason to start. I believe so. (---) I think I got engaged because my son had troubles, and he pulled me to society.) [10] Others also speak about a certain concrete reason and motivation that made them active, such as building an identity in the new country that included their cultural roots.

Perception of inequality and relative deprivation is a traditional starting-point for explaining political activism and to some extent this can be seen in my material as well. One respondent says:

När min farfar blev dödad, jag vet inte, det kändes liksom verkligen som jag måste, eller jag kände liksom att jag ska försöka lyckas så att det där inte skall upprepas, så att ingen kan komma och bara skjuta någon annan bara för att dom är av någon annan nationalitet eller vad som helst. (When my grandfather was killed, I do not know, it really felt as if I had to, or I felt that I really should try to succeed so that it will not happen again, that no-one can come and shoot someone just because they are of a different nationality or whatever.) [7]

The will to defend and fight for Tensta since it is discriminated, since it is a low status suburb is another theme recurring, though it is evident that this kind of argumentation for many respondents belongs more to a past discourse. The belief in social change for the whole suburb is not very high; rather it is about helping others to class-mobility, finding individual solutions for the people in Tensta. "...förhoppningsvis att det innebär en klassresa för en och annan" (...hopefully this can result in class mobility upwards for some.) [9] This reflects also what was previously discussed as a "despite-all" attitude and connects to Touraine's (2002) description of the subject as not striving for a new society and a new humanity, but rather increased happiness and good life for each and everyone.

5.3.3. Understanding of How Things Go – Knowledge

One man simply says that "*Mitt boende och arbetande i Tensta har inneburit att det har vuxit fram ett engagemang hos mig vad gäller den här stadsdelen.*" (My living and working in Tensta has resulted in my getting committed to this city district). [9] This is another way to explain activism – as result of *personal experiences and knowledge gained*. Another man says: "*Jag har fått mina värderingar hemifrån. Och genom erfarenheter, genom att ha träffat på olika saker. Att man ser hur jävla orättvist samhället var i Latinamerika och många andra länder.*" (I got my values from home. And from experiences, from coming across different things. To see how devilishly unjust the society was in Latin America and in many other countries.)

Education is another important way to gain knowledge that many of the respondents talk about. One woman says that “*utbildning förstärker ens egen personlighet - att kunna förstå mer och kunna sätta in det i rätt sammanhang*” (education reinforces one’s personality - to be able to understand more and to put things into the right context) [4]. Most of the respondents however do not necessarily put emphasis on education, but rather on having the right knowledge that is valid in this society in each specific situation. It is about being able to master the cultural codes, to be well oriented and to know how the society functions, and this kind of knowledge requires many components apart from formal education.

5.3.4. Language for Action - Communication

Emile Benveniste has said that the basis of subjectivity is in the exercise of language.¹³⁷ And language is not just a linguistic set of rules or a private means of communication but a social phenomenon. Kamali refers to Bourdieu, Wittgenstein and others when stating that “language, whether Swedish, English, Turkish, Persian, Spanish, or otherwise, derives an important part of its meaning in a social context”¹³⁸. Also Taylor (1994) writes about the dialogical character of human life. He asserts that the acquisition of a rich language is fundamental for becoming full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, and defining our identity. Thus the knowledge of the language and the knowledge of the society in which one has to act go hand in hand and they need to develop simultaneously in order to be able to formulate intentions in relation to the society.

The respondents in general did not find it too difficult to learn Swedish, though of course learning a new language always requires an extensive effort. They express the need for knowing the language in order to be *independent*, not to have a need for a translator when talking to the teacher of their children, their doctor or other officials, as well as in order to get a job and have their own income. This is clearly linked to an identity of independence and managing things themselves, but also to a personality of curiosity and persistence.

¹³⁷ Kerby (1997) p. 127

¹³⁸ Kamali (1997) p. 60

Respect for *the other*, the stranger, the neighbour, is central for Touraine's concept of the subject and this recurs in all of my interviews and also in the respect shown to me. In communication theories of politeness-systems as described by Scollon and Scollon (2001) importance is given to the power-relation between co-participants in a discourse. Using the same rhetorical strategies does not always result in the same perceived power-relation. If a person uses an involvement-strategy in a conversation and the other person responds by also using an involvement-strategy this implies a close relationship of equal status, a so-called symmetrical solidarity politeness-system with short turns, over-laps and affirmations of the stand-point of the other person. But if an involvement-strategy is answered with an independence-strategy this usually implies a hierarchic relationship in which the person using the involvement-strategy is superior, e.g. a boss that can call the employees by their first name and ask them about their weekend-plans but hardly the opposite. If both speakers make use of independent-strategies this usually implies that they are equal but not close, a so called symmetrical deference politeness system. To master politeness-systems thus requires being aware of the co-participant's perception of the relationship in order not to communicate superiority while having the intention to communicate solidarity. This in turn requires being attentive and mindful when trying to build solidarity relationships, balancing between independence and involvement in a way that a person does neither dominate nor seem indifferent.

Since I am not equipped with the necessary data for doing a linguistic analysis of the way my respondents express and build discourse, I can not judge their ability to balance independence and involvement in communication. From their statements about themselves it is nevertheless clear that they see themselves as skilled in communication and able to approach people in the spirit of "the good conversation", implying listening and respect but also feed-back and the requirement of getting respect back. "*Det goda samtalet*" (The good conversation) [5] [9] as two respondents name it, is described as a real dialogue and real listening on equal grounds. The importance of listening is a key idea all through the interviews. One woman talks about her father and his ability to listen in a "democratic spirit". "*Han är rättvis. Han respekterar det du säger, han lyssnar, han försöker ge*

dig chanson att utvecklas..." (He is fair. He respects what you say, he listens, he tries to give you the chance to grow...) [10] On the question on what in life has been most important for him, one man answers:

Kanske... säger några, min ödmjukhet... säger många. Jag tror kanske att det kan ha påverkat. Liksom att lyssna och inte ha förutfattade meningar eller straffa andra med ord eller... Att lyssna och ödmjukhet, jag tror det. Den röda tråden i mitt liv har varit att lyssna tror jag. (Perhaps... some people say, my humbleness... many people say that. I think that has had an impact. And also to listen and not to have prejudices or to punish others with your words or... To listen and to be humble - the main theme in my life has been to listen I would say.) [5]

One of my respondents refers to Martin Buber and says that we need to go beyond the etiquette and preconception about people:

Försöker vi möta människor – det här är nästan en lite religiös idé – försöker vi möta människor som individer - då tänker jag på en sån här Martin Bubersk bild då va. (---) Det handlar om det här mötet då mellan en värld och ett universum som i viss mån är isolerat från en annan värld, ett annat universum. Här och där va. Och vi försöker upprätta en bro, det är väl det perspektivet någonstans som gäller. (If we try to meet humans – and this is almost a religious idea – if we try to meet humans as individuals - and I am thinking of Martin Buber's image. (---) It is about this meeting between a world and a universe that to a certain degree is isolated from another world, another universe. Here and there sort of. And we try to build a bridge...I guess that is the perspective I believe in.) [9]

Another respondent points out the importance of showing that all humans are of equal value. On the question how he himself shows that he says:

Det gör man ju genom att man pratar med folk på ett vanligt sätt då va. Det är inga speciella åtgärder utan tvärtom att man behandlar den som alla andra. Man betraktar inte en människa som dum bara för att han är svart, eller inte förstår, eller inte kan svenska, eller inte bra svenska – man försöker begripa vad han säger. Men inte att man överagerar - utan att de får känna att alla får samma behandling, det är viktigt. (That you show by talking to people in a normal way. It does not require any special measures, rather the opposite, that you treat him as anyone else. And that you do not treat a person as an idiot only because he is black or does not understand or does not speak Swedish, or not good Swedish – you

just try to understand what he says. But not by overacting - rather that they can feel that everyone gets the same treatment, that is important.) [3]

In order to establish communication there must be meeting-places, and this is something the respondents all underline as important. But meeting-places should not be forced, nor be only arranged through typical Swedish ways like to meet on certain hours for taking an evening course (*studiecirkel*) together. Rather they speak about the needs for spontaneous meeting-places such as the Cultural Café in Tensta or activities where you do not need to book a time, since booking a time obviously does not fit a lot of people from less clock-time-oriented cultures.

But more than meeting-places people also need to have topics in common. Touraine means that communication without a uniting principle that is shared by the communicators is impossible¹³⁹ and Buber says that “the real living together of man with man can only come true when people have the real things in their common life in common; where they can experience, discuss and administer them together, where real fellowship and real work guilds exist”¹⁴⁰. This is also reflected very clearly in my interview-material. The respondents continuously come back to making the point that you need to have something shared to talk about in order to establish a real communication, you need to do things together or have common concerns. On the question if the Swedish association-culture was experienced as very different, one man answers:

Absolut inte. Om man pratade om rasism t.ex. – jag hade lite kunskap och dom hade kunskap, dom hade glöd att bekämpa det här hela. Och vi pratade politik, jag hade kanske inte så mycket kunskaper om Sveriges politik, men om internationell politik. Jag hade samtalsämnen med dom här personerna jag träffade och så där. Det var absolut inte någon konstighet mellan oss, och sen det är det som är så fascinerande, att man måste ha saker och ting att samtala om, och då man struntar fullständigt i hudfärg eller religion, det är samtalsämnet som är jätteviktigt. (Certainly not. If we were speaking about racism for example – I had some knowledge and they had some knowledge and they had the fervour to fight it. And if we were speaking about politics, perhaps I didn't know so much about Swedish politics, but about international politics. I

¹³⁹ Touraine (2001) p. 197

¹⁴⁰ Fisher (1997) p. 309

had topics of conversation with these people I met and so on. There was absolutely nothing odd between us, and that is what is so fascinating, that you need to have things to talk about and then you don't care a bit about the colour of skin or religion, the topic of conversation is so important.) [5]

The idea that culture and arts can form a bridge between people and facilitate communication is also expressed by some of my respondents. To share the same visual experience or to play music together can create natural meeting places as well as the climate for conversation and real meetings.

5.3.5. Acting in a Multicultural Setting - Tolerance for Ambiguity

The complexity of identity in today's society, as described in the chapter 2.4.2., requires competences such as *tolerance for ambiguity* in order to enjoy and be able to act in a postmodern context where borders and identities are fuzzy and messy. Gudykunst and Kim define tolerance for ambiguity as the "ability to deal successfully with situations even when a lot of information needed to interact effectively is unknown" and state further that "if we have a high tolerance for ambiguity (---) we tend to seek objective information about the situation and the people in it" and that "we tend to be open to new information about ourselves and others if we have a high tolerance for ambiguity".¹⁴¹ They also quote Ruben and Kealey who mean that "the greater our tolerance for ambiguity, the more effective we are in completing task assignments in other cultures".¹⁴² And Stella Ting-Toomey states that "Personality factors such as tolerance for ambiguity and personal flexibility also help to promote identity security and inclusion of the self and others."¹⁴³

Concerning questions on identity my respondents do not really have problems combining different identities such as wanting to call themselves Swedish-Chilean or Swedish-Somali or rejecting all labels except "myself". They also give the impression of ease in code-switching, for example in quotes like the following:

¹⁴¹ Gudykunst & Kim (1997) p. 269

¹⁴² Gudykunst & Kim (1997) p. 269

¹⁴³ Ting-Toomey (1999) p. 45

När vi pratar [vårt språk] hemma så marker jag att det blir mer och mer begränsat. Jag och mina syskon pratar svenska, och det kan leda till att även om vi har bra [vårt språk] så kan det vara så att, ja, syslöjd t.ex. Så kan man säga flera ord på [vårt språk] och sen "syslöjd" på slutet. För det finns inte motsvarighet eller man vet inte vad motsvarigheten är. (When we speak [our language] at home I notice that it gets more and more limited. I and my siblings speak Swedish and that can result in that even if we speak well [our language] it can be like, well, "syslöjd"¹⁴⁴ for example. Then we can say a whole sentence in [our language] but finish off with "syslöjd". Because there is no equivalent or we do not know it.) [7]

One native Swede among my respondents suggests that he might be an exception, enjoying living in Tensta. *"Svenskar har ju svårt att palla med olikheter, att det är massa skräp och grejer, skrik och mycket barn."* (Swedish people have hard times coping with the differences and the fact that there is garbage and people yelling and a lot of children.) [3] The respondents share a frustration that the society only sees the multicultural neighbourhoods as threats and problems instead of seeing the beauty and the possibility, and realise that *"man mår bra av den här soppan"* (this mixed soup is good for you) [5] as one man expresses it. This reminds of Bennett's final stage in the developing intercultural sensitivity, described as "a person who experience difference as an essential and joyful aspect of life".¹⁴⁵

Almost all of the interviewees have grown up with some kind of natural diversity that probably has helped them to develop tolerance for ambiguity. Some come from a heterogeneous family in one way or the other, e.g. parents with different ethnicity or religion, one man worked for many years as a sailor *"så jag blir ju inte förvånad att människor har andra vyer eller uppfattningar"* (so it does not surprise me that people have different views or opinions) [3], and others grew up with the contrasts between countryside and city-life. One woman tells:

Så en blandning, jag tror att det är det som har format mig och givit mig stryka – jag är en mycket stark person tror jag. Just den här bredden. Att ha vuxit upp med två föräldrar som inte gick i en fåra utan de levde sina man- och kvinnoroller på helt andra sätt. De stimulerade oss att gå ut i världen, mina föräldrar t.ex. hade

¹⁴⁴ *Syslöjd*; needlework, is a curriculum in Swedish schools

¹⁴⁵ Bennett (1988) p. 186

knappt varit utomlands men de insisterade på att vi skulle lära oss i alla fall ett språk till förutom vårt modersmål. (The mixture, I think that is what has shaped me and given me strength – I am a very strong person I believe. This variety. To grow up with two parents who did not keep in the normal track but lived their gender roles in a total different way. They stimulated us to go out in the world, my parents had for example hardly been abroad but they insisted on our learning at least one foreign language.) [11]

Krzysztof Czyzewski affirms this idea. He asserts that if you once grew up with a multitude of voices you will never really enjoy listening to a unison melody but rather automatically start to sing the second part. If once you have experienced diversity you will find monologs and unison melodies to be hypocrisy.¹⁴⁶

One of my respondents suggests that some kind of continuity between life in the old home country and life in the new home country can increase the tolerance for ambiguity. For many immigrants political activism can be a kind of bridge, for others it might be their profession, their motherhood or their hobbies. To migrate is a certain rupture, and it is important to be able to see the links and the bridges in order not to get lost, not to lose oneself on the way.

