Place Identity and Feeling at Home

A Qualitative Study About Place Identity Amongst Refugees in Umeå, Sweden

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En kom hit för att fly från nöden,
en kom hit för att undgå döden.
En kom hit, av terror tvungen,
en kom hit för att gifta sig med kungen.
Dom är tyskar, iranier, greker och turkar,
mest är dom snälla, andra är skurkar.
En del är ärliga, andra skumma,
en del är genier, andra är dumma.
Mest är dom fredliga, andra vill slåss,
med andra ord, dom är som oss!
En del söker lugnet istället för bråket,
det enda vi svenskar kan bättre – är språket.
Det sägs att vi stammar från Adam och Eva,
som inte var svenskar – men ja må dom leva!

- Swedish poem by Tage Danielsson
ABSTRACT

To feel at home and to find your place identity in a completely different setting than you are used to requires a whole new type of coping with changes. In order to cope, there are different aspects that can help you. Either it be your personality, the physical surroundings or the people that you have by your side. This thesis has had the aim of examining how and why refugees feel at home in the city of Umeå, Sweden.

What has been clear is that the interviewed refugees do feel at home in Umeå, this mostly because of social activities with friends and family, not as much because of the physical attributes Umeå has as a city.

Place identity, seen from different theoretical perspectives, has been clear in that identity is mostly created in harmony with a place and what the place has to offer socially and not always due to the physical attraction of the place, which has been visible in discussion with the refugees in the study. Instead, place identity for the interviewed individuals has been created through the conceptions, interpretations, ideas and related feelings the individuals have to Umeå.

Key words: place identity, belonging, refugees, Umeå, qualitative study, focus group discussions.
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1 Introduction

Immigration to Sweden is increasing every year and a large part of the immigrants are refugees that either have asylum or are seeking it in Sweden. The number of asylum seekers in 2014 were approximately 81,000, which is an increase of around 27,000 people comparing to 2013 (Migration Board Website, 2015). In 2013, approximately 1.5 million people in Sweden were foreign-born. According to a recent poll, immigration is one of the most important issues amongst Swedish citizens, the issue being the second most important after school (Dagens Nyheter, 2015-01-29).

Much research focus and policy debate on immigration issues are on socioeconomic impacts, which of course is an important factor in migration around the world. The interest for developing and testing instruments to measure progress in societal progress such as human well-being is growing amongst the research community; however, there are still few studies that have focused on the well-being amongst refugees (World Bank 2013, 22).

The studies that exist focus mainly on one dimension, namely the measures of happiness and in a few selected developed countries (World Bank 2013, 24). One recent poll, the Gallup World Poll, has assessed the overall well-being of migrants through thematic interviews about both objective and subjective elements in their lives such as income level, housing and work conditions and also impression, perceptions and feeling of satisfaction with their lives. Approximately 2/3 of the migrants that attended the poll were refugees (World Bank 2013, 27).

Having a “well-founded fear of being persecuted” is the UNHCR definition of being a refugee (UNHCR 2007, 16) meaning that the refugee’s country of origin must be portrayed as a genuine danger in
order for the person to be accepted of actually being a refugee. That is, the construction of a refugee’s country of origin is constitutive of his or her own identity in the sense that the country must be portrayed as a genuine danger in order for the individual to be accepted as ‘really’ being a refugee. Moreover, constructions of the host society may function to justify or resist the presence of asylum seekers and refugees through presenting it as an appropriate or inappropriate place of refuge (Kirkwood et al., 2013).

The idea here is to examine the well-being of migrants in the city of Umeå in Sweden, not focusing as much on the socio-economic benefits and disadvantages of migration, however still considering of course their economic value to the society. The well-being of individuals is considered as one of the major developmental factors, for example in the 1986 Declaration on the Right to Development, development is defined as:

“...a constant improvement of the well-being of the entire population and of all individuals” (UN, 1986).

Also, the United Nations Millennium Declaration focuses on the well-being of the individual as the key purpose of development as well as more recently, the United Nations argued that the notion of well-being and sustainability should be at the core of the global development framework beyond 2015 (UN DESA, 2012a)

An important part of well-being is feeling at home wherever in the world you are at any certain point of time. Place identity is a concept of understanding the importance and significance of place for a person’s well-being (Hague & Jenkins, 2005, 5). Feeling at home implies the factor “place” as a physical setting but also includes socio dynamics into the meaning. The concept of place identity is central in human geography and there are several different definitions and ideas about what the
concept actually implies amongst researchers. Researchers such as Relph (1976) and Tuan (1974) were amongst the first to describe place identity as an fundamental role in human experience whilst other researchers had before this not touched upon the complexity of the meaning of place for individuals (Seamon & Sowers 2008, 43).

The ability or willingness to feel at home can differ due to several different reasons. One issue can be the physical environment and its impact on a person’s life. Physical environments such as cities can differ largely between individuals in the way that the place is perceived and therefor in the way the individual feels about the place. Sense of belonging, creating place identity and feeling at home will thereby consequently be different between individuals and in different types of cities.

Umeå is perceived by many people as an open and welcoming city. After a recent visit by Sweden’s Minister of Culture, Alice Bah Kuhnke, she cited that the commitment to positive change is large in Umeå and there is a noticeable openness in the city (Umea Municipality website, 2014). Possible aspects that can influence a person’s well-being is the size of the city, for example in a smaller town, a person with an appearance that differs from most of the other population can make that certain person feel excluded.

2 Aim

The aim of this thesis is to investigate how a group of refugees express place identity and feeling at home in the city of Umeå. This has been done through focus group discussions with refugees, and will further on be presented through a thematic analysis and connected to existing, relevant theories. The questions that will be raised are as followed;
(i) how do refugees express place identity in Umeå?
(ii) how important is it for the refugees to feel that they have a place identity in Umeå in relation to integrational factors?
(iii) is it the physical - or social environment (or a mix of both) that makes a refugee feel at home?

2.1 Geographical context
As Umeå is one of the cities in Sweden that is annually increasing in population, also being an outlier as the biggest city in northern Sweden, it stands as a reasonable boundary for this thesis. Because I am based in Umeå city, and considering the limited resources that are available for this thesis, Umeå is the best choice for my research.

Umeå is the biggest city (considering population size) in the region Norrland in the north of Sweden. Norrland is the largest of the three main regions in Sweden but has the equivalent of the population as in Stockholm, approximately 1 million, therefore Norrland has a low population density. Umeå’s population is around 120,000 people. Umeå’s main economic branch is education and innovation much due to Umeå University, one of Sweden’s largest universities. Through the university, Umeå also has a large national and international representation of students. (Umeå Municipality website, 2015).

2.2 Classification and terminology
The terms Global North (GN) and Global South (GS) will be used in order to classify the geographical pathways that refugees migrate to and from. There are a number of definitions for understanding migration between different parts of the world used both in literature and by various international agencies. There is no clear divide or agreement between which definitions are the most appropriate and therefore a brief overview of some of the definitions is necessary.
Since the early 1960s the terms developed and developing countries, meaning wealthy and poor countries, has been in public debate. The terms North and South became a more prevalent term after the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 and thereby the term Second World lost its significance after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the global world order was simplified and based on two terms, the First World being the North and the Third World being the South (Thérien 1999, 725; Reuveny and Thompson 2007, 528). Still, there is no mutual agreement on how the North-South dichotomy should be categorized. North and South do not actually exist, they are artificial constructions that are intended to be a reflection on the global situation that we are in, where there are specific dimensions of development.

2.3 Design of thesis

The following parts will be presented in this thesis: the method chapter will present the qualitative approach that was used followed by a theoretical chapter that considers issues such as immigration policies, migration history and asylum process in Sweden, place identity and integrational issues. After this, the empirical chapter will present the results from a focus group discussion held with refugees in Umeå followed by a concluding discussion where the aim is to link the theoretical aspects with the empirical ones.

3 Method

The empirical part will consist of a thematic analysis of a focus group discussion that was held with eight refugees settled in Umeå city. The refugees in the focus group were identified with the help from the Umeå regions VIVA school which has Swedish for immigrant’s courses. The VIVA school is an educational center that provides the chance to get
through primary and secondary education levels for adults (VIVA vuxenskola, 2015).

3.1 Method discussion
This qualitative research method is based on seeking information and analyzing it through “real-world” perspectives, unlike quantitative methods where you can use data in order to foresee things that have not already happened. Qualitative researchers therefore interpret the world in its original state, in that way taking advantage of how people attach to happenings around them. The techniques of a qualitative approach are based upon people’s values, decisions and beliefs (Denzin & Lincoln 2011, 7-11).

Qualitative method is also based on a naturalistic approach, seeking to understand happenings in specific settings put in context. The researcher is therefore not able to control the happening, trying instead to unveil the ultimate truth (Golafshani 2003, 4). Validity and reliability are important factors to take into account when using any type of research method.
When using quantitative approaches, validity and reliability are easily determined through data and statistical methods. However, when using qualitative approaches you must validate and rely on your qualitative data using other methods. Results and observations must be repeatable and replicable, without a chance of it turning into another type of result. Also, the observation must be stable to changes over time and the observations should stay similar through a given period of time (Kirk and Miller 1986, 41-42).

According to Dalen (2008, 11) the foremost criticism towards a qualitative approach is that, in contrast to quantitative methods, you cannot use predetermined rules as to how data will be processed. Therefore, it is not always easy to explain how the results were obtained.
Through a qualitative study you often seek to reach, with the help of systematics, unique and subjective results on one issue, which in turn is difficult with quantitative methods. However, as individuals react and understand things differently, qualitative research must be done as neutrally as possible in order to ensure that as many people as possible understand the outcomes (Dalen 2008, 13).

The method of thematic analysis is used when the results of your empirical research show tendency towards themes that can be summarized. Thematic analysis is often used to examine the results of interviews and groups discussions where recurring factors are common. These factors can then be analyzed into collective themes that can explain the questions that have been raised (Sage Publications, retrieved 2015-05-17).

### 3.2 Focus group discussion

Since approximately the beginning of the 21st century, the use of focus group discussions has increased (Dahlin-Ivanoff 2011, 70). The method was said to be used firstly during the Second World War, where researchers Merton and Kendall (1946, 551) used focus groups in order to examine how people reacted to war propaganda. The method was also used for marketing reasons during the same period (Dahlin-Ivanoff 2011, 71). Nowadays, the method is used in all types of academic environments but has become a normal method in especially social sciences and caring sciences (Barbour 2007, 5-7).

The method of focus groups is often used when your goal is to have a group discuss different aspects of one special theme or subject. The individuals in a group are often chosen due to them sharing collective experiences due to them coming from similar backgrounds and cultures.
Focus group discussions are effective when the purpose is to not only find out what people feel about a certain subject, but also to understand why.

It is often easier to collect thoughts and ideas in a group instead of during a private interview where the interviewee might feel more pressured and stressed, therefore giving poor answers (Krueger & Casey 2009, 36-41). Focus group discussions are not useful methods when there is a mismatch between the researcher’s knowledge and the interviewees understanding. Therefore it is of importance that the target group is aware and understands the subject or theme that will be researched (Dahlin-Ivanoff 2011, 72).

Focus group discussion should be referred to as its own specific research method, instead of being grouped with other similar methods. This due to the method having more similarities with the hermeneutic tradition than with the positivistic one. Meaning that focus groups are more appropriate to use when there are explanatory functions of a theme that you want to analyze, instead of being a logicalistic or mathematical reason for the analysis (Dahlin-Ivanoff & Hultberg 2006, 126).

The data that is collected during a focus group discussion is not used primarily in order to understand how individuals understand the world, rather it is the groups' collective statements, feelings and shared experiences that you want to understand (Dahlin-Ivanoff 2011, 72). Focus group discussion are built on the assumption that people do not live secluded from each other. Instead, people create their own frames of reference but when in interaction with others, their frames may be confirmed, reinforced or even challenged due to other people’s beliefs and ideas. This in its turn leads to new knowledge and understanding (Stewart & Shamdasani 1990, Wilkingson 1999 & Dahlin-Ivanoff 2002).
3.3 Ethics
Before the focus group discussions were made, I visited the class where I met the refugees and presented myself, my background and the aim of my thesis. I described the different parts of the thesis and especially place identity as it is the main focus. I also explained that everyone who was willing to join my discussions may be anonymous in my final report, and that they are allowed to leave the discussion at any point and that they do not have to answer a question if they find it disturbing etc. They were also informed that they can refuse to be recorded.

The effect that an interviewer has on the informants can be of great meaning to the outcomes of the interview results. How the informants perceive me as a person, based on my background, educational level, culture and gender may affect how they answer my questions (Denscombe 2009, 244). This is something that was considered both before and during the interview sessions.

4 Theoretical perspectives
The following chapter will present theoretical aspects on immigration, policies, migration history in Sweden and place identity and integration.