Humour is also mentioned as important equipment in order to enjoy living in a suburb like Tensta. As expressed in one of the interviews: *“Tolerans, det bygger mycket på humor”* (Tolerance, that is to a large extent based on humour). [3]

5.3.6. Ability to Act – Resources

In chapter 5.3.1. the importance of attitudes and social norms was described. Kelly et al. outline how attitudes and social norms form the basis for the *intention*. But before the intention translates into *action* the *perceived behavioural control* intervenes, the actual ability to act. This can be internal factors such as individual skills, abilities and knowledge, or external factors such as time, opportunity and dependence on others.¹⁴⁷ It is interesting to

¹⁴⁶ Czyzewski (2001) p. 88

¹⁴⁷ Kelly et al. (1996) p. 27

notice that all women I have interviewed are either single, divorced or widows, as if having a husband for a woman imply fewer opportunities for engaging in the society. Another way of explaining this could of course be that for women social engagement can be a substitute for a relationship, and the truth might contain both explanations. Among the interviewed men four out of six have a wife and children, while two are divorced. One man also attributes the opportunity to be active in the society in his free-time to his wife who takes care of the children.

Mutual recognition and cooperation among the individuals who share the same acting-oriented lifestyle is fundamental for maintaining energy and visions. All of my respondents speak about the importance of *networks*. For many of them the access to networks has been the key to their involvement in the society – for different reasons. Once you are in the right circles you are always requested to come to meetings and you discover more and more associations, you get to know more and more people, you develop a home-feeling and you enjoy it more and more. You also get some of the necessary tools for being an efficient actor – you have people around you who support you and who you can ask for advice. This is particularly important for the first generation immigrants among my respondents, since it takes time to learn how a new society functions and how to influence things. One man describes how his possibilities have changed:

Då, för tio år sedan, var jag inte mogen att protestera så högt heller, jag visste hur samhället fungerar, jag hade inte kontakter. Nu har jag massa kontakter med den här föreningen, olika partier eller folkvalda människor eller ledamöter.(---) Jag kan fråga vem som helst nu, det är många som jag känner. Om det är någon fråga så kan jag ringa vissa personer och fråga "vad gör man när det blir så här?". Då får man råd därifrån. (Then, ten years ago, I was not mature to protest loudly, I did not know how the society functioned, I did not have contacts. Now I have a lot of contacts through this association, different parties, popularly elected people or members. (---) I can ask anyone, I know a lot of people. If there is a question I can make a phone call to certain people and ask "what do you do when this happens?". Then I can get a piece of advice from them.) [2]

Another aspect of networks is that they often contain role-models, people who have come before and can be a source of inspiration. One woman says: *“Jag har vänner också som är engagerade. De hjälper mig, jag ser hur de gör och jag frågar också. Jag blir attraherad att göra som de gör, förstår du. Det är klart, alltid när man ser något hos andra människor som du önskar att du skall kunna göra också, det är klart, man tar från dem.”* (I have friends who are engaged as well. They help me, I see how they do things and I ask as well. I get attracted to do like they do, you know. Of course, always when you see something in other people that you wish you could do yourself, of course, you will learn from them.) [10]

For immigrants most networks beyond the ethnic group start with volunteer associations but also with political parties. As mentioned previously as much as six of the respondents are member of the Social Democratic party, the biggest political party in Sweden and the party that has the ruling power in both Sweden and Stockholm for the current period of mandate. Of course such a membership can be helpful, if used in an active way for gaining contacts and being inspired by role-models.

Building networks is also about gaining trust that can open doors and give possibilities. One woman describes gaining other people's trust and having education as the two main factors that can enable a person to make a difference.

Social networks of friends and family are of course important in times of hardships or psychological stress. Many of the respondents talk about the importance of their having family or friends who support them a lot and what difference that makes. In some, but quite few cases, the support from religion is mentioned.

5.3.7. Sustaining the Fire – Rewards

Kamali observes that participating in social life implies the ability to recognize the social reality, but also to be recognized by other members of the community in which the individual acts. Therefore it is a kind of self-realization. “An individual's integrative social

action, thus, is a dialectical process of self-realization that takes place in a familiar social context that provides the appropriate means for meaningful social action.”¹⁴⁸

One woman elaborated on the need for being an actor in order to develop feelings towards the society: *“När man börjar engagera sig och bry sig, då skapas känslor också för landet faktiskt. Så länge du inte bryr dig så känner du inte att du tillhör hit. Det upptäckte jag, att så fort jag började bry mig mer, då blev Sverige hemland för mig.* (When you start to get involved and start to care about things, then you actually also develop feelings for the country. As long as you do not care, you do not have a feeling of belonging. I experienced that as soon as I started to care more, Sweden became my country.) [10]

Most of the respondents describe the biggest reward for their work in the feeling of satisfaction when helping others. *“Det roligaste är att man kämpar och sen plötsligt ser man liksom att en tjej eller kille har fått ett arbete eller gått till vidare studier.(---) Det gör en jätteglad och stolt liksom.”* (The most positive for me is that you really put a lot of energy and then all of a sudden one of these youngsters gets a job or starts to study. (---) That makes me so happy and proud sort of.) [5] *“Det som ger mig kraften är att kunna hjälpa en kvinna som är misshandlad eller en ung tjej som har problem med sin familj. Att lyssna, att hjälpa att ringa polisen eller att hjälpa henne att ta det lugnt. Då känner jag efteråt att jag gjort ett bra jobb.”* (What gives me the energy is to be able to help a woman who is assaulted or a young girl who has problems with her family. To listen, to help to call the police or help her relax. Then I feel afterwards that I’ve done a good job.) [6] *“Att se människor resa sig och förändras och växa och ta sig ton – det var som ett under varje dag liksom. Detta var fantastiskt, fantastiskt att vara med om.”* (To see human beings rise and change and raise their voice – it was a wonder every day. It was amazing, amazing to be part of.) [11] Many express it as being a facilitator so that human beings can reach their full potential – and not help in a way that makes people feel handicapped and dependent.

¹⁴⁸ Kamali (1997) p. 185

But a more explicit recognition can be needed sometimes and does help to sustain the fire, especially in times of low energy and when the work is being questioned. The way others approach you means a lot. One woman describes the recognition she felt in receiving a whole box of post-cards and letters from people who were sorry that her project had been closed down in Tensta. Another woman expresses that she is grateful for the respect she has gained in Tensta thanks to her commitment.

Another kind of reward is the context and meaning that a commitment gives; the feeling of being part of something bigger, beyond the personal project. One man says that: *“Jag har alltid haft ett jävla hat mot dem som förtrycker människor - jag känner ju gemenskap och sammanhang då, att slå tillbaka, hävda att alla människor har samma rätt oavsett var de kommer ifrån eller hur de ser ut.”* (I have always hated those who oppress people - then I feel a connection and a context, to fight back, to argue for the equal right of each and everyone no matter where they come from or what they look like.) [3] Another woman reflects upon the fact that she got quickly engaged in the Swedish society when she came *“och jag tror att det var det som räddade mig psykologiskt också”* (and I think that was what saved me psychologically as well). [11] Yet another respondent says that her engagement is like rehabilitation for her; that it makes her feel better and sleep better.

The respondents also describe rewards in terms of putting ideas into practise, to gain professionalism and expertise in the field and to get to know interesting people from all over the world who have come to Tensta. It is experienced as a lot of fun in the midst of the hard work and that it is interesting and educating in many ways to be so involved. *“Man får så mycket. Tror du att om jag hade bott i [ursprungsland] i hela mitt liv att jag hade fått den kunskap jag har idag? Man lever så mycket, man lär sig så mycket... när man blandar sig... när man flyttar på sig... Man lär sig så mycket.”* (You get so much. Do you think that if I had stayed in [country or origin] my whole life that I would have gained the knowledge I have today? You live so much, you learn so much...when you mingle...when you move... You learn so much.) [10]

5.4. Barriers for Becoming an Independent and Involved Actor

The social psychological explanations for non-activisms stretches from cultural context to practical constraints and Kelly et al. refer to models based on societal, group and individual factors.¹⁴⁹ Most of the explanations that my respondents give for the non-activism of other people in Tensta are based on individual attributes, conditions based in the structures of the society, and practical constraints, and this chapter mainly deals with those. The broader cultural context of activism being “out of date” is discussed in chapter 5.5.1.

5.4.1. Uncertainty and Psychological Stress

The main explanations that my respondents use for non-activism is the uncertainty and psychological stress that many people in Tensta suffer from. First-generation immigrants often come from war-zones and totalitarian states and they are afraid of getting too involved in the society. It takes time to understand how the new society functions and to know how to deal with things. The culture-shock can be inhibiting. *“Många säger att det är så stor kulturkrock. De har rädsla och de vill försöka sätta sig inom sitt skal så att de inte förlorar det lilla de har.”* (Many people say that the culture shock is so big. They are afraid and they want to protect themselves so that they do not lose the little they have.) [10] The culture-shock can for example concern all the different authorities they need to relate to in a centralized social welfare country like Sweden. One of my respondents remembers an encounter in a health centre:

Jag frågade henne vad hon behövde hjälp med och då hade hon en platspåse och sa “kan du hjälpa mig med det här?”, och så vände hon plastpåsen upp och ner och på det här lilla bordet som vi hade var det fullt med små lappar, små och stora i olika färg, pappersbitar. “Jösses”, sa jag, “vad är det här?”. “Här vet du”, sa hon, “här har jag tid till sjukgymnasten den och den tiden”, eller något sånt där. “Och här har jag tid hos min socialsekreterare och här är papper från skolkurator om det här barnet och här och här ska de behandla mig för

¹⁴⁹ Kelly et al (1996) p. 154

min arm och här från apoteket och här de säger att jag ska arbetsträna men här de säger att jag ska vara ledig.” Och då började jag rada upp de här papperna - hon hade många tider och hon var kallad till socialtjänsten på samma tid som till sjukgymnasten och massa sådana här saker. Så började jag räkna och det visade sig att hon har sexton olika myndighetskontakter samtidigt och då måste det vara hon som samordnar det här för myndigheterna förmår inte samordna sinsemellan.” (I asked her what she needed help with and then she took out a plastic bag and said “can you help me with this?” and she turned the plastic-bag upside down and the little table that we had was filled with different papers in different size and colour. “O dear, I said, what is this?” “Here you know”, she said, “here I have an appointment with the physiotherapist” or something like that. “And here I have an appointment with the social secretary and here is a paper from the school welfare officer concerning this child and here they will treat me for my arm and here is from the pharmacy and here they say that I should do work exercise and here they give me sick-leave.” And I started to organize all the papers - she had many appointments and for example with the social welfare office at the same time as the physiotherapist and loads of those kinds of things. I started to count and it showed out that she had sixteen different authority-contacts at the same time and then she has to be the person co-ordinating all this because the authorities can’t coordinate among themselves.) [11]

The same woman describes all the existential pain she encountered when working with health-related issues in the suburb. Existential pain in relation to living in a society where one feels alien, where questions arise concerning life and death, concerning dying in a foreign country and what is the meaning with it all. On top of that anxiety arising from social isolation, housing-problems and economic insecurity - and not knowing who to turn to with personal problems. *“När man bodde hemma i sitt ursprungsland hade man alltid någon att gå till, och det finns så många här som inte har någon att gå till.”* (When you lived in your home-country you had always someone to go to, and there are so many people here who do not know who to go to.) [11]

“Det är inte lätt att känna sig trygg i ett främmande land” (It is not easy to feel secure in a new country) [10], another respondent says, underlining that often a long process is needed in order to find one’s place and to feel allowed to have an opinion in a new society. *“I början hade jag inte de här känslorna och tankarna att jag är en person från det här samhället. Nej. Då kände jag att jag var en gäst och då kanske jag inte har rätt att blanda mig i någonstans.”* (In the

beginning I did not have the feelings and thoughts of being a person belonging to this society. No. I felt I was a guest, and then perhaps I do not have the right to interfere with anything.) [10]

My respondents also explain that many immigrants are afraid of making mistakes in the language and in the social codes. The anxiety of not be taken seriously because of grammar mistakes or wrong pronunciation is a barrier for activism and integration. One respondent says:

Tror du att det är så lätt för någon, säg man eller kvinna som kommer från någon by i Mellanöstern eller Anatolien att ta sig självklar plats på ett socialt sammanhang som de möter här? Det är inte så självklart. Inte för den personen p.g.a. att han skäms, p.g.a. att han inte tror om sig själv att man kan någonting eller att man är informerad eller något sånt där. (Do you think it is so easy for someone, say a man or a woman who comes from some village in Middle East or Anatolia to take place in the social context that they meet here? It is not so easy. Not for that person because he is ashamed because he does not believe himself to be able to do something or that he is enough informed or something like that.) [9]

Many of the respondents speak of the language as a barrier that prevents many people to get involved in the society. But they also recognize that the barriers are not in the actual learning of the language, but in the lack of concentration and energy for leaning that many immigrants have, due to the lack of peace of their mind.