4.1 Immigration policy/ies in the EU and Sweden

“Remember, remember always, that all of us, and you and I especially, are descended from immigrants and revolutionists”

Franklin D. Roosevelt

Migration is the movement of people across global, national and local boundaries and compromises a purpose of new establishment, either it
be permanent or temporary (Gallagher 2013, 1). Migration flows today are slower than in the second half of the nineteenth century, but still include more than 215 million people or 3 percent of the world’s population, who live outside of their birth countries (World Bank, 2011). The reasons for migration are various, some people are forced to leave their country due to political instability and some chose to migrate due to better living opportunities in other countries (Gallagher 2013, 1). Even though migration patterns are higher between low-income countries (GS to GS migration), GS to GN migration (low-income to high-income) still makes up about 40 percent of world migration patterns (World Bank, 2013).

The journey from one country to another can be harsh and testing for any individual. Many people are additionally not able to travel legally and therefore seek alternative ways to migrate, risking their health and sometimes even their lives in order to gain a better life. At the same time, migration supports national economies both in the receiving countries as well as in the sending ones, in that way improving the lives of many millions of people. Either way, migration is a phenomenon that is here to stay and acts as a central plank in our globalized world (Gallagher 2013, 1).

Reliable information on migration and its patterns are not always available. Some countries are not transparent when it comes to migration data, definitions of migration might vary between countries and some countries may keep better statistics than others, making it hard to draw any comparing results between countries (Gallagher 2013, 2). However, some relevant facts that have been drawn from recent, authoritative publications show that refugees and asylum seekers are made up of 16.3 million people, or 8 percent, or international migrants. 65 percent of immigrations in the Middle-East and Africa are refugees and asylum
seekers due to the fact that more people move between developing countries (south to south migration) than from developing countries to high-income countries (World Bank 2013, 10; OECD 2013, 52).

Policymakers are more and more aware that migration has a cumulative effect nationally and that it also can have an impact on economic growth. A chain of development can occur through migration, from the individual migrants to households and further through communities and entire countries. Migrants have a tendency of “giving back” to their countries of origin, although it often is about private remittances to individuals and households, supporting local private economy rather than on a national scale. This can also have a wider impact than only on the individual level. Money that is sent back to individuals or households may enable a further investment in for example building a new home, meaning that employment in construction will be boosted, even if it only means for a shorter period of time, or a skilled person that migrates back to their country of origin, bringing back new ideas and knowledge (World Bank 2013, 33).

Recently, increasing terrorist activities around the world have had an impact on the political scene, especially on immigration politics (Freeman et al in Givens et al 2009, 1). The policies regarding immigration and refugees in the EU have become stricter as governments have become more aware of security issues. Scholars and commentators on migration issues argue that governments, media and politicians have used these ongoing terrorist activities as an opportunity to correlate immigration with terrorism. Immigrants have on a larger scale been portrayed as a threat to security allowing governments to restrict and control migration in a larger scale (Boswell in Givens et al 2009, 93). However, Boswell in Givens et al (2009, 93-95) discusses how, in fact,
there is little evidence that governments in the EU are restricting immigration solely on security reasons.

Immigration policies in Sweden have become a hot topic over the past few years as immigration has increased rapidly. Even though immigration to Sweden is small compared to other EU countries, the amount is large when looking at the total population of Sweden. One of the major topics in Swedish immigration is the political party Sweden Democrat or Swedish Democrats (Sverigedemokraterna, SD). The party is a far-right, right-wing populist and anti-immigration party that in the most recent elections gained 12.9 percent and winning 49 (14 percent) of the seats in the Swedish parliament (Riksdag) (Swedish Government website, 2015).

4.2 Migration history and process in Sweden
Sweden has received increasing amounts of refugees from approximately 1945 and onward. As you can see in figure 1, net migration to Sweden has differed during the years but has in the end steadily increased. From approximately 1995, net-migration has increased largely from being close to 0 to around 80,000.
The Swedish population was before this period a relatively homogenous group with only a few minority groups that distinceted themselves from the larger Swedish population. Successive waves of immigration has since then led to fundamental changes in the composition of the Swedish population. In recent years, immigrants have become a large part of the total population in Sweden, going from 8 percent to 14 percent in just a few years (Bevelander & Dahlstedt 2013, 179).

Through the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, labor migration was the foremost type of migratory reason for coming to Sweden. Due to organized labor recruitment and liberal immigration laws, many people migrated to Sweden. However, in the early 1970s, economic growth stagnated, in that way reducing the demand for workers from abroad and consequently, migrations laws were hardened. Labor migration from the Nordic countries decreased while migration from other countries ceased altogether (Castles & Miller 2003, 52 and Bevelander & Dahlstedt 2013, 180).

Even though labor migration stopped, other types of migration flows still occurred. From the same period of time (early 1970s and onward)
refugees and tied-movers have dominated the migrations flows into Sweden. These people came primarily from Eastern Europe and non-European countries. In the 1980s and 1990s, these two types of migration groups steadily increased. The refugee’s countries of origin have changed over the years, depending primarily on which areas of the world that have dealt with crisis and conflicts. In the 1970s the refugee groups were dominated by Chile, Poland and Turkey, moving in the 1980s to people still coming from Chile but also Ethiopia, Iran and other Middle Eastern countries to migration flows in the 1990s dominating from countries such as Iraq, former Yugoslavia and other European countries (Bevelander & Dahlstedt 2013, 180). Today, family reunion migrants are the largest immigrant group followed by refugees. In 2006 and 2007, refugee migration was at its peak, meaning that in the following years family reunion migration has increased.

Migration laws today provide the opportunity to come to Sweden as legal labor migrants regardless of your skill or educational level. The system is however still somewhat regulated and not very flexible. Before 2008, an employer who wished to hire a person from a GS-country had to report the vacant position to the County Labor Board. A work permit could be obtained for people coming from outside Scandinavia or EU-country if the Migration Board and the National Labor Board found that there was a need for this actual person to obtain the work.

The National Labor Board carried out investigations and tests on whether or not the labor market needed foreign labor. The employer needed to prove that the foreign born worker was to be paid a proper wage, had accommodation and that the person was covered by insurance and that the terms of employment were fair and in line with the collective agreements (Johnsson 2008, 22).
The National Migration Board and the County Labor Boards had the responsibility for matching supply and demand in the labor market, therefore being the ones determining who was allowed to enter the Swedish labor market from outside the Scandinavian and EU border (Johnsson 2008, 24). However, after 2008, the rules were changed by the government in order to shift the responsibility of the labor market to employers rather than the authorities. The idea was that the employers had better and more complete knowledge of what skills were needed in the labor market.

4.3 Immigration of asylum seekers
The following chapter has been retrieved and presented from the Swedish migration board website.