Det är inte bara en språkbarriär. Jag tycker man koncentrerar sig för mycket på språket. Det finns ju andra saker som är viktigt också. Hur pass informerad man är, hur intresserad man är att delta. En del har väl så jävla mycket problem, eller tycker att man har det, så att man inte orkar med eller vill orka med något annat. Det är mycket sånt som spelar in. (It is not only a language-barrier. I think there is too much focus on the language. There are other things that are equally important. How informed you are, how interested you are in participating. I guess some people have so damn many problems, or perceive that they have, that you do not have energy or do not want to have energy for something else. A lot of those things matter.) [3]

Or as expressed by a woman among my respondents:

Du vet när man har problem, då mår man ju inte bra, så, man har ingen kraft, man har ingen ork, som många kvinnor här som har läst flera år i rad, de säger att det fastnar ingenting här, det kommer och går men det fastnar ingenting, varför fastnar ingenting, jo därför att, vissa kvinnor, har jättemycket problem. Det kan vara ekonomiska problem, det kan vara att mannen går arbetslös hemma, du vet man blir ju irriterad, man går varan på nerverna, så det blir bråk, det påverkar livet, hela familjen. Och oftast det kan vara konflikter, krock, kulturkrockar, när barnen växer det blir problem, mellan sin make, och som mamma man tar alltid barnens parti. Man skyddar på något sätt sina barn. (You know, when you have problems, you do not feel well and you do not have the energy, nor the guts, just like many women here who have studied Swedish for ages, they say that nothing remain with them, it comes in and goes out but it doesn't stay, and why is that, that is because some women have so many problems. They can be financial problems, that the husband is unemployed at home, you know you get irritated, you get on each other's nerves, you start to fight, it influences the whole life, the whole family. And most often it can be conflicts, clashes, cultural clashes, when the children get older there are problems, the mother disagrees with the husband and takes the side of the children, as women always do. Somehow you protect your children.) [4]

This reflects very much Gudykunst's so called AUM-theory, posing that Anxiety and Uncertainty Management are two central factors for intercultural competence.¹⁵⁰ According to my respondents many people in Tensta experience anxiety and uncertainty when being confronted with the society and therefore stay outside as much as possible. In other words they lack tolerance for ambiguity due to uncertainty and psychological stress.

5.4.2. Lack of Knowledge

Another reason coming back in the interviews is that many people simply do not know what is going on or where to get involved. To invite people to an open meeting by putting up a paper on a notice board does not resemble an invitation for many people from less "paper-information-based" cultures, as one of my respondents explains it. There are also people who do not understand Swedish or even are illiterate, which makes it even more important to complement written invitations and written information by other means of

¹⁵⁰ Gudykunst (1995) p.10

communication. The need to talk directly with people, encourage them to come and assure them that others they know will be there, is emphasized by my respondents.

Once in the meetings, many people do not know exactly what is being discussed and are therefore afraid to ask. "*Kommunikation är svårt och formen, beslutsprocessen, är svår*" (The communication is difficult and the formality, the way decisions are taken, is difficult" [1], one respondent explains. To use more simple Swedish is one idea that comes up for achieving more inclusion in the meetings and to reduce failures in information and communication.

Another respondent explains that people with foreign background who want to give their opinion or complain, in many cases complain to a wrong authority and therefore it has no effect – and next time they will probably not even try.

Hosseini-Kaladjahi suggests three factors for passivity that are related to the lack of knowledge, namely (1) not knowing the language, (2) ignorance concerning democracy issues and (3) illiteracy or low educational level often combined with traditionalism.¹⁵¹ He explains traditionalism with what some researchers call "urban villagers", people whose main adaptation problem is not linked to being an ethnic minority in a foreign majority culture, but rather coming from a traditional rural society and trying to adapt to a modern, urban society. Despite being put in other words by my respondents, I very much recognise the picture given by Hosseini-Kaladjahi in my collected data.

5.4.3. Lack of Time

Lack of time as a barrier for becoming involved in the society is particularly mentioned in relation to immigrant women. There are a lot of women who simply have so much domestic responsibility and so little support from their husbands concerning house-work that they don't have the time to be involved in the society. This is a situation not only found among immigrant women; traditional gender-roles concerning household

¹⁵¹ Hosseini-Kaladjahi (2002) p. 67

responsibilities are in general more common in low-income families as the majority of those in Tensta. As mentioned earlier it is interesting to notice that the female fire-souls I found in Tensta were all single women.

One young woman who has grown up in Sweden with immigrated parents also explained the lack of time that especially female teenagers experience in trying to accomplish the expectations both from school, friends and from family. Many young women with immigrated parents are expected to help much more at home than their friends from mainstream Swedish families, and also to be present at home much more.

But some respondents also suggest that there is a lack of time in general for being involved in something beyond getting the family economy going.

“Jag tror att folk här sliter och arbetar för sin familj, för sina barn. Många personer som bor här kommer från landsbygdsmiljöer, kommer från enkla familjer och så vidare, och dessutom har de fullt sjå med att ha siktet inställt på framtiden för sina barn.” (I believe people here are drudging and working for their family, for their children. A lot of people who live here come from country side conditions; from simple families and so on, and they are fully occupied with working for the future of their kids.) [9]

5.4.4. Strong Diasporic Identity

Previously (in chapter 5.3.7) I described how one respondent's feeling of belonging to Sweden developed when she started to be involved in the society. Another respondent explains the non-activism of many immigrants in the neighbourhood with the feeling of non-belonging:

Jag tror att det beror på precis det som jag sa från början – det här mentala utanförskapet liksom. Kanske att man befinner sig fysiskt, geografiskt i Tensta, men tankarna är begravna i hemlandet. Och sen, svårigheter man har gentemot majoritetssamhället, vad gäller utbildning, jobb och språk etcetera, massa “handikapism” de bär med sig. De känner sig inte hemma. Och när man inte känner sig hemma, man blir inte engagerade i samhällsfrågor. Man har sin parabol kanske och tittar liksom på kanaler hemländer och man känner sig lite nostalgisk i bästa fall och man känner sig utanför. (I believe that it is due to what I spoke about in the beginning - this feeling of mental alienation sort of. Perhaps you are physically, geographically in

Tensta, but your thoughts are buried in the home country. And then, the problems you have in relation to the majority-society concerning education, job, language etc., all these handicaps they carry with them. They do not feel at home. And when you do not feel at home, you do not engage with the society. You have your satellite TV perhaps and you sort of watch TV-channels from your home country, you feel nostalgic in the best case, and you feel as an outsider. [5]

The ethnic groups in Tensta often form a strong diasporic identity and feel stronger within their group than when exposed to the Swedish society. The dilemma often pointed out in research about diaspora and transnationalism (as previously discussed in chapter 2.1.) is that diasporic communities are anchored (socially and culturally as well as physically) neither at their places of origin nor at their places of destination.¹⁵² They live in a certain way still in the society they once left – even if this society in reality has changed and transformed since then. William Safran's definition of diaspora from 1991 characterizes diaspora by "*dispersion from an original centre, the maintenance of memory or myth about the original homeland, the belief of not being fully accepted in the host country, the idea of return, commitment to maintenance or restoration of the homeland, and the group consciousness and solidarity*"¹⁵³ which correspond quite well with my respondents' descriptions from Tensta. One young woman says:

Det finns mycket av gruppssamhälle här. Det finns en jättestor grupp syrianer och de håller ihop liksom i sin grupp, och sen turkarna håller ihop i sin grupp och så där. Och då kan det vara så att den gruppen blir som ett litet samhälle, du får hjälp från kyrkan t.ex. eller från en väns vän och så där och att engagera sig utåt blir inte lika viktigt för du har allt du behöver i den gruppen. (This is quite much of a group-society. There is one big group of Syrian people and they are sort of always together in their group and the Turkish stay in their group etc. And then it can be so that this group becomes like a little society of its own, you get help from the church for example or from a friend of a friend and so on and to be engaged outside is not that important, because you have everything you need in the group.) [7]

She believes that it can be both good and bad. The positive side is the social network and support you can get by belonging to one group, but the risk is that it becomes a closed

¹⁵² Vertovec & Cohen (1999) p. 1

¹⁵³ Povrzanovic Frykman (2004) p. 82

group with few connections to the rest of the society. She continues: *"Jag tror att om samhället skall fungera så borde fler folk faktiskt engagera sig och gå och rösta. Och om de inte vill engagera sig utåt i andra politiska organisationer så kan de engagera sig i den lilla gruppen, bara de gör det utåt också. Inte bara stänga in sig."* (In order for the society to function people need to be more engaged and go and vote. If they do not want to be in other political organisations at least they can engage with their own group in an extrovert way. Not just lock themselves in.)

5.4.5. Economic and Ethnic Segregation

Tensta is a low-income area with a large unemployment and a lot of socio-economic problems that of course influence the position and social capital of its inhabitants. One of my respondents who work with young people in the neighbourhood explains that many of them lack role models in their lives.

De har sociala problem, de flesta av dem har ett sånt där kraschat familjeförhållande och kanske pappa är arbetslös och mamma samma sak, eller dom bor ensam utan sina föräldrar, och de här ungdomarna har inte kontakt med vuxenvärlden och de har inte så mycket förebilder heller. De rör sig i de här tre stadsdelarna, de har inte den här kontakten med infödda svenskar, de har lägre utbildning. Språket, kulturen, koderna, kontakterna... Massa olika saker påverkar att de ligger längst ner på arbetsmarknaden och på utbildning t.o.m. Det är någon sorts sjukdom faktiskt, skulle jag säga. (They have social problems, most of them have this kind of crashed family-situation and perhaps their father is unemployed and their mother as well, or they live alone without their parents, these youngsters do not have contacts with adults and they do not have too many role models either. They move around in these three city districts, they do not have this contact with native Swedes, they have lower education. The language, the culture, the codes, the contacts... All different things that influence that they are at the bottom of the labour market and at the bottom even concerning education. It is a kind of disease I would say. [5]

A lack of support for those people who show interest in being more active is another reason pointed out by one woman. *"Det måste finnas 'följelse' kan man säga, att följa den här personen, att bygga kunskap hos den här personen."* (There must be a follow-up; to follow this person, to build this person's knowledge.) [10] Many people point to the need for more resources in general for the suburb, especially since established immigrants as well as

established people in general tend to move away from Tensta and be replaced by newly arrived immigrants with bigger need of support.

Bauman writes about the issue of power for building social ties, and mean that “the ‘we’ must be powerful, or social identity won’t be gratifying”.¹⁵⁴ Also Parekh addresses the issue of power in relation to identity: “Identities are valued or devalued because of the place of their bearers in the prevailing structure of power.”¹⁵⁵ And it is clear that to come from Tensta doesn’t imply power nor implies a positive collective identity. One respondent says: “*Det här är en segregerad bostadsort, det finns inte mycket här rent materiellt i form av affärer, banker och sådana saker. (---) Här bor människor som med svenska mått mätt har det sämst i landet.* (This is a segregated neighbourhood, there isn’t much here in material terms like shops, banks and those kinds of things. (---) People that live here are people who from a Swedish point of view are at the bottom of the scale.) [9] Bergström et al. reflect on the fact that there is a spirit in each society partly stemming from the way people see themselves and how others see them.¹⁵⁶ And it seems as if the spirit in Tensta is not very encouraging for activism.

The tendency for combined economic and ethnic segregation is getting stronger and stronger in Stockholm.¹⁵⁷ To come from a city district that is considered low-status can be an impulse for activism and social struggle - but can also give a feeling of hopelessness and to rather look for individual ways of improving one’s situation instead of collective ways. To make a personal class career – including moving away from Tensta, can for many people be more attractive than working for a new status for the whole suburb. This is also quite reflected in the statistics, showing that most people who achieve a better salary or position move away from Tensta, while more recently arrived immigrant groups

¹⁵⁴ Bauman (1999) p. XXXI

¹⁵⁵ Parekh (2000) p. 2

¹⁵⁶ Bergström et al. (2003) p. 105

¹⁵⁷ SOU (1997)

move in.¹⁵⁸ Another reaction is to reject the host culture and create your own rankings and life-styles, as young men from the suburbs often do. One man says:

”Ungdomarna har det marigt alltså. Det blir ju mer och mer ett samhälle där ungdomarna från förorten håller sig för sig och svenska ungdomar för sig. De går inte på samma ställen, börjar tycka illa om varandra för att de inte lär känna varandra. Svenskarna tycker att de är kaxiga och bråkiga och stökiga och de tycker att svenskarna är nedlåtande och har fördomar. Det är jobbigt tycker jag, att det blir så. Då blir man ju lite pessimistisk om framtiden. (Young people have tough times. We have more and more a society where young people from the suburb are doing their thing and Swedish young people their thing. They don't go to the same places and they start to dislike each other because they never get to know each other. The Swedes think that the youngsters from the suburbs are cocky and noisy and trouble-makers, whereas these think that the Swedes are condescending and have prejudices. That hurts me, this development. Then you get a bit quite pessimistic about the future.) [3]

5.4.6. Discrimination

Another reason for non-activism is the attitudes immigrants meet in the Swedish society and the discrimination that they experience. The difficulty to get into the labour market creates a disappointment towards the society; a feeling of being rejected, that also influences the eagerness to be involved through the volunteer sector. The discrimination experienced naturally also reinforces the diasporic identity discussed in chapter 5.4.4. and this becomes a vicious circle hindering involvement in the society.

One woman among my respondents explains that a lot of people say to her that there is no use to get involved because Swedish people do not have confidence in an immigrant and many concur that there is a need to change attitudes in order to put immigrants more in the limelight. It is pointed out that it is not always easy to be allowed in to the activists' circles or to be treated with respect and listened to if trying to say something in an open meeting and that people with foreign background are often dismissed due to poor Swedish.

¹⁵⁸ Andersson (2002) p. 103

One respondent proposes that “*Tensta lider av ’ämfös’*” (Tensta suffers from “ämfös”). [9] “Ämfös” should be read out: “*äldre män, föreningsvana svenskar*” (older association experienced Swedish men) and refers to a small group of older men who are dominating discussions in local meetings and participate in every possible process. The picture given in the evaluation of the Plus-project from 1995 is very much the same.¹⁵⁹ These older Swedish men are seen as excluding due to the nature of their language and that they do not take into account that others might not be as familiar with Swedish association culture as they are. People with immigrant background feel uncertain about the way things go in the meeting and they do not dare to speak or make questions since they are not sure that it is appropriate. A Swedish native among my respondents notes:

Det är inte integration man pratar om när man pratar om att de skall anpassa sig till den svenska modellen – det är assimilation. Och de flesta missuppfattar ju det. Många svenskar säger att de skall jävölar anamma anpassa sig till vårt, men de lär sig inte av invandrarna. Vi har en unik möjlighet att integrera oss med varandra, så att man lär sig. (It is not integration you talk about if you say that they should adapt to the Swedish model – that is assimilation. And most people misinterpret that. Many Swedes say that they should god damn adapt themselves to us – but they do not learn from the immigrants. We have a unique opportunity to integrate with each other, so that we learn.) [3]

The attitudes that immigrants sometimes experience from the majority-society hurt a lot, also for my respondents. One woman who came to Sweden as a child tells how she often felt as if her mother was declared an idiot (*dumförklarad*) by authorities and that it was very difficult having to translate discourtesies to her mother:

Jag blir arg ibland på myndigheter i Sverige. Hur de bemötte mig när jag var liten och skulle hjälpa min mamma att översätta... hur de... deras nonchalans och deras översittarstil när vi kom dit och jag skulle översätta för min mamma. Den mottagningen vi fick var inte särskilt trevlig. (Sometimes I get angry with the authorities in Sweden. The way they approached me when I was a child and I was helping my mother to translate... how they... their nonchalance and their superiority attitude when we came and I was translating for my mother. The treatment we got was not very nice.) [7]

¹⁵⁹ Sahlin & Söderlund (1995) p. 84

Another respondent reflects over how tired he is of being called “immigrant” when he has lived all his life as an adult in Sweden:

Det känns som att när folk säger att “aha, en invandrare” att det betyder att jag inte är värd någonting. Jag har gjort som de har gjort för det här landet. Du har jobbat, jag har jobbat, du har betalat skatt, jag har betalat skatt, jag har inte begått något brott. Varför skall jag vara invandrare? Det är ju självklart att jag är invandrare, men ordet eller meningen de använder... (It feels when people say “oh, an immigrant” that it means that I am not worth anything. I have done what they have done for this country. You have worked, I have worked, you have paid taxes, I have paid taxes, I have not committed any crime. Why should I be an immigrant? Of course I am an immigrant but the word or the meaning they use...) [2]

Wirtén affirms that “immigrant” has negative connotations in Swedish. “It is used in a stigmatizing and condescending way. To be called an immigrant does not always have to do with actual circumstances. Rather it is a marker of marginalization and expulsion.”¹⁶⁰

A different kind of discrimination are the attitudes of “taking-care-of-immigrants” which make many people passive and handicapped without ability to believe in their own strength. It is about expected behaviour which becomes like self-fulfilled prophecies. Hosseini-Kaladjahi comments on the danger of being too kind without asking for a commitment in return, and the inherited risk with excusing immigrants on the basis of cultural differences and thereby unconsciously stating that they will never be able to live up to the same requirements as ethnic Swedes.¹⁶¹

One of my respondents calls this attitude of taking care of people from Africa, Asia and Latin America whiteness racism or culture racism and sees it as an inheritance from the colonial era in Europe. Another man points out that not everyone comes through the first years in Sweden waiting for resident permit and not being able to work or do anything without becoming very passive. He calls it a “*passiviseringsprocess*” (passivity-process).

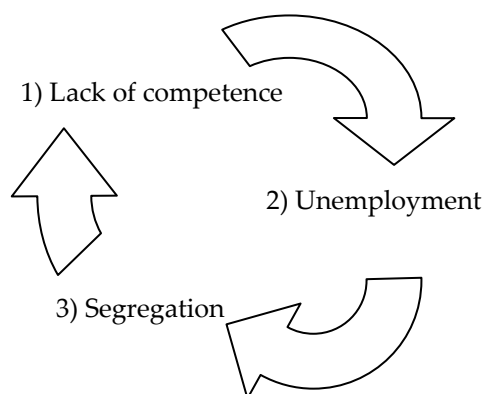
¹⁶⁰ Wirtén (1998) p. 19, translation K. H.

¹⁶¹ Hosseini-Kaladjahi (2002) p. 68

“Ibland är det en snällhet, vi vill ta hand om invandrare, men har människor själva kommit hit till Sverige då är de kapabla att ta hand om sig själva.” (Sometimes it is a kindness, we want to take care of immigrants, but if people have come here themselves then they are able to take care of themselves.) [1]

Recent research verifies that the perceived discrimination has its grounds. Hosseini-Kaladjahi points out that the Swedish strategies for breaking ethnic segregation have always focused on the minority, the immigrants themselves.¹⁶² The problem has been outlined as a lack of competence among immigrants – especially concerning the Swedish language, resulting in unemployment and therefore segregation, which in the next step reinforces the lack of competence. The logical strategy for breaking the segregation has therefore been to increase the competence of the immigrants.

Figure 3) The minority-focused problem picture



But Hosseini-Kaladjahi shows from his studies on immigrants from Iran that there is no significant correlation between language skills and employment and not even between level of education and employment.¹⁶³ He asserts that the reasons for segregation are more to be found in the discrimination of the majority-society towards immigrants, and that they are based on a hierarchical logic, strongly correlated with the economic strength of the country of origin – e.g. Americans can be positively discriminated even if their Swedish is very poor, but people from sub-Saharan Africa are associated with poor

¹⁶² Hosseini-Kaladjahi (2002) p. 54

¹⁶³ Hosseini-Kaladjahi (2002) p. 58

countries and are therefore considered low-status people.¹⁶⁴ Wirtén agrees to this analysis, observing that the prevailing hierarchy among immigrant groups is clearly corresponding with the global power and economic hierarchy.¹⁶⁵

On the basis of these observations Hosseini-Kaladjahi suggests that programmes for breaking segregation rather should target discriminatory attitudes in the labour market in order to break the vicious circle. It is not strange that also language learning is inherently difficult if you do not feel accepted. Hosseini-Kaladjahi quotes Annick Sjögren stating that “as long as children and parents do not feel accepted by the society, the most ambitious pedagogical programmes will fail”.¹⁶⁶ The Swedish Minister of Integration, Mona Sahlin, confessed in a recent interview, that from her understanding the Swedish integration policies have been wrong, focusing too much on the individual immigrant instead of focusing on the structures in society.¹⁶⁷ This view is shared by Kamali who has been appointed governmental investigator concerning structural discrimination in the Swedish society. The analysis is nevertheless under tough debate at the moment and there is hardly any consensus about the roots of the problems, what should be investigated and by whom. This is not the place to go into that debate in detail but what is interesting to point out here is that discrimination as a structural problem in the Swedish society has been brought to the centre of the integration-debate and that many factors support the need for taking structural discrimination into account when explaining segregation and non-activism among immigrants.

5.5. Perceived Structural Constraints that Suffocate Fire-Souls in Tensta

Touraine does not only put forward the idea of the subject but also its need for institutional support and protection: “institutions that serve the freedom of the subject and

¹⁶⁴ Hosseini-Kaladjahi in the conference Crossroad Fittja 5/12 2003

¹⁶⁵ Wirtén (1998) p. 23

¹⁶⁶ Hosseini-Kaladjahi (2002) p. 59, translation K. H.

¹⁶⁷ Dagens Nyheter 1/6 2004 p. 10

the communication between different subjects” in order for people to develop as subjects and actors.¹⁶⁸ Bauman (1999) states something similar when saying that the strength required by the intercultural society will not come by itself, but must be facilitated and supported. As seen in chapter 4.3. public institutional support is one of the main components in local development according to the “necessary triangle model”. And Kamali concurs that institutions and the need for institutional change are at the core of the integration problem “in order to satisfy the democratic demands of the civil society and to reinforce solidarity boundaries among different groups”¹⁶⁹.

But instead of getting institutional support, it is obvious from my interviews that the fire-souls in Tensta experience being counteracted by local politicians and civil servants. To what extent they get influenced or even feel that their fire is dying due to this differs. Some are still quite optimistic and energetic and say that for sure there are problems but that one should not become bitter it is just to try again and again. Others are quite tired and feel that their energy is running out. Most of them are also keen on mentioning that there are good people in the decision-making structures as well and some feel to be very supported by civil servants, but still the criticism of the overall attitude, climate and ways of dealing with things Tensta is quite sharp and totally dominates the picture. This chapter mainly deals with the disappointments and disillusionments that make it difficult to keep on burning.

5.5.1. The Development of the Society at Large

Framtiden för Tensta? Alltså, under de tjugo år som jag har bott här anser jag att Tensta har genomgått en sämre utveckling än man skulle önska sig, det har blivit sämre i Tensta. Samtidigt så anser jag att utvecklingen i Västeuropa för en viss social grupp människor – alltså den här två-tredjedels-samhälles diskussionen du vet – den har också varit sämre. Och... utvecklingen i Tensta är del av det här. Jag är ganska pessimistisk på hur framtiden ser ut. (The future for Tensta? Well, during these twenty years that I have lived here I believe that Tensta has not had the development that one would have wished - it has gotten worse in Tensta. At the same time I can see that the development in Western Europe for a

¹⁶⁸ Touraine (2002) p. 31

¹⁶⁹ Kamali (1997) p. 56

certain social group – the two-third-society-debate you know – has also gotten worse. And... the development in Tensta is a part of that. I am quite pessimistic about the future.) [9]

Some of my respondents speak about a disappointment with the ways things have developed that is part of a broader picture of globalisation of economics and growing gaps in the society that this has brought about. Others are more frustrated with seeing people becoming more passive and less involved nowadays, with society being more individualistic and egoistic. As pointed out by Robert Putnam in his book “Bowling Alone” (2000) there are fewer and fewer people in the western society who are prepared to take on volunteer commitments and social responsibilities without seeking immediate financial reward. This is reflected in the interviews in statements such as:

Förr så var det ju tycker jag, en slags kampanda som handlade om solidaritet - dels att man kämpade för de som hade det sämre - internationell solidaritet och också Tensta-Rinkeby solidaritet mot diskrimineringen i Stockholm liksom mot de här områdena. Alltså massa sådana här saker. Så det fanns en väldigt stark samhörighetskänsla, en kampanda och föreningsaktivism på något. Den här känslan av att vara diskriminerad kan ena ganska mycket också, om det inte finns andra saker som enar så tycker jag att alla invandrare och svenskar som bor här har samma intressen för de är lika utsatta. Men nu tycker jag att det som förenar oss nu är mera viljan att skapa ett bra liv för oss och våra barn och så där och det kan man uppfatta lite mer eller mindre privat. Men det kan hända, alltså det kan nog vara så att det är... Jag tror att det har med riktiga förändringar att göra och en ny tidsanda, men det kan ju också vara min personliga, att mitt eget liv har förändrats, att jag själv har flyttat mitt eget fokus. (Before there used to be a certain kind of fighting spirit I believe, that was about solidarity - partly fighting for those who were worse off – international solidarity, and partly solidarity against the discrimination in Stockholm against neighbourhoods such as Rinkeby and Tensta. A lot of these kinds of things. There was a strong feeling of connection, a fighting spirit and activism. This feeling of being discriminated can also unite a lot, if there are no other things that unite then I would say that all immigrants and Swedes living here have the same interest because they are equally exposed. But now I think that what unites us is more the will to create a good life for us and our children and so on and that could be understood as more or less private. But it is also possible, it could be... I mean, I think it has to do with real changes and the new times, but it could also be that it is my personal life that has changed, that it is me personally who has changed the focus.) [8]

5.5.2. *Institutions and Politics of Funding*

One of my respondents relates that when she started to work with a health project in Tensta she saw a big book-shelf of reports of finalized projects in the city district committee office, and she felt that she did not want her project to be just another report on a dusty shelf. *“Jag vill inte att det skall vara ett projekt som väcker massa förhoppningar hos folk... att folk blir använda för att man skall hitta modeller och att någon skall skriva en uppsats och sen tar projektet slut.”* (I did not want it to be a project that raises expectation and hope in people... people that are being used because someone wants to find a model for a thesis and afterwards the project ends.) [11] She got a promise that if the project worked it would be made permanent. But that was later changed. After less than two years politicians decided to end the project and the people who needed the help were in a way let down. She tells about her reaction to the decision:

Efter lunchen var över så sa de att hela verksamheten skall läggas ner. Och alla andra visste som satt kring bordet. Och jag satt ensam där. Och – jag är väldigt stolt över mig – för jag blev alldeles tyst och sen så tårarna bara rann. Och jag sa till dem att det här är maktmissbruk, det är maktmissbruk och det är ett fruktansvärt svek mot de människor som bor i Tensta. (After the lunch they told me about the decision that the whole project would end. And all the other people around the table already knew. And I sat alone there. And – I am very proud of myself - I got very quiet and then the tears started to flow. And I told them that this is abuse of power, this is abuse of power and it is an enormous treachery against those people who live in Tensta.) [11]

When the same woman asked the city district director Jack Kindberg how they could act in this way his answer was that *“varför skall jag ge pengar till er när jag kan pytsa ut lite pengar till föreningar så fixar de lite hälsoarbete?”* (why would I fund this project when I can give out some money to associations and they arrange some health work?) [11]. This attitude of letting non-professional people get money for small projects instead of having a coherent and professional strategy for how to meet the needs in the suburb is given a lot of criticism by my respondents. One man calls it *“amatörernas julafton”* (the Christmas Eve of the Amateurs) [8]. It is however not the fact that associations are given the space that is

criticized, but rather the amount of money they are given for their projects, despite the lack of professionalism and broader perspectives. One of my respondents says:

Jag läste att en förening behöver en halv miljon för att utveckla unga invandrarkvinnor – va! Då blev jag arg. Jag blev jättearg och jag ringde upp dem. Vadå behöver så mycket pengar för att utveckla unga invandrarkvinnor? Det behövs inte. Jag har jobbat så mycket ideellt. Och jag vet hur man kan utveckla, man behöver inte så mycket pengar. (I read that an association needed half a million crowns in order to develop young immigrant women! Then I got angry. I got really angry, and I called them up. What is this that needs so much money to develop young immigrant women? That is not needed. I have worked so much voluntarily. And I know how you can develop; you don't need all that money. [10]

From his evaluation of integration efforts¹⁷⁰, Hosseini-Kaladjahi concurs that there has been too much focus on immigrant associations and that there are few results in relation to the input. He suggests that the difficulties in working with immigrant associations are due to the fact that:

...they often can't ensure continuity in their activities, they don't always represent all the members of the group, that they mainly exist for other purposes than integration and that some immigrant associations are directly or indirectly linked to ideological institutions in the home country or to political oppositional parties in exile.¹⁷¹

Despite this, Hosseini- Kaladjahi asserts that immigrant associations still can have their importance since they are a potential link to big groups of people otherwise not easily reached. But he rather suggests that the local anchoring should be based on competent individuals than on immigrant associations¹⁷², thereby supporting the focus for this study.

My respondents share frustrations concerning continuous ruptures in strategies and execution and the main problem is said to be the short-sightedness and the lack of long term goals. It is clearly very de-motivating and tiring for the people involved and they start to feel that their efforts are pointless because nothing is allowed to continue. There

¹⁷⁰ Specifically from evaluating "Blommansatsningen"

¹⁷¹ Hosseini-Kaladjahi (2002) p. 70, translation K. H.

¹⁷² Hosseini-Kaladjahi (2002) p. 70

are a lot of unfulfilled promises and empty words that suffocate the fire-souls and drastically reduce the motivation to give energy and time for development work. Here are comments from three of my respondents:

Jag vill se ett sammanhängande förändringsarbete, strukturellt arbete, att man börjar från noll och man avslutar här och utvärderar vad som har varit bra och vad som inte har varit bra. Faktiskt, det har inte varit många verkliga projekt – det har bara varit lite hit och lite dit, man slutar med ett projekt men kan man se något resultat? Eller så är det ett projekt som går jättebra men den så finns inte pengar för att fortsätta. (I want to see a coherent work for structural change; that you start from one point and then evaluate and see what has been good and what has been bad. Actually there haven't been many real projects – mostly it has only been a bit here and a bit there and one project ends and no results can be seen. Or a project goes really well but then there is no money to continue.) [5]

Min kritik mot det här handlar om fler saker. Ja själva grunden i det projektänkandet, att man hela tiden startar nya flaggskepp på något sätt, projekt som ger sken av att det kommer mycket pengar till det här området. (---) Jag tycker att det vore mycket bättre om det satsades extra på dom här områdena - för det tycker jag att man skall göra - men inte så där på proklamationssättet utan att det sker i ordinarie budgetar egentligen (---) Inte på det här teaterviset; cirkusmöte eller vad man skall kalla det för som jag tycker bara är förnedrande egentligen. (My criticism concerns many factors but the basis is the project-thinking, that new flagships are set off all the time, projects that give the impression that there is a lot of money coming to the suburb. (---) It would be much better if extra money were spent on these areas – because I do think there should be – but not in this kind of proclaiming manner but rather through the ordinary budget. Not in this theatre way; circus meeting or what you should call it that I actually mostly find humiliating.) [8]

Vad är det som gör att ibland i perioder finns det projektpengar, och det finns uppmuntran ifrån politiskt håll lokalt, ifrån tjänstemannahåll lokalt att försöka vaska fram individer som är beredda att så att säga vara de här eldsjälarna i lokalområdet. Och i andra perioder så finns inte det utan då motarbetas det i stället. Då har man byggt upp någonting med projektpengar med sikten att - i alla fall i de här eldsjälarnas fantasi - har varit att nu dras det igång någonting som kommer att utveckla Tensta, som kommer att permanentas, som kommer att utvecklas och bli större eller något sådant. Det är klart, det är väl allas våra fantasier när vi börjar med något sånt här. Inte så att vi tänker tills döds dagar vara involverad i det här, men sätta igång det, och ge det till andra sammanhang som utvecklar det här och bygger vidare på det och så. Men det blir inte så. Utan det är någon slags konjunktur som plötsligt då svänger. Antingen så svänger det låt säga för ett år eller så svänger det permanent. (Why is it so that in some periods there is project money and there is encouragement

from local politicians and local civil servants to try to find the individuals who are prepared to be the so called fire-souls in the neighbourhood – and in other periods there is not and then it is counteracted instead? Then when you have built something with project money with the aim – in the vision of the fire-souls at least – that now something is starting that will develop Tensta, that will be made permanent, that will develop and become bigger or something like that. I guess that is all our vision when we start with something like this. Not that we think that we will be involved till the days of our death but that we start it and then give it to others who will develop it more and will build on it and so forth. But it does not go that way. Then there is a kind of business circle that all of a sudden makes a turn. Either it turns for a year or it turns permanently.) [9]

This tendency is reinforced by the political climate of Stockholm, which is strongly coloured by ideology. The majority in the city council changes with every election, which makes the ruptures and changes of policies towards the suburbs a bit too frequent. Often promises made in election-campaigns are not very well based on the real needs or conditions, and trying to fulfil the promises causes a lot of problems and frustrations and often results in well-functioning projects being closed down in order to give space in the budget for what has been promised.

Hosseini-Kaladjahi warns that there is too much of a tendency in project evaluations to romanticise the flexibility and efficiency of the project model in comparison to the slowness and conservatism of the bureaucracy and he recalls Weber's positive judgement of the rationality and predictability of the bureaucracy and concludes that every project needs to be anchored in the existing bureaucracy in order to succeed.¹⁷³ This very much goes hand in hand with what is suggested by my respondents.

5.5.3. "*Feigned Democracy*"

"*Skendemokrati*" (feigned democracy) is an expression often coming back in the interviews, in different contexts. One man says:

¹⁷³ Hosseini-Kaladjahi (2002) p. 63

Vi har ett demokratiskt underskott i förorten. Här finns människor som har sökt sig till demokratier, men när de kommer till Sverige, till förorten, ser de att istället politiken blir ett slags rävspel, politiken blir ett slags demokratiska processer. Vart fjärde år så kommer politikerna till förorten och säger att ni skall rösta, ni skall gå till vallokalen - men så fort valrörelsen är slut släcker man lampan. Sedan säger man att man bekymrar sig att det är fyrtio eller femtio eller femtiotvå procent som röstar, men det är ingen som bryr sig mellan de här valen. När det handlar om makt och representation i politiken, de struntar i fullständigt. Det är det här som jag menar, man struntar fullständigt i människors erfarenhet som bor i förorten. Det spelar ingen roll vilket parti du tar. (We have a democratic deficit in the suburbs. Here are people who have searched for democracy, but when they come to Sweden, to the suburb, they see that democracy has become a kind of political intrigue, the politics has become only a process implying that every fourth year the politicians come to the suburb and say that you should vote, you should go to the polls – but as soon as the election campaign is over the light is switched off. Then they say that they are concerned that there are only something like forty or fifty or fifty two percent that is voting, but no one cares between the elections. When it comes to power and representative politics, they do not give a damn. This is what I mean, that they do not give a damn about the experience of the people living in the suburbs. It is the same whatever political parties you speak about.) [1]

The interviewees experience that the central authorities in Stockholm do not allow for too much of independence in Tensta, and that they want to control what happens there. The case of Tensta Art Gallery being forced into becoming a branch of the Stockholm Cultural House is for many taken as a proof for this theory. Two of my respondents also mention the feeling that the people in Tensta are seen as guinea-pigs for the researchers or professionals from the city. Here they can experiment with their theories without any real commitment to change or continuity.

Many respondents speak about powerlessness, and how easy it is for politicians to ignore people in Tensta since the majority is badly informed and can be easily manipulated. A frequent example is that of the enlargement of the highway passing outside Tensta. Many of my respondents have been involved in fighting for the highway to go through a tunnel instead, in order not to deteriorate the living conditions in Tensta, or at least to set up walls to protect Tensta from the noise – but they see no real effect of their struggle. And partly this is due to the fact that the people in Tensta do not have the social capital that makes a difference when protesting. This creates a lot of frustrations among my

respondents. One respondent says that she feels the need to make people in Stockholm understand that *“Tensta ligger i Sverige! Det ligger inte i Afrika. Om det finns dåligt rykte är det dåligt rykte för hela Sverige.”* (Tensta is situated in Sweden! It is not situated in Africa. If there is a bad reputation, then there is a bad reputation for the whole of Sweden.) [10]

Some have positive comments about the open meetings in the City District Renewal but the majority finds them very frustrating. Many of my respondents are doubtful or resistant about taking part in meetings or processes that legitimize what they call feigned democracy. One man says:

Jag upplever att det är väldigt mycket ett spel och att det viktiga i de här sammanhangen inte är resultaten utan bara att det skall komma mycket folk på möten, eller att det skall finnas många namn på utskickslistan, och så skall man pricka av på något vis att det finns något slags demokratisk process eller delaktighet som är något annat än den här Stadsdelsnämnden, utan att folk är engagerade på något sätt. Och möjligheten att föra diskussioner, att påverka någonting, förverkliga någonting, är helt omöjligt. (I experience it quite much as a political game and what is important is not the results but only that there are a lot of people in the meetings, a lot of names on the sending list so that somehow you can say that there is some kind of democratic process or participation that is outside the committee, that people are engaged in other ways. But the possibility to have a discussion, influence something, realise something – is not there.)
[8]

One man uses the term “technocrat dictatorship” referring to the bureaucratic language used by civil servants in the communication with inhabitants, inhibiting people to participate and makes the democratic process doubtful. He explains:

Människor vet inte riktigt vad man diskuterar och därför kan de inte begära ordet helt enkelt. Många av dem upplever att det här är skendemokrati. Även om det blir ja här i samverkansgruppen så kan det bli åttio procents nej i nämnden. Vi har inte läst på, många vet inte...det är som en sjukdom. Det är jättesvårt att integrera och utveckla vårt område, men politikerna i Stockholms stad anser att man kan spotta lite grann. Inte spotta men det är som om du är jättesjuk och du skall bara ta en Alvedon, du har ingen riktig medicin. På samma sätt är det med “Stadsdelsförnyelsen”. (People are not too sure about what is being discussed and therefore they simply can not ask for the floor. Many people feel that this is feigned democracy. Even if the coordination group says yes the city district committee will say no in eighty percent of

the cases. We have not studied the rules enough and many people do not know... it is like a disease. It is really difficult to integrate and develop our neighbourhood but the politicians in Stockholm think that it is enough to give next to nothing. It is like when you are really ill and you just get a pain-killer but no real medicine. It is the same way with the "City District Renewal".) [1]

5.5.4. "The Grass-cutter-machines"

Fear of change is coming back as a sharp criticism towards local politicians and civil servants. A lot of people see a pattern in the way that initiatives and well-functioning work is being treated in Tensta. One older woman, who participated in the annual meeting of the friends of Tensta Art Gallery where the decision to close down the gallery was discussed, called this "the grass-cutter-machines". When telling about my study of fire-souls in Tensta one of my interviewees spontaneously comments that "*Är det inte skottpengar på eldsjälar i Tensta?*" (Is there not a bounty for shooting fire-souls in Tensta?) [9]. One of my respondents expresses this feeling saying that:

Jag tycker det är så typiskt och därför upprör det mig mycket det som har hänt med Tensta konsthall också - inte bara för det konstnärliga som jag tyckt jättemycket om, det är de utställningar som jag har gått till de senaste åren som har mest berört mig - men jag känner också det här att man inte låter några initiativ växa i Tensta. Det finns en ledning med en uppfattning... en total brist på visioner... och ett förändringsmotstånd som är massivt. Ingenting som går utanför det traditionella, det vanliga, det slentrianmässiga får lov att överleva i Tensta. Det är min uppfattning. (---) Jag tror att det handlar ganska mycket om att man har fått sin varma plats i solen och då... Jag har uppfattningen att det viktigaste för de här personerna är att fortsätta ha det bekvämt. Bevara en sakernas tillstånd som gör att deras platser inte blir hotade. Och då vill man ingenting. Jag känner att i praktiken finns det mycket förtryck också. För de håller befolkningen...liksom...allt som kan göra att människor i Tensta kan få lite bättre självkänsla sågas av. Det är min uppfattning. Man får inte känna sig stolt över att bo i Tensta. (---) Precis som med Livstykets, Konstverksamhet, allt som kunde ge Tensta ett annat namn på kartan - allt det försvinner. (I feel it recurs all the time and therefore what has happened to Tensta Art Gallery makes me so upset. Not just because of the artistic loss - because I really liked it a lot and the exhibitions that have been shown are the ones I have visited the last years that have touched me the most - but I also feel that there is something about not letting any initiative grow in Tensta. The leaders have a certain attitude... a total lack of visions... and a resistance to change that is enormous. Nothing that goes beyond the traditional, the common, the routine is allowed to survive in Tensta. That is my opinion. (---) I think that this goes back to that when once you got your warm place in the sun then... I have the feeling that what is most important to these

people is to continue to have it comfortable. To maintain status-quo so that their positions are not threatened. And then you have no visions. I feel that in practice there is a lot of oppression as well, because they keep people... somehow... everything that could give the people in Tensta better self-confidence is being cut off. That is my opinion. It is not allowed to be proud of living in Tensta. (---) Just like *Livstycket* or the art work; everything that could give Tensta another name on the map – it disappears.) [11]

Another of my respondents gives a similar picture and mentions how the women's shelter, the women's project *Livstycket*, the Cultural Café and the Art Gallery have been treated with continuous fights for further existence and how the city district committee seem to work against their success, especially during the last two years. He continues:

Här måste man ju säga att det är Abdu Gorja som ordförande för nämnden och Jack Kindberg som Stadsdelsdirektör som har ett oerhört stort ansvar. Det måste vara så. Det kan inte vara på något annat sätt eftersom det är de som har det här mandatet och så där just nu, och det är därifrån som man kan säga att sådana här strukturförändrade åtgärder eller helt enkelt sabotageverksamhet kommer; det är därifrån det kommer. (Here one must say that Abdu Gorja as chair-man for the committee and Jack Kindberg as the director of the city district have a huge responsibility. It must be like that. It can not be in another way because those are the people who have a mandate for the time being, and from there come these kinds of structural changes or simply sabotages; it is from there that it comes.) [9]

Another respondent says that “*det jobbigaste i Tensta är Stadsdelsförvaltningen och deras sätt att köra över folk*” (what is the most bothersome in Tensta is the city district management and their way of running over people) [3]. He explains:

En del som jobbar där är ju bra, det är ju bra människor. Men det finns ju liksom ett inbyggt förakt för de som bor här tycker jag. (---) Och det här med Konsthallen är för jävligt, att de har punkterat Gregor. Det är ju det här med eldsjälar, och det är väl det enda jag kanske blir förbannad på – man pratar på ett sätt och i verkligheten är det ett annat. Det är jättefint då va med Konsthallen, Kulturcaféet och Livstycket och man visar upp det för folk som kommer utifrån. Och eldsjälar, man pratar mycket om det, att de är så värdefulla för området. Men det ser man ju då i Gregors fall vad det är värt. När det kommer ekonomiska och andra...Gregor har ju stuckit ut hakan för mycket tycker de väl. (---) Om jag skulle sticka ut hakan för mycket och bli uppkäftig, då skulle det väl hända samma sak med mig som med Gregor, det är jag säker på. (Some people working there are doing good things, they are good people. But I feel that there is a sort of

internalised despise for the people living here. (---) And this with the Art Gallery that is really awful, that they have punctured Gregor¹⁷⁴. It is this about fire-souls...I guess that one of the few things that really makes me angry - that they say one thing and in reality it is quite different. It is so nice with the Art Gallery and the Cultural Café and *Livstycket* and you show it to people who come from outside. And fire-souls, you talk a lot about it, that they are so valuable for the area. But then you see in the case of Gregor how much that is worth. When there are economic and other... I guess they think that Gregor has been too cheeky. (---) If I started to be cheeky then it would happen to me what happened to Gregor, I am quite sure about that.) [3]

The director of the city district Jack Kindberg is described as “blasé”, “incompetent” and lacking visions and will to change things. The chair-man of the city district committee Abdu Gorja is described as “corrupt”, “not serious” and a “careerist”. My respondents speak of logrolling and of all the cards not being on the table. They experience that decisions about projects and funding are taken behind the back of the people who are most involved. Successful projects and people are seen as threat and are outmanoeuvred, especially if they break the preconception about how things should function or if they challenge the prevailing hierarchy. There is also a problem with a stiff organisational structure that doesn't allow for innovative projects with multifaceted approach since that is too difficult to relate to a specific budget-line. Funding-wise such projects fall between the chairs, even if they might be the most needed in order to understand and deal with the problems in Tensta that are often interrelated.

It is difficult to know whether the case of Tensta Art Gallery or any other project that has been counteracted should be seen as result of central policies towards the suburb or as an internal problem in Tensta. From my material it seems to be a mixture of both. The local politicians and civil servants easily lend themselves to different interests from external actors if this might be positive for their future career, instead of looking for the best for Tensta. My respondents guess that Tensta Art Gallery was just too much for the cultural hierarchy of Stockholm: An independent and low-budgeted cultural actor in a suburb like Tensta that managed to get international reputation of that size was probably threatening

¹⁷⁴ The name of the fired director of the Art Gallery

and hard to accept – and some of the front-persons in the cultural sector play tennis together, such as the cultural top-politician and the director of the Cultural House. The solution that was found was to - with the help from the board of the Art Gallery and the local politicians in Tensta - force Tensta Art Gallery under the organisation of the Cultural House of Stockholm and at the same time sack the director and initiator who were seen as arrogant and someone not knowing his place. So, the local politicians did have a role in this play and the final result can not be seen as only the fault of external bad will. The “grass-cutter-machine” is therefore often referred to as a combination of external and internal resistance to new initiatives that could threaten the existing hierarchies. And here I need to underline again that for me the interesting point is not if this is a true picture or not, but the interesting point is that this is an experienced reality for the people who are really trying to work for a better life for everyone in Tensta.

The case of Tensta Art Gallery might also reflect a certain cultural-political attitude towards these kinds of suburbs; that the only cultural life that people in Tensta understand is hip-hop and basket-ball. There is a general feeling among the people I have interviewed and in the meeting of the Friends of Tensta Art Gallery that the Swedish cultural elite think that Tensta Art Gallery made exhibitions that were too difficult for the people living in Tensta and that this proves their disdain for the suburb. The new concept for the Art Gallery will give space for exhibitions of school-children, which in the meeting of Friends of Tensta Art Gallery was compared to letting the municipal music school take over the concert hall in the centre of Stockholm. This clearly links to the previously described attitude that professionalism is not needed in Tensta.

The case of Tensta Art Gallery has been a huge disappointment for many of my respondents. One of my respondents describes what the Art Gallery meant and what for him could be the result of the way things have developed:

Konsthallen tycker jag var så... jag kunde liksom gå och skratta högt för mig varje dag när jag tänkte på den alltså, för att den öppnade fönster som det blåser ifrån... det kom hit folk långt bortifrån. Plötsligt så ingår

Tensta... vad skall jag säga... även om det är en liten, liten institution, så ingår det i ett nätverk med kompetens och professionalitet som man inte har gjort tidigare. Och som plötsligt gör det intressant för Konstfack att förlägga en kurs hit och det hände mycket på många olika nivåer – förutom att det var väldigt roliga utställningar som de gjorde. Det var kul att stämman träff med vänner där eller om man hade något besök kunde man föreslå att först ses på Konsthallen. Det gav mig förnyat hopp när det gällde Tensta. (---) Konsthallen hade ett väldigt symbolvärde - alltså, det hade ju väldigt konkret betydelse förstås men för mig var den väldigt symbolisk. Så att... jag tror att... det är möjligt att om det blir på det här viset då får vi liksom låta det gå ett år och känna efter, för att inte dra allt för snabba slutsatser. Men jag kan mycket väl tänka mig att det som har hänt med Konsthallen leder till att jag inte har något kvar att ge här, att jag måste lämna Tensta. (The Art Gallery I felt it was so... I could go and laugh out loud just by thinking of it, because it opened a window through which new air came... people came from far away. (---) All of a sudden Tensta was... how should I say... even if it is a small, small institution it is part of network with competence and professionalism that has not been the case before. And all of a sudden it was interesting for Konstfack¹⁷⁵ to locate an arts course here and it happened a lot at many different levels – apart from that it was nice to visit the exhibitions there. It was nice to make appointments with friends there or if I had a visitor I would suggest we should first meet in the Art Gallery. It gave me renewed hope concerning Tensta. (---) The Art Gallery had a huge symbolic meaning – of course also concrete meaning but for me it was very symbolic. And I feel that... well it is possible that if it goes this way... I mean we should not draw too quick conclusions, but I can very well imagine that what has happened to the Art Gallery will lead to my having nothing left to give here, that I will have to leave Tensta.) [8]

Apart from the frustrations with good projects being cut down, some respondents feel that energy is put into making the whole suburb as Swedish as possible instead of seeing the opportunities in the international contacts and the diversity. This also creates frustrations and is a battle bound to be lost.

Tensta är väldigt mångkulturellt, det finns otroligt mycket resurser, men de försöker göra detta homogent, som ett svenskt område och det gör det väldigt tråkigt, väldigt tråkigt. Det är som att försöka få Östermalm eller Kungsholmen att se ut som Rinkeby. (---) Det handlar om människor som har en naiv vilja att alla människor som bor i Tensta skall vara gemena, försvenskas. (---) De försöker och försöker men ju mer de försöker desto mer slitningar blir det och desto mer kommer människor att misslyckas. Det skapar mycket frustration.

¹⁷⁵ Konstfack is a very respected university college of arts, crafts and design, run by the Swedish State

(Tensta is very multicultural, there are so many resources, but they try to make this a Swedish neighbourhood and that makes it very dull, very dull. It is like trying to make Östermalm or Kungsholmen¹⁷⁶ look like Rinkeby. (---) These people have a naïve will that all the people living in Tensta will become average; Swedes. (---) They try and try but the more they try the more the tensions are growing and the more people will fail. It creates a lot of frustration.) [1]

Some respondents also experience that the politicians in Tensta have an unwillingness to face unpleasant facts (*“strutspolitik”*), something also going back to fear of change and fear of uncomfortable positions. The situation with drug-dealing is very bad in Tensta and at first this was ignored since the politicians did not want to talk about something that could make the reputation of the suburb worse – which is not a very fruitful reaction when facing a problem.

There is also a frustration shared by many of my respondents of how things are processed in the bureaucracy; that it takes so long time to come from proposal to realisation and that the money is eaten on the way by all the investigations and consultants and discussions. The feeling shared by my respondents is that the long bureaucratic process does not help in really improving things or give a solid ground, many things end in nothing. *“Det är så otroligt lite som händer i förhållande till den tid och engagemang som lagts ner.”* (There are so incredible few results in relation to the time and engagement that has been put into it.) [8]

Or another voice:

Vad har hänt i Tensta? Det har inte hänt någonting i Tensta. Bara att vi fick en konsthall – och den har de stängt nu. Vad har de utvecklat i Tensta? Det har inte blivit någonting. Det har inte blivit någon arbetsplats, ingenting nästan. Bara att ena gruppen fått lite pengar, andra gruppen fått lite pengar – och pengarna har försvunnit. (What has happened in Tensta? Nothing has happened in Tensta. Only that we got an Art Gallery – and now they have closed it. What have they developed in Tensta? Nothing. No work place, nothing almost. Only that one group got a bit of money, the other group a bit of money – and the money was gone.) [2]

¹⁷⁶ Östermalm and Kungsholmen are fashionable parts of Stockholm with few first-generation immigrants

5.5.5. Local Organizing and “Middle East Politics”

Almost all of my respondents speak of the strong group-society in Tensta, mainly based on ethnic factors. Within the group you keep together and you also support each other. One woman adds that: *“Sedan får man inte glömma bort att det är folk som flytt från krig och det kanske inte är så lätt för en bosnier att umgås med en serb eller en etiopier att umgås med en eritrian - jag vet inte”* (Of course, one should not forget that many of those people have fled from war and perhaps it is not that easy for a Bosnian to make friend with a Serbian or an Ethiopian with an Eritrean - I do not know) [7] and she also says that it is different for the younger generation who has grown up in Sweden.