Today, the process for asylum seekers is as follows: An application for asylum must first of all be made within the borders of Sweden. The Swedish Migration Board is the authority responsible for examining applications for asylum. At the time of application, the asylum seeker will be informed of the asylum process and also receive an overview of their rights and obligations.

The asylum seeker is allowed to leave a specific wish for who they want to be represented by when it comes to public counselors, interpreters and administrators. The asylum seeker is also allowed to choose the gender of the representatives. Other practical issues that are done in the registration process is fingerprint checking with the EU’s common database Eurodac. This is done in order to determine whether it is Sweden or another EU country that is responsible for examining the asylum application. Applicants will be advised of further practical issues and rights during the process, such as per diem, housing, health care and organized employment.
As a rule, the public counselor will represent and defend the asylum seeker's interests during the Migrations Boards examination and if it becomes necessary, in the Migration Court. The public counselor is appointed by the Immigration service but the counselor’s loyalty must always be towards the client in focus, and not towards the Migration board.

The applicant will then be invited to the public counselor in order to get a briefing about the asylum process including information on the roles of the different actors, and also to sort out the actual reason for gaining asylum. This is an important process for the asylum seeker as it is central that the counselor is aware of the grounds of asylum and can defend the client's interest during the investigation that the Migration Board will handle.

After this, the applicant will be invited to the Migration Board for an oral examination of the grounds for asylum. This will then be reviewed together with the investigation that the Migration Board has held. The counselor will be present during this examination – as throughout the entire asylum process- and will be able to defend the client as far as possible, if this would become a necessity. The counsellor and client will then review the minutes of the asylum investigation and go through whether or not there should be any additional data added concerning the ground for asylum. In some cases a supplementary examination/investigation is needed.

The minutes of the asylum investigation and the counsellors own discussion with the applicant is the basis for the contents of the letter that the counsellor then sends to the Migration Board. The letter presents the applicant's reasons for seeking permanent residence in Sweden as a refugee and any other factors that might be a basis for refuge; this
through a legal argument pursued on the basis of both Swedish and international asylum laws.

Finally, the Swedish Migration Board will then decide if the asylum applicant should be granted or denied refuge in accordance with the conditions set out in Chapter 5 of the Aliens Act (Utlänningslagen) (2005: 716). The decision is usually put forward after an officer has presented the case and given proposed decisions. Decisions must always be taken after the application is tested in the following order: refugee status (Chap. 4 § 1 Aliens), subsidiary protection (Chap. 4 § 2 Aliens), other subsidiary protection (4 Ch. 2 a § Aliens.), Residence of highly distressing circumstances (5 Ch. 6 § Aliens.), residence permit on other grounds (eg, 5 Ch. 3 § Aliens.). The decision is then notified to the applicant.

Municipalities in Sweden receive different amounts of refugees each year. It is each municipality’s decision as to how many refugees they will accept each year, however in a joint agreement with the Swedish Migration Board. Even though one municipality is bigger than another, the amount of refugees can be larger or equal to the smaller municipality. For example, the municipality of Boden has a population of 28,000 and received in 2014, 181 new refugees. Umeå, as mentioned before, has a population size of around 120,000 people while they in 2014 received 118 new refugees (Swedish Migration Board, 2015).

4.4 Push and pull factors
There are different factors that are a part of the decision making progress of a migrant. In some cases, the immigrant might not have a choice in moving but solely needs too due to the risk for his or her own life. In that case, there are strong push factors from their country of origin. However, the refugee in this case sometimes does have a choice as to what country
he or she wants to seek asylum in. The pull factors in this case could be close family, other relatives or friends living in a country, also migration laws might be a pull factor.

There are both gains and losses with moving to another country. The greatest gains are associated with migration to the Global North (GN), whether it be GN to GN migration or Global South (GS) to GN. Those that have migrated to the GN have generally rated their lives as better than their counterparts in their countries of origin. Those migrants that have resided in a GN – country for more than 5 years consider themselves as having a better life than what they would have if they had stayed at home. In contrary, migrants in the GS tend to rate their lives as similar, or even worse than, those who have chosen to stay in the country of origin. Migration has clear consequences for migrants and their families, but also affects the development of touched economies. (World Bank, 2013; OECD, 2013).

4.5 Place identity

"A sense of belonging is based in the lived experience of inclusion and affinity, and undermined by experiences of exclusion, marginalization, and rejection" (Taylor 2009, 299).

The original concept of place identity was developed by Proshansky, Fabian & Kaminoff in 1983. They defined it as ‘a potpourri of memories, conceptions, interpretations, ideas and related feelings about specific physical settings as well as types of settings.’ (Proshansky, Fabian & Kaminoff 1983, 60)

In this regard, they saw it primarily as a cognitive concept that was a ‘sub-structure of the self-identity’ (Proshansky, Fabian & Kaminoff 1983, 59) and worked to define a person’s broader identity through their
relationships with place. Similarly, Rose (1995, 88) discusses how identity is about how we make sense of ourselves and that a place can become so strong that it becomes a part of your identity.

Researchers, anthropologists and sociologists, amongst others, have argued that place in fact is something that is created by people, either individually or in groups. Dixon & Durrheim (2000, 33-35) however criticized this notion, suggesting that it ignored important factors in a society such as rhetorical functions, discursive actions and political dimensions related to notions of place, and further developed the concept to address the relationships between notions of identity and the regulation of space.

This meaning that how places actually are divided between people is not only an individual person’s choice, but reflects on how the city is administrated by for example politicians. They argued that taking a discursive approach to place identity facilitates an understanding of the way that notions of place feed into notions of identity, as well as highlighting the way in which place identity is social in origin, being co-constructed with others, and that these identities are practices that have functions (Dixon & Durrheim 2000, 28).

Dixon (2001) developed this idea further, suggesting that discursive approaches should be used to understand the way in which geographies are organized to control, for example, inter-ethnic contact; in this regard, he stated that: ‘The history of collective relations in many societies is, at least in part, a history of struggles over geography’ (Dixon 2001, 600).

More recent studies have applied the concept of place identity to further explore the way that constructions of place function to regulate social relations or reinforce notions of belonging (e.g. Bowskill, Lyons & Cole, 2007; Hugh-Jones & Madill, 2009; McKinlay & McVittie, 2007).
However, this research has yet to explore the way in which particular constructions of place function to constitute people’s identities, provide explanations of behavior or ways of being and thus work together to justify or discredit people’s legitimacy and belonging. The current study extends the theoretical understanding of place identity through analyzing discourse relating to the presence of asylum seekers and refugees, a group whose very identity and right to remain are tied up with constructions of place.