Strong social networks in the group can of course be positive and help recently arrived immigrants to settle in the new country, but it has also become a way of organising the local politics in Tensta, and this is seen as problematic by many of my respondents. There is a struggle about influence and about the money that comes to the suburb through development programmes and this makes integration between the groups inherently difficult and creates a competitive atmosphere and makes the groups more closed. All of my respondents witness “having seen things” in the open meetings and in the way the money is being distributed, and expressions such as *“jag vet vad det handlar om, jag kan läsa mellan raderna. Det är inte många som kan göra det”* (I know what it is about, I can read between the lines. Not many can do that) [1] or *“Ibland finns det saker som går under bordet”* (Sometimes there are things that go under the table) [4] are being used when asked about the development programmes and the open meetings. One of my respondents says: *“Jag gillar inte grupperingar. Det finns grupper och jag gillar inte det. Och varför gillar jag inte det? Därför att jag hatar Mellanösternpolitik, att det är bara de som är kända som skall fortsätta att vara kända. Det här är en jättefarlig utveckling. Jag vill att alla ska få plats, jag vill ha utrymme för alla.”* (I do not like grouping. There are groups and I do not like it. And why? Because I hate Middle East politics, where only the well-known people will continue to be well-known. It is a very dangerous development. I want everyone to find a place, I want everyone to have space.) [10]

Much of the money in the current development programme the City District Renewal goes to local associations, but what seem to be open associations that anyone can join are often quite closed and exclusive societies dominated by one ethnic group. One of my respondents explains with a metaphor:

Det fanns en park som hette Nydalparken i Tensta, och de barnen som gick dit och deltog i aktiviteterna hade blivit som ett gäng tror jag. Och andra barn vågade sig inte dit. Och det kan bli så, man får akta sig så att det inte blir så, att vissa söker sig dit och så är det ett gäng som bildas i den föreningen och så är det inga andra som vågar söka sig dit. (There was a park in Tensta that was called Nydalparken, and the children who came there and participated in the activities had become like a gang I would say. And other children did not dare to go there. And things can become in that way. One should be cautious so that it does not go that way; that some people come to an association and create a gang and no others dare to come there.) [7]

One specific case is being related in indirect or direct terms by the majority of my respondents. It is the case of the local association of Verdandi¹⁷⁷ and its links with Abdu Gorja, the chairman of the city district committee in Tensta. Verdandi is dominated by members from the Syrian-Orthodox church in Tensta and there is a widespread understanding that the members of the Syrian-Orthodox church supported Gorja in the nomination process within the Social Democratic Party in Tensta and in return got or will get a huge amount of money from the development programme.

This is put in relation to structured efforts in the suburb - such as the women's shelter or the integration project *Livstycket* that is famous all over Stockholm for cloth-production and the context created around it – which need to struggle for money all the time and continuously face threats of being closed down. Seven out of eleven respondents explicitly speak about the need for more control over where the money goes and what happens with it afterwards. And they also think that money should not be distributed in this kind of proclaiming manner but rather go through the normal budget and be judged according to

¹⁷⁷ Temperance movement

criteria of relevance and the competence of the actor who should realise and monitor the project.

Similar conclusions are drawn in the evaluation of the Plus-project in Tensta; a project for improving living conditions for young people that took place between 1991 and 1994. The evaluators Sahlin and Söderlund write:

There are many reasons behind the fact that the project in Tensta has failed seen from the Plus-perspective. There has been a lack of continuity in most areas, both concerning bodies and functions for co-operation. Our opinion is that there are few actors in the Plus-project in Tensta that are pulling their "own projects" with explicitly financial motives. "Here we'd better fix an association so that we can grab the money", was a statement overheard in the cloak-room after a meeting between the Ministry of Civil Affairs, representatives from associations and civil servants. The message from the Ministry in the meeting was also that only associations could get money, and that one could start an association "under a lamp-post" if necessary.¹⁷⁸

Many of my respondents also have a feeling of nepotism and that getting money is mainly about having influential relatives or friends. One woman says: *"De grejerna jag vet kanske inte är bra att prata om, men det får inte bli så att bara för att någons förälder eller någons syskon är med där de delar ut pengar, så skall inte jättestora summor gå till en förening – bara för att några av ens vänskapskrets ingår där, det får inte bli så."* (Perhaps it is not good to speak about those things I know, but it should not be so that just because your parent or your sibling is in the decision-making body that you get huge amounts of money for an association – just because some of your friends are there, it must not be like that.) [7] Another respondent goes further into these problems, outlining a theory of how it has become like this:

Men vad är det som gör att det blir så här? Jag har inget bra svar på det. Jag har inget bra svar. Jag skulle kunna säga att det finns något slags kris i socialdemokratin i Stockholm om man skall göra det så där stort. Definitivt är det så i Spånga-Tensta för det finns en konflikt, en uppdelning, en tudelning av socialdemokratin här. Socialdemokratin som är den drivande politiska kraften i Spånga-Tensta. (---) Det är en allmän diskussion som pågår i Tensta, att Abdu Gorias väljarbas i lokalområdet, det är syriskt-ortodoxa personer. T.ex. kunde det

¹⁷⁸ Sahlin & Söderlund (1995) p. 47

se ut så här på något nomineringsmöte inom den lokala socialdemokratiska organisationen: Abdu Gorja ser till till att det kommer vad det var över hundra stycken personer av hans landsmän från Syriskt-ortodoxa kyrkan, de kommer på det här nomineringsmötet och som röstar enligt kommando för honom. Så det är sådan här röstmanipulation om man säger så va. Och det här är inte jag som säger, jag hör det ifrån socialdemokratiska sammanhang. Sen har samma personer som kommer ifrån Syriskt-ortodoxa kyrkan gått in i Verdandi som finns lokalt här. Du vet Verdandi. De har gått in där med stora pengar. De här socialdemokraterna som associeras med Hjulsta socialdemokratiska förening påstår att det är anmärkningsvärt att i Stadsdelsförnyelseprojektet, alltså uppföljningen av Ytterstadssatsningen, att Verdandi söker 1,6 miljoner eller vad det är från det här och får det i princip – nu tror jag aldrig att det där blev beviljat men man sökte jättemycket. Och då sägs det så här att "aha det här understöds av Abdu Gorja för där finns hans landsmän som har gått in i Verdandi och han beviljar pengar till dem". Och då sägs det att det gör han som gentjänst för att de stöder honom i socialdemokratiska nomineringen. Vad är det nu jag säger? Det här låter spekulativt och det låter som något slags bypolitik i Mellanöstern. Men det är så här det skrivs och talas om i seriösa socialdemokratiska sammanhang, jag har hört det själv. (Why is it like that? I have no good answer. I could say that there is a certain crisis within the Social Democratic party in Stockholm if one wants to make this big. There is at least for sure a crisis in Spånga-Tensta because there is a conflict, a division, a division into two of the Social Democratic party here, the party that is the driving political force in Spånga-Tensta. (---) There is a general discussion going on in Tensta about that Abdu Gorja's voters in the neighbourhood are mainly Syrian-Orthodox people. In the local nomination-meeting of the Social Democratic party for example, then Abdu Gorja arranged that, what was it, over hundred people of his fellow countrymen from the Syrian-Orthodox church came there and voted after his command. That is manipulation of votes we could say. And it is not me saying it - I hear it from Social Democratic contexts. Then the same people coming from the Syrian Orthodox church have joined Verdandi. You know Verdandi. They came there with big money. The other fraction of the Social Democrats who are associated with Hjulsta means that it is noteworthy that the City District Renewal has more or less given 1.6 millions of crowns to Verdandi or whatever amount it was. I do not believe they will get that approved but they applied for a lot of money. And then people say that this is supported by Abdu Gorja because his fellow countrymen are there who supported him in the Social Democratic nomination What is it I am saying? This sounds very speculative and sounds like some kind of village-politics in the Middle East. But this is the way it is written and talked about in serious Social Democratic contexts, I hear it myself.) [9]

Another respondent clearly confirms this picture and also puts blame on the Social Democratic party which has not been taking its responsibility and has been weak when confronting people who come with what she calls Middle East political culture. "Om jag

gör något fel, omedvetet, någon från mitt parti borde komma och säga till mig att det stämmer inte, du skall inte göra så.” (If I do something wrong, unconsciously, someone from my party should tell me that this is not correct, you should not do it like that.) [10]

The way of giving money that should be used for integration-efforts to ethnic associations is criticized; one respondent asserts that this only reinforces the isolation of the group. *“Om man tror att olika grupper skulle integrera sig genom att de gör egna program, det är fel – de segmenterar ju sin isolering istället. Integration måste ju vara att man möts, inte att man ger pengar till integration av Turkiska föreningen som bara turkar är med i.”* (If you believe that different groups would integrate when doing their own programmes, then you are wrong – they are just reinforcing their isolation. Integration must be to meet - and not that you give money for the integration to the Turkish association where only Turkish people are members.) [3] And one man who works a lot with an ethnic cultural association also questions why his association gets so much money. *“Ibland får jag misstankar också. Varför får vi så mycket stöd? Förstår du? Om man får så mycket stöd så börjar man undra varför man får så mycket stöd. Vad är det de egentligen vill ha från oss?”* (Sometimes I become suspicious. Why do we get so much money? Do you understand? When you get so much money you start to wonder why you get so much support. What is it that they really want from us?) [2] And another respondent asserts that politicians give money to different ethnic groups in order to secure votes.

There is also a certain “divide and rule” attitude coming from the local politicians. Different associations become rivals about money and support and this reduces the solidarity between different associations and actors and strengthens the position of those already in power. One respondent also witnesses egoism that prevails concerning information and contacts between the different groups.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

6.1. Conclusions from Findings

This research puts focus on the actors or the fire-souls in the suburb of Tensta – a metropolitan, multicultural and economically poor suburb at the outskirts of Stockholm – trying, *through the eyes of the committed*, to understand something about the conditions for and the relevance of the actor-perspective for building intercultural local societies in a globalised, postmodern world, explicitly addressing perceived prerequisites for becoming a subject, perceived reasons for non-activism and experiences concerning institutional support from politicians and civil servants.

Despite being a case study with a limited field for data-collection, the explicit aim is to say something applicable not only to Tensta, but, as expressed in the beginning, to “explore the actor-perspective on building intercultural local societies in a globalised, postmodern world” with the assumption that there are things to learn from the case of Tensta that are relevant for other contexts as well.

6.1.1. Prerequisites for Becoming a Subject

The respondents give importance to many different factors when explaining their commitment. Social norms given by their family or by other strong influences or experiences in their childhood and youth seem important for initiating activism, as well as personal attitudes such as curiosity, empathy, courage, persistency and sense of humour. External motivation can also have a central role for initiating activism. Relevant language-skills and good knowledge of communication cues and social codes are essential. Tolerance for ambiguity that can be traced back to growing up in a multifaceted situation is also important, as well as to have the necessary resources financially, educationally and

time-wise for being involved. Very important is to have access to networks and many of my respondents have built up their networks from involvement in political parties but also from NGOs and volunteer associations. Rewards e.g. the joy of seeing people's life change to the better, are important for maintaining their fire, and most respondents have also an ideological and visionary base for their activism.

To become an actor and an independent and involved *subject* is in my understanding a circular process of satisfaction, deeper understanding and motivation for action that once going in the right direction can be self-motivating. To accept a system, understand a social milieu and be able to act accordingly - what Bourdieu calls *practical mastery*, is part of this process. "Through participation in the production and reproduction of a particular part of life, or at least for a social field, individuals engage in social relationships that are the very basis of success and satisfaction."¹⁷⁹ And Touraine suggests in the same line of thought that "Happiness is to find yourself again, both in your life-events as well as in your human and material surroundings."¹⁸⁰

It is evident that repeated behaviours influence a person's self-concept which then becomes an important factor in itself. The more you get involved and act, the more you understand, and the more eagerness, motivation and tools you have for getting more involved. Commitment becomes a part of your personality, of your habitus, it defines who you are. According to Kelly et al. "activist identity" is the main reason behind collective action, short-circuiting any other psychological determinant.¹⁸¹ It seems like a positive circle or spiral that you somehow have to find the entry-point to. Once you're inside it and have made it yours it becomes self-motivating because activism has become a part of your identity.

This activism might take different shapes during different times in life. But rather than dying the fire seems to transform and put light on different problems in which to engage –

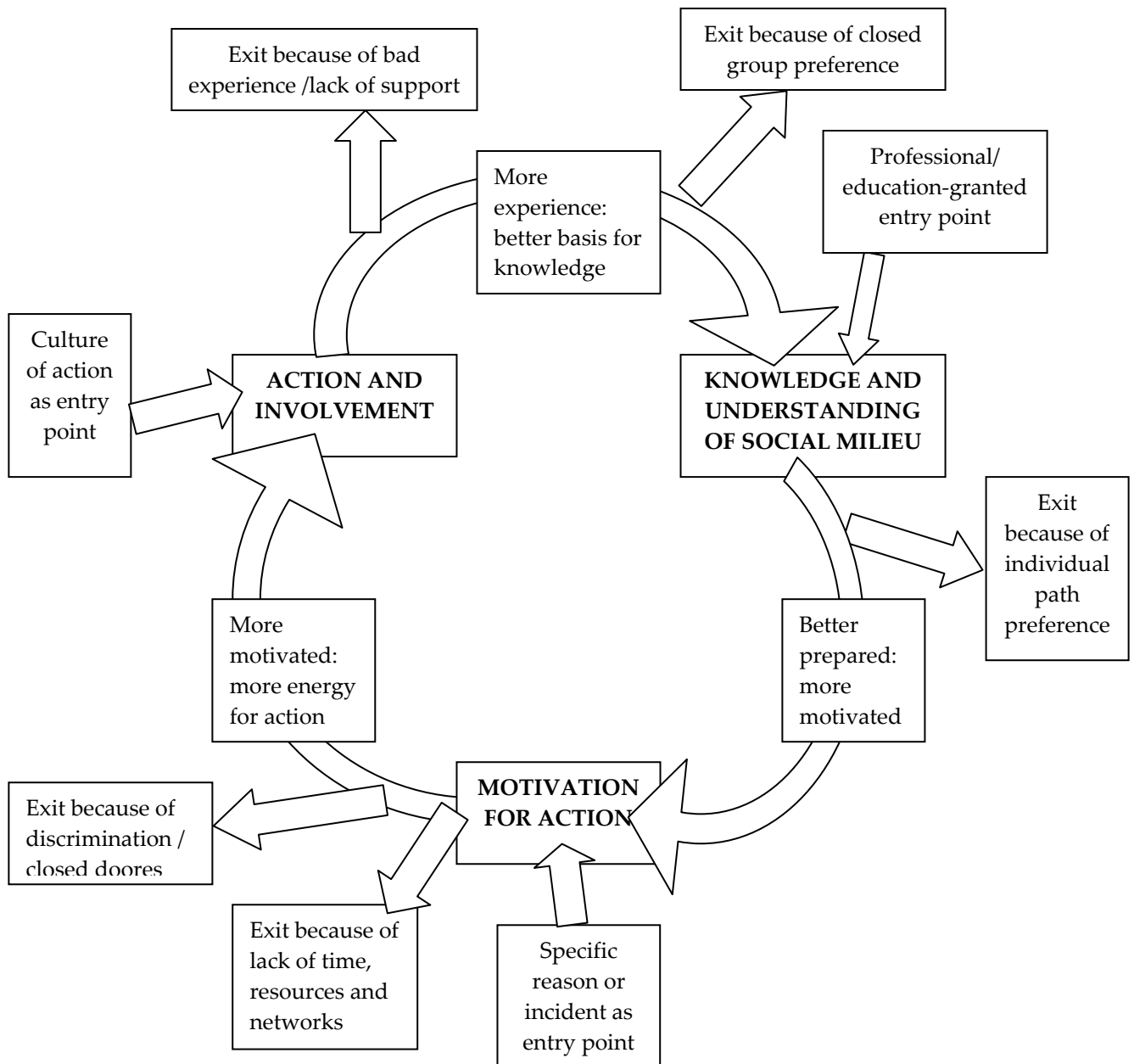
¹⁷⁹ Kamali (1997) p. 185

¹⁸⁰ Touraine (2002) p. 90, translation K.H.