Place is more than a location, instead constructions of place may function as more connected with meaning and feeling than with the actual, physical place (Relph 1992, 37 and Rose 1995, 88). The meaning of place implies a contemporary tension between the local and the global construction of place (Rose 1995, 89).

This can vary significantly between individuals and where the individual is at the actual point in life. For example, as a Swede travelling in Africa, one would present him or herself as being Swedish, if the person that you have presented yourself to has knowledge of Sweden you might go ahead and say what part of Sweden you are from. However, if you are a Swede travelling in another part of Sweden that is not your home-area, you would directly refer to your home town as the place where you are from. Thereby, what place actually means is connected to your geographical location.

Many people identify themselves, at least partly, by the relationship they have with their place of living (Taylor 2009, 296). It can be a society or a nation, or both (Valentine 2001, 9). There are certain factors that can make some people feel more or less related to a location, these factors
have to do with where you are, who you are there with and what type of situation you are in. The rapid increase in the number of people moving across national borders that has been mentioned earlier refers to different types of migrants. Some are high-ranking "global citizens" who are traveling for work related reasons, while others are stateless refugees. There are major differences between these individuals who move across national borders and this can affect how they perceive belonging to a place, and how others see them (Taylor 2009, 297).

Place attachment can be complex as there are degrees of inclusion and exclusion, depending on for example the size and population of the place. Whether or not you will be included in a society can be based on race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion, sexual orientation and gender. Persons belonging to a particular ethnic group may feel excluded from a society, but can also experience the affiliation with other excluded individuals (Taylor 2009, 295).

Another factor that contributes to the complexity of place attachment is that an individual may be born in a country and grow up in another. It can help the individual feel that she or he has a dual national identity, with a strong sense of belonging to two different countries (Taylor 2009, 298). The question however is how do you actually identify yourself with a place that is so different from your country of origin?

Rose (1995, 95) and Amundsen (2001, ) both point out that a group identifying themselves with a place, by that way establishing what they have in common is simultaneously establishing a relation of difference with other places and other social groups. Place identity therefore refers to relations based on both similarities and differences, and this is important to understand. Putting place identity into a crude position, it is in fact about “us” and “them”, “us” or “we” share common experiences,
cultures, tastes and histories that make us different from “them” (Hague 2005, 6).

One part of place identity is the essence of sense of place. Emotions about places can be connected to the notion of identity. What becomes obvious is that a sense of place is more than just an individual person’s feelings about a particular place, but instead is in connection with the individuals’ whole social life. Places are interpreted from specific social positions and particular social reasons and senses of place are articulated through representation. Places represent different things, and are all unique even though some places can share similar characteristics and features (Rose 1995, 89-90).

With increasing migration flows around the world, places can over time change characteristics and therefore also change the sense of place for the individuals living there. When people migrate, they do not leave behind their cultures and traditions, rather they bring with them their beliefs that might even be elevated after a migration. These types of factors all affect a place and the individual’s sense of it. Places will always be foremost physical while at the same time they are perceived differently by individuals and also affected by the way individuals perceive the place (Massey 1995, 46).

As has been examined, place identity does not foremost rely on the physical setting of a place. Therefore, place identity can be transnational and stretch over both local and national borders. Transnationalism is the study of how people and institutions are linked by multiple ties and interactions over borders of national states (Vertovec & Cohen 1999, 447).

Transnationalism can be linked to the importance of place. A study made on Ugandans in Britain showed that place identity and transnationalism
inter-relate strongly with integration. The migrants’ history, identity and connection to the country of origin has great importance to the identity that will be created in the new place of residence. How migrants cope in the residence country can be linked to what type of setting they originate from. If the setting differs largely on factors such as education and work opportunities, integration through these types of means can become easier. Education, for example, can be a helpful frame for a migrant, as it can be a stepping stone into the new countries culture and traditions (Binaisa 2013, 889).

4.6 Integration
Integration into a society starts from childhood, therefore it can be difficult to integrate to a new place when you are an adult. Integration can be especially difficult if you migrate to a country that is significantly different from your country of origin and also if it is your first time moving away from your home country or even your home town. For refugees and asylum seekers, this is often the case (Lundborg 2013, 222). Integration can however be complex as the word itself can mean different things depending on how the term is to be used. Castles et al (2002, 114) for example argues that there is no general accepted definition or model of immigrant and refugee integration.

Employment is seen as one of the crucial factors for integration into a society. Employment does not only yield an income, but also gives knowledge in cultural aspects, language and the functioning of the labor market (Lundborg 2013, 219). Rooth (1999, 54) discusses how an early establishment in the host societies labor market can make the integration process quicker for a refugee.

Acculturation, which is the process of two different types of cultures that cross pathways, is an integrational term that gives a more clear insight as
to how integration actually could work or not (Berry 2001, 615). There are essentially four different outcomes of an acculturation process, according to Berry (2001, 619). Integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization are the four possible outcomes.

These outcomes are defined by two factors, relationships pursued amongst groups and the willingness or ability to maintain heritage culture and identity. Berry argues that integration amongst immigrants and refugees is based on how much cultural integrity is maintained in the new country while at the same time seeking to participate in the larger society. This, Berry means, is essential for integration but can differ depending on the other outcomes. In assimilation, the degree of heritage culture decreases, in separation, relationships among groups are less and in marginalization both of the categories have decreasing importance (Berry 2001, 619).

Researchers have found that language is one of the largest barriers when discussing integration. Nowadays, English is a well-founded language in many countries, but still lacks effect in many other countries. In Sweden, English is a well-founded language and can largely be used around the country. However, being able to speak a countries native language is always an advantage. If the wish is to attend university in Sweden it is a requirement to have credentials in the Swedish language. This is possible for immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers to get through Swedish for immigrants courses that are held individually throughout municipalities in Sweden. In Umeå, it is the VIVA adult school that holds these courses (Viva adult school website, 2015)
4.7 Refugees in media Sweden

Only recently, the topic of asylum seekers and refugees in Sweden has become a hot topic in both the Swedish and international media scene. One happening outside of Östersund, a smaller city close to the border to Norway, caused a large two-folded debate in Sweden. 40 asylum seekers were taken by bus to a small village where they would stay until they had their asylum and could freely choose their dwelling (Daily mail, 2015).

An asylum process can take up to a year and this was something that the asylum seekers were much aware of. When the bus arrived to the destination the asylum seekers refused to get off the bus and also went on a hunger strike. They demanded to be taken back to one of the bigger cities, Malmö, Göteborg or Stockholm as they felt that their chances to more descent lives were bigger in any of those cities (Daily mail, 2015).