¹⁸¹ Kelly et al. (1996) p. 53

at some times it can be to create an Art Gallery or a Women’s shelter and at other times in life it can be to work for the safe environment for children since you are a parent yourself. In the following figure I have tried to visualise the circle or spiral of activist’s identity and have also marked the possible entry and exit points that my research points at.

Figure 4) Entrance and exit points for an activist’s identity



The circle has three entry points; specific reason or incident that gives *motivation for action*; culture of action that leads to *action and involvement* and a professional or education-granted entry point leading to knowledge and understanding of social milieu. Most of my respondents point at culture of action based on personal attitudes and social norms as the

main explanation for becoming fire-souls, but specific reasons or incidents have also functioned as eye-openers and starting points. The professional or education-granted entry point is not prevailing among my respondents – rather the commitment came before the profession or education, but in particularly two cases professional experiences are mentioned as entry point to become a fire-soul. The exit-points in the circle are discussed in chapter 6.1.2.

Pure activism is however not enough for qualifying to the title “subject” in Touraine’s notion. The figure above doesn’t visualise the special conditions for acting in a multicultural postmodern society where tolerance for ambiguity, understanding the nature of communication; ability to listen, respect and be in dialogue, and the need for shared concerns and shared meeting-places are crucial. On the other hand, without these conditions fulfilled there might be no way to remain for long in the circle and in one’s commitment and the exit point “failure because of bad experience” would be the most applicable. It is nevertheless clear that - however helpful visual models might be - two-dimensional computer-drawings can never capture all the complexities of reality that qualitative research attempts to illustrate. This model should therefore not be seen as the complete answer to this research question, but as complementary to the text.

6.1.2. Explaining Non- Activism

The reasons for non-activism can in many ways be seen as a mirror of the reasons for activism. It is the opposite – personal identity of not being an “activist type”, social norms not valuing engagement in the society, lack of financial and educational resources, time and network. The uncertainty, psychological stress and lack of tolerance for ambiguity that many people in Tensta suffer from are however the main reasons given for non-involvement and of not even searching for an entry point to the involvement in the society. Another relevant aspect is the diasporic identity that makes many immigrants not really present in Tensta but rather have their thoughts and emotions still in the country they have left or only focused on their own ethnic group – if they enter the circle they exit at “closed group preference”. Others who are successful exit at the “individual path

preference” and rather use their activist experience as a way to individual career than to social change. Discrimination and fear of not being taken as an equal conversation partner are other important factors inhibiting people actually motivated for action to find the entry-point or the way to transform their motivation into action in the circle visualised above.

6.1.3. Institutional Support

The support from politicians and civil servants is, as discussed earlier, seen as crucial for building intercultural societies and it seems as if lack of this support can break the positive circle at any point – it can kill the motivation, tie the hands for action and prevent knowledge and information to be shared. Therefore it is serious that this support is in Tensta mostly perceived by my respondents as little, null or even the opposite. The judgement on the local politicians and civil servants is quite hard and contains the frustrations of many years with things not going the right way. Partly this seems to be due to communication failures and the short-sighted project-culture that is the prevailing way of doing things (not only in Tensta), but also due to political intrigues based on ethnicity that has come to overrule good democracy and common visions in Tensta. This has made the suburb divided and easily controlled by other actors who don’t really see the need for e.g. an Art Gallery or a protection from high-way noise in a suburb with mostly first or second generation immigrants with low income and weak social and cultural capital in relation to the majority-society.

The frustrations are both in connection with local as well as central politicians and civil servants. It seems as if the Swedish society face a difficulty insomuch trying to cherish cultural differences that the dialogue dies and the ability to talk about things becomes difficult. This leads us back to Baudrillard (quoted in chapter 2.4.1.) who puts forward the idea that the acceptance for difference and multiple ways in the postmodern society also has created a sort of intolerance to expression of disgust – which in its turn creates a

feeling of no-reaction and apathy.¹⁸² The communication dies if “anything goes”. As Parekh points out (also quoted in chapter 2.4.1.) “Dialogue is possible only if each culture accepts others as equal conversational partners, who need to be taken seriously as sources of new ideas and to whom it owes the duty of explaining itself”.¹⁸³ Perhaps this is the heart of the problem. Since people in Tensta are not respected or seen as equal conversation partners, e.g. the Social Democratic party can not deal with the problems in Tensta in a constructive way. Instead it becomes a kind of avoid-it-and-smile-strategy that creates space for power-abuse.

Andersson suggests a different course of explanation and means that segregation remains strong in Sweden because there are big groups in the society that have a lot to gain from that.¹⁸⁴ This is also a feeling shared by many of my respondents; a feeling that no one really cares about these suburbs, that policies of integration are only empty words and that most people at high positions prefer that people with immigrant background and low socio-economic status stay in the suburbs and are heard of as little as possible.

Independently of how true the picture the fire-souls give of the situation is, the fact that this is the way they experience the situation indicates that something is very wrong. It is possible that it is all false rumours, but when rumours are spread with this scope they in a way become real since they are perceived as real and the common discourse among a great number of people is based on them.

6.2. Back to the Larger Picture

In chapter 3.1 I associated the study with the research tradition of critical hermeneutics which implies coming back from the specific to the holistic and general again in order to

¹⁸² Johansson (1992) p. 95

¹⁸³ Parekh (2000) p. 337

¹⁸⁴ Andersson (2002) p. 111

reach a larger understanding of social forces. For Touraine (2002) the link between the subject and social movements is so clear that it is almost taken for granted. And what can the fire-souls in Tensta teach us about social forces?

Hosseini-Kaladjahi points at the danger of area-focused investments in integration efforts since instead of focusing on the overall structures and concerns, a specific problematic suburb or neighbourhood is highlighted, often adding to the stigmatization of the area.¹⁸⁵ My choice of focusing on the fire-souls in Tensta and the political climate there can be criticized for exactly this reason. I trust however, that anyone reading this research can notice that the starting point is not Tensta, but conditions for the intercultural society in general. It is not Tensta as such that is the problem, but how to live together in a globalised, postmodern society. Given the practical constraints, the time and resources available for conducting this study, any broader data collection than the one made, would simply not have been feasible.

As said in the beginning, despite the intention to reach wider applicable knowledge, it is beyond the scope of this study to answer how much of this material is very unique for Tensta and how much is relevant for other similar contexts in Sweden or elsewhere. It might be the case that the situation concerning the institutional support is not as bad in other places, but for sure there is a problem concerning the short-sightedness of the project-culture that is penetrating our society in many different levels, and the lack of *the good conversation* - the true dialogue with time, real listening and implications of obligations as well as rights. And I hope that if this thesis will bring about any kind of discussion that it will be about all these things mentioned - and not about Tensta as such.

Touraine gives indication for the importance of a "school of the subject", and also this research confirms the need for early influences in order to develop into a fire-soul that enjoys and can handle the differences and quick transformations of our societies. To give

¹⁸⁵ Hosseini-Kaladjahi (2002) p. 74

importance to intercultural communication that can reduce anxiety and uncertainty when facing ambiguous situations would be an important part of this education.

6.2.1. *Culture Specific or Culture General?*

Touraine sees the subject as a force for liberation in all societies and all cultures¹⁸⁶ and asserts that the idea of the subject revitalizes the distance between the experience or compassion and the social belonging that both Buddha and the gospel preach¹⁸⁷. I do not have the space in this study for a thorough examination of the grounds for his claim from an intercultural communication point of view, but I could imagine that there is something universal about the idea of the subject, the human ability to say no, to be a dissident - though it may have many different manifestations and also manifestations beyond the descriptions of Touraine or my own understanding of his theory, that for obvious reasons are based on a Western-Christian tradition. In the scope of this study the only conclusion I can make is that all my interviewees are clearly representing a similar actor-perspective based on independence and involvement. But despite coming from different cultures they all come from either a Christian or a Muslim tradition, two religions resembling each other in many ways, and thus I can make no claim about relevance of the actor-perspective in a e.g. Hindu or Buddhist context. If looking at geographic factors instead of religious it is however interesting to point out that the person least matching the subject as pictured by Touraine was the respondent from Bangladesh, which could indicate that something else is important in southeast and east Asia. But that would be very pre-mature to state and must be left unanswered by this research.

6.3. Recommendations for Future Research

Firstly it would be very interesting to dwell into the field of different cultural perception of being a subject and an actor and whether Touraine's claim on universalism is just a French

¹⁸⁶ Touraine (2002) p. 109

¹⁸⁷ Touraine (2002) p. 127

blindness to cultural differences, or if he actually manages to point at something universal in the human conditions of today.

Then it would be of utter importance to go further into questions of what kind of institutional support can cherish the development of independent and involved *subjects* that can cope with the postmodern, globalised society and help build the horizontal links for social cohesion and real living together in our diversity, for example outlining the “school of the subject” and also looking into different institutional models and supportive structures. It would also be important to include a more thorough class- and gender-analysis to the research.

For future research it would of course be very interesting to have a much bigger field than just one suburb for data collection, in order to give more research foundation for practitioners working for intercultural societies and getting further away from the idea of only focusing on the “problematic areas”. Thorough research that can give direction for the strategies concerning integration, interculturalism and anti-discrimination is very needed in order to achieve something beyond the current “trial-and-error” strategy, according to Hosseini-Kaladjahi.¹⁸⁸

But as a child of the postmodern complexity I do not believe that there is an end of the road. Every answer will bring about thousands of more questions in a continuous process of trying to understand and find approaches to the needs and challenges of a world in constant flux, constant change. That however does not mean that research is in vain - rather that it is more needed then ever.

¹⁸⁸ Hosseini-Kaladjahi (2002) p. 74

6.4. And Finally

Arriving here has been a long journey. Sometimes I have been very frustrated, sometimes I have been very doubtful about the value of what I was doing. Excluding an aspect has felt like a violation, reducing the complexity of life to a Master's thesis has felt ridiculous. Reality is always so much more.

But once I started doing interviews I was caught by the encounters with real people and by the trust people showed me and the complexities and problems they revealed to me.

I still do not know if we can live together. In any case, I do feel very privileged. I met wonderful people that wanted to share their stories with me. And I hope that their stories can feed into a much bigger process of reaching a wider understanding and that the questions can continue to be addressed.

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9. APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Main Questions of the Interviews

1. Could you please tell me a bit about where and how you are involved in Tensta?
2. How did it happen that you came to be this involved?
3. Could you please tell me about your background? (Family – ethnicity – religion – political affiliations - education – arrival to Sweden and Tensta – languages – interests)
4. How would you describe your identity? (Asking them to affirm or take away different labels such as “Somali”, “Swedish”, “Muslim”, “Tensta-inhabitant”, “woman”, “social democrat”, “immigrant” etc. and motivate)
5. What does Tensta mean to you?
6. There are a lot of people who are not that involved as you are. What reasons do you see for this?
7. What support do you experience from the local politicians and civil servants?
8. What do you think about the open meetings in the City District Renewal?
9. What is the most enjoyable part of your work in Tensta?
10. What is the most frustrating and difficult part?
11. What do you think has been the most central theme in your life?
12. Could you name a person that has meant a lot to you as a role-model?
13. Fire-souls are burning. Do you have a strategy for not becoming burned-out?
14. What do you do in your free-time?
15. Do you socialize mostly within your ethnic group?
16. What do you think about the future in Tensta?
17. Is there anything else that you come to think of that you want to say?

APPENDIX 2: Written information given to respondents before conducting the interview

University of Jyväskylä

Department of Communication

Thanks for accepting to give an interview and thereby help me to collect data for my masters thesis. The thesis deals with the intercultural society and focuses "fire-souls" in Tensta. I plan to finish in June 2004 and I will be happy to send you a copy as thanks for your collaboration.

Some things are important for you to know. The interviews I conduct will be the basis for my thesis but it shouldn't be possible to identify who said what. I will therefore not use your name in the thesis but you can yourself choose another name. As a researcher I have professional secrecy and the material will not be used by anyone else or for any other purpose.

Feel free to contact me if you after the interview come to think about something that you would like to add or if you have any questions.

Kind Regards

Kristina Hellqvist

[Contact-details]