The debate on this issue was carried out both in different media settings like tv-shows and newspapers but also in social medias such as Facebook. The news also hit international news agencies (Daily mail, 2015). There were essentially two sides to the debate, one side felt that the asylum seekers had the right to demand better living conditions and that they have the same right as anyone else to choose where they want to live. The other side felt that the asylum seekers should be happy that they are offered somewhere to live and that they should show gratitude to the Swedish government for at least considering them an asylum to Sweden.

There has been some debate in Umeå and its surrounding municipalities considering both refugees and asylum seekers. One of the most recent debates was when the program coordinator for the Västerbotten Museum in Umeå issued a notion to ban the Swedish Defense Force to be a part of the national day celebrations in June in the annual celebration area Gammlia. The banning was done due to the authorities believing that it
would be disrespectful for new refugees as the presence of military forces could scare them and make them feel uncomfortable. The ban was however withdrawn in the end after the municipal board in Umeå decided that the Defence Force should be a part of the celebrations (SVT website, 2015).

5 Results
Here, a thematic analysis will be presented based on the focus group discussion done with the refugees. The questions that were discussed during the focus group discussion can be reviewed in Annex 1.

As the interviewees were not familiar with the theory of place identity, I briefly explained the idea behind the concept to them. However, as the concept of place identity is complex and many folded, it is not easily understood. Therefore, I felt that the use of the concept of “feeling at home” was more understandable in order for the interviewees to recognize what it actually was that I wanted them to discuss.

5.1 Immigration in Umeå
A focus group discussion with a group of refugees will stand as the empirical part. The refugees that were interviewed all reside in Umeå city. As the refugees that have been interviewed in this thesis have lived in Sweden between five to six years, and in Umeå between five to three years, they already have Swedish citizenships and are therefore able to freely choose their place of living.

In 2012, Umeå received 98 new refugees, in 2013 the number was 137 and in 2014 the amount of new refugees was 118 people (Umeå Regionen, Migration Board in Umeå) (See figure 1 for citizenships). New refugees to Umeå are resigned to different living quarters depending on factors such as age and sex.
In figure 1, you can see the top five citizenships of new refugees in Umeå between the years 2012, 2013 and 2014. As can be seen, Somalia, Afghanistan and Eritrea are represented each year by refugees. In the two most recent years, Syria is the newest country (together with stateless refugees) that is represented, taking Iran and Iraq’s place.

The amount of new refugees between 2012 and 2014 to Umeå is fairly high compared to the net migration to Umeå during the same years. In 2012 Umeå had a net migration of 234 persons, in 2013 it was 378 persons and in 2014, 678 persons (Umea.se).

![Top 5 citizenships of new refugees in Umeå](image)

**Figure 2. Top 5 citizenships of new refugees in Umeå**

### 5.2 Selection of interview persons

Below I will present the interview persons that were present during the group interview. All of the persons live in Umeå city, namely in the areas of Ålidhem, Marieberg, Ålidhöjd, Mariehem, Nydalahöjd and Teg. The interview persons are all refugees that are studying Swedish for immigrants at VIVA vuxenskola in Umeå. Due to limited resources, the
ability to find interviewees that would fit my aim was demanding and therefore I had little chance to freely choose my interview persons.

Interview person “A” is a family refugee from Nepal. “A” came to Sweden after “A”s spouse had gotten asylum after political clashes in Nepal early 2000. “A” has been living in Sweden for approximately five years now with the family’s two children and in Umeå for three years. “A” has a high school diploma and has worked at a kindergarten and is now hoping to be able to attend university in Sweden in the future.

Interview person “B” is a refugee from Somalia. “B” arrived in Sweden after living a few years in various African countries such as Zambia and Malawi whilst waiting to get asylum in Sweden. “B” is married but is not able to meet the spouse and two children often as the rest of the family is in Somalia and has not been granted asylum in Sweden yet. “B” has a high school diploma and has worked since early adulthood in different areas such as a butcher, taxi chauffeur and shop keeper.

Interview person “C” is a refugee from Afghanistan. “C” came to Europe by boat for approximately five years ago after being on the run from the Taliban for a few months. “C” then came to Sweden where he got asylum and has been living in Umeå for three years. “C” is an educated journalist with a four year diploma from the University of Kabul. “C” worked as a radio host, tv-presenter and reporter in Afghanistan and is now hoping to do the same in Sweden.

Interview person “D” is a refugee from Eritrea. “D” arrived in Sweden as an unaccompanied refugee child for approximately four years ago. “D” is today 21 years old and is hoping to attend university as soon as a high school diploma has been achieved.
Interview person “E” is a family refugee from Somalia. “E” came to Sweden with the families four children approximately a year after “E”s spouse had gotten asylum. “E” has not attended school.

Interview person “F” is a family refugee from Burundi. “F” arrived in Sweden shortly after “F”s spouse got asylum. “F” has a high school diploma and wishes to attend university in Sweden before the couple start a family.

Interview person “G” is a political refugee from Ethiopia. “G” arrived in Sweden for approximately five years ago after serving jail time in Ethiopia. “G” has a bachelor’s degree in political science from the University of Addis Ababa. “G” has since arrival in Sweden worked in a restaurant as a server. When “G” has learned Swedish to a satisfactory level, the wish is to get a master’s degree in political science.

Interview person “H” is a refugee from Afghanistan and came to Sweden for approximately three years ago. “H” worked as an interpreter for the UN after completing middle school. “H”s spouse was also able to seek refuge in Sweden. The couple does not have any children yet.

5.2 Thematic perspectives

In the following chapter, the answers from the focus group discussion will be described through themes that were identified after the transcription of the interview.

5.2.1 Climate

The first question that was discussed was whether or not there were any factors that made the refugees feel at home in Umeå and one of the first discussion points that the interviewees had was how the climate in Umeå was hard to relate to in the beginning. As the interviewees come from the Middle East, Africa or Asia, they were not used to the persistent coldness.
Many of the interviewees arrived in Umeå during the colder months but were quickly advised by people around them that the weather gets warmer during the summer months.

The fact that the weather was not always so cold was reassuring for them, “E” for example tells me that upon arrival to Umeå a supervisor immediately joked about the weather saying that luckily, we have four to five months of absolutely beautiful weather in Umeå. “E” felt that it is possibly to get through the colder and darker months as the people of Umeå always felt positive about the future.

All of the interviewees agreed when “A” said that one of the most important parts of feeling at home in Umeå was to feel comfortable outside during the winter. Many of the interviewees are used to being outside and much of the social life in their original home areas was carried outside the house. In the beginning of “A”s new life in Umeå, the thought of being outside and playing with the children in the snow was depressing and “A” had a hard time understanding how the children could be outside during break time at school and had some light disputes with the children’s teachers. However, after a few weeks, “A” got used to the cold, much due to the right type of clothing and also, “A” added with a laugh, the right attitude.

5.2.2 Education

“Seeing students everywhere in Umeå inspires me” – “H”

When we discussed the matter of why Sweden, and specifically Umeå is a good place to live, all of the interviewees were unanimous that the possibilities for education was one of the top beneficiaries. The possibility to be able to go to school for free for both children and adults
is a great thing, according to especially “H”, “A” and “C”. The group is pleased and admires the faculty when discussing the Swedish for immigrant’s course that they are attending.

They all agree upon the fact that, in their home countries, they would not be able to attend university and that they would struggle hard in order to be able to give their children the chance to go to school. Many of the countries that the interviewees come from have high fees for attending school. The universities are especially expensive and also do not carry educations that suit for international diplomas. Living in a city with a large university like Umeå has spruced the urge for further education, both for the interviewees that have a high school diploma but also for the two that have a bachelor’s degree or have already attended university in their home countries. For “C” however, the possibility to further education in Umeå is, right now, low, as the wish is to get a master’s degree in journalism which is not available in Umeå today.

5.2.3 City environment

“People in big cities are so selfish, in smaller cities like Umeå there is more care for everyone” - “H”

The interviewees are keen on the way Umeå is built. With how it is built they mean the city center in the middle and most of the main living areas surrounding it. As a few of them live in renowned “student” areas, they see this as positive and refreshing with many young people around. They also feel inspired by the students, “F” for example says that, especially when it is warmer outside, and “F” walks to work and needs to cross the
university area, feels like a part of the university even though “F” is not attending any courses when the interviews were performed.

5.2.4 Safety

“Umeå is like a safe haven for me” – “C”

All of the interviewees come from parts of the world where there are either conflicts in the form of civil wars, terrorism or have restricted, by the government, ways of living. The contrast to Umeå and the way of life here is therefore large. Other than climate issues, the feeling of being safe was large and welcoming to the interviewees. “B” tells us that one of the first things that was noticed upon arrival in Umeå was that many people were outside walking and running, only for recreational reasons. This made “B” feel good and was bound to do the same as quick as possible.

The rest of the group also see Umeå as very safe, as many of them have lived in other parts of Sweden. They believe that Umeå is especially safe, when comparing to the other cities they have either lived in or visited. “B” says that friends in Malmö have, after visiting Umeå, wished that Malmö would have the same type of open atmosphere that Umeå has. They would however still not want to live in Umeå if they had the chance, as it is so far from other places, according to “B”.

One happening that the group discussed that was a shock to all of them, as they had already from the beginning felt safe in Umeå, was when a new-Nazi movement visited Umeå and demonstrated on the main shopping street in the city center. There were clashes between the movement with both police and individuals which, the group discussed, was quite startling. However, the massive demonstration towards racism
and Nazism that was organized a week later showed how much the population of Umeå valued Umeå’s openness and willingness to help individuals regardless of factors such as origin and gender, said the group.

“C” then tells the group about how “C”’s mother can go to the local food shop in Umeå at any time of day or night without “C” thinking about it particularly but that when the mother needed to visit the doctors clinic in Kabul at 9 in the morning, the mother would not be allowed to go by herself as this would be a threat to her life. “C” means that this is one of the biggest comparisons to the life they lived in Afghanistan, and that Umeå clearly has a strong characteristic trait of being a secure city.

Another aspect of safety that the group discussed was the authorities in Sweden. For example, “G” spoke about the first arrival to Umeå, and how lost “G” felt upon arrival by train to the train station. Luckily, “G” says, a black man was also on the train and “G” believed that this person could help to find the place where “G” was supposed to go. The man however advised “G” to contact a policeman that happened to be at the station where as “G” was confounded as to how the police man could help “G” as the view “G” had was that police were no help at all to the common person, as is the case in “G”’s home town Addis Ababa in Ethiopia. The police man however called upon a taxi and made sure that the taxi chauffeur had the right address before wishing “G” a happy visit in Umeå.

“C” concludes this question with saying that the police in Sweden, respectively Umeå, are much easier to respect as the police themselves seem to respect the local population and the people they meet. Even though the police are not as visible in Umeå as they are in for example Kabul, they are not surrounded by an aura of threat when they walk around the streets as they do in Kabul. In Kabul they always look like
they are patrolling, whilst in Umeå they look like they are on a Sunday walk, according to “C”. They show “the front of the society”.

Another part of what makes the refugees feel safe in Umeå is the freedom of speech which many of the interviewees appreciate more than other factors of good life. “G” tells the group about elections that “G” was a part of when still living in Ethiopia. “G” was giving a speech when suddenly the police arrived and “G” was put into jail. “G” says that this would never happen in Umeå, if “G” wanted to give a speech on women’s rights in town in Umeå, “G” could do this without hesitation.

5.2.5 Family and traditions

An important difference between Umeå and their own home villages and cities are some specific family traditions. One of these traditions is that many of the interviewees are used to gathering family and friends many times a week to socialize. This is something that has differed largely from their lives in their home countries. They do not keep up this tradition as often as they would have if they were in their home village. Often the simple fact is that it is too cold outside so that they would rather stay home.

Religion is an important factor for many of the interviewees and when the discussion point of physical buildings was brought up, one of the only physical factors that made the refugees feel at home in Umeå was the buildings where they would have their religious meetings. There is for example no mosque in Umeå at this point in time but there are facilities where Muslims can pray and have meetings. “B” says that this place feels like home due to the interior and the people that are there. One large difference is how the Muslims that attend prayers are from all over the world, which “B” says is only positive. “B” has made new friends from
different countries and therefore also has learnt new things and says that they often have very interesting discussions together after prayers.

5.2.6 Recreational activities

“Umeå is a sporting city, I felt it directly. Everyone does something that has to do with sports, it makes me feel at home” – “H”

Shortly mentioned in chapter 5.2.4, recreational activities was one of the factors that made the interviewees feel at home in Umeå. This was also the factor that specifically was mentioned as making two of the interviewees “feel at home”. The other interviewees also felt that all of the sports activities that are offered in Umeå makes them feel closer to home, and other, new activities makes them feel more welcome in Umeå.

Especially the fact that it is possible to just walk out of your door and then do almost any type of sports, anywhere, without having to worry about your own personal safety was important. Also the fact that the interviewees that have children feel that they can, without hesitation, let their children play outside with their friends. “C” explains how it is so good that you do not have to be in a building to do sports, instead you can be on the street or even in the forest. The only thing you need is a ball, two people and a couple of trees and you have a football court ready.

5.2.7 Communication with home country

“Every day I read something terrible on Facebook. Recently my friend’s brother was killed by Taliban and this was discussed on Facebook. I always read, but I can never help”. - “C”

A topic that comes up many times during the interview is the relation to the home countries of the refugees. All of the interviewees long for their
extended family and their friends that still live in their home countries. Communication is mainly through different Social Media platforms such as Facebook, where they on a daily basis can see how their relatives and friends are doing. This is both a positive and negative thing, positive in the sense that a daily communication is possible but negative due to the interviewees not being able to more than observe what is happening. Sometimes the internet connection in the home countries are down, making the communication hard as telephone lines in many of the refugees home countries are often not working.

5.2.8 Communication with key people in Umeå
One of the questions that was discussed was the communication with key persons of a migration, asylum and integration process in both Sweden and Umeå. The interviewees discussed the issue and agreed mostly with the fact that all of the parts of a migration to Sweden were easy compared to either what they themselves had experienced or what they had heard from friends and relatives in other countries both closer to home and in the EU. The help in both learning the Swedish language and how the Swedish labor market works was a large part for the refugees and the matter of coping in the new place of residence.

“B” for example says that feeling at home in Sweden has been much easier than for example in Zambia. He felt like more of a foreigner in Lusaka, Zambia’s capitol, than in Umeå. The authorities in Zambia treated him like a “forbidden foreigner”, he says, whilst in Sweden and Umeå he has always felt listened too. “C” however says that when he first came to Sweden he felt as though he was a threat, as he emigrated from Afghanistan, he felt as though the authorities in Sweden looked upon him as a terrorist.
When asked specifically how the interviewees felt upon first arrival in Umeå, all of them said that it felt good and safe from the very beginning. As mentioned before, the only part that was hard to cope with was the cold weather.

The fact that they already master Swedish to an almost satisfactory level makes the interviewees feel more at home. “B” says that upon first arrival to Sweden, “B”s English was poor, but was still able to communicate quite well with Swedes. However, now mastering the language has helped largely.

6 Concluding Discussion

Considering the results from the focus group discussion, emotions about places can clearly be connected to the notion of identity, meaning that an individual person’s feelings about a particular place is in connection with the individuals’ whole social life. What is possible or not in a place is more relevant than the physical appearance in order to create place identity in a new home area, according to the interviewed refugees.

Even though Umeå differs significantly from the home areas of the interviewed refugees, they still feel at home due to several different reasons that have little to do with the physical space of Umeå. However, what was clear was that there are physical factors that make the refugees feel less at home. At least considering the first weeks or months that the refugees were in Umeå they felt that the winter weather was harsh on their physical being and they could not grasp the fact that they were supposed to live and function in the type of weather that Umeå has during many of the months of the year.

The refugees did quickly feel that it in fact was an issue that was easy to deal with once they got used to it and also once they had acquired the
right clothing. The fact that being able to cope with being outside during the colder months was a large part of feeling at home in Umeå. As one of the interviewed tells, much of the social life in their home countries is actually outside of the house and therefore this was a step in the direction of feeling more at home.

The ability to maintain cultural heritage in the new country of residence has shown to be of importance. Berry (2001) argues that in order for a successful integrational process to be preserved, a cultural integrity must be perceived. In contrary, assimilation leads to the degree of heritage decreases as an important factor. The interviewees have shown clearly that the possibilities to maintain the same social life and religious activities from their countries of origin have been important for their place identity in Umeå.

Access to sports of different kinds was the foremost social activity that made almost each of the refugees feel at home in Umeå. The fact that almost each sport activity that the interviewees were used to having in their home country also was available here was reassuring. As well the fact that new types of activities, such as running and walking outside at any time of the day or night was possible made them feel at home.

As the refugees come from countries that differ largely from Sweden in terms of safety, this was an important aspect of feeling at home for the interviewees. It did not really matter that the physical environment was persistently different to that of their home towns, the feeling of safety was much stronger than the need for the physical environment to look or feel the same.

The question as to how the refugees relate to place identity in their home countries will remain unanswered. The issue was briefly touched upon during the discussion but it was clear that it was a delicate topic. Why
this was the reason is hard to analyze, but the fact that being a refugee and therefore having none or limited possibilities to ever go back to their home country might be a factor that makes the issue sensitive. The feeling of knowing that you might never be able to see your home again is probably very tough.

The identity that one has in connection to one’s home country/town has shown to be an important issue in a person’s life when it comes to migratory factors. As Binaisa (2013, 899) pointed out, migrants moving to a significantly different country can find the integrational process easier through means that are harder to find in the country of origin. Educational opportunities in Umeå for example, has proven to be important for the interviewed refugees and their place identity. The atmosphere of the university and what it brings to Umeå is inspiring for the refugees and many of them are keen on attending university in Umeå in the future.

For Swedes, safety might be something that is taken for granted but can quickly disappear when something unpleasant happens in for example a living area in a city. The interviewed refugees however come from backgrounds where the feeling of safety is not granted, instead not being secure is the normal way of life.

As the refugees discussed during the interview session, just the fact that you can approach a police officer on the street in Umeå without hesitation is a sign of how safe Umeå is. Another aspect of safety that was discussed was how in Umeå you often come across people demonstrating or publicly speaking about different issues, either political or social, in the city center.

The interviewed refugees discussed the fact that they today feel like a part of Sweden, and they feel integrated to especially Umeå. One factor is
due to them being able, to a satisfactory level, speak Swedish. Other factors that were discussed was that their children attend school and most of the refugees have employment or other types of activities that they can fill their days with.

Even though the interviewees still feel strongly about their countries of origin, they feel that they do have a place in Umeå. In the beginning of some of the interviewees stay in Sweden, even being able to speak in English helped many times, and especially when understanding each other in a conversation of importance, such as with the migration board, has felt good.

When the group discussed the matter of dealing with migration issues they were unanimously positive towards both the migration board and non-profit organizations that help in migration issues and integration processes. The group discussed how these different institutions were helpful in integrational processes such as learning Swedish cultures and traditions, but also giving a push in the right direction when it comes to finding work in Sweden and foremost in Umeå. As Rooth (1999) wrote, an early establishment in a local labor market can quicken the integrational process for a refugee.

Much focus in this thesis is in the understanding of place identity as a result of the focus group discussion. As mentioned in chapter 3, data that is collected during a focus group discussion is not used primarily in order to understand how individuals understand the world, rather it is the groups’ collective statements, feelings and shared experiences that you want to understand but at the same time lifting individuals perspectives on factors.

One of the disadvantages with focus group discussion is in fact when you want to highlight an individual’s beliefs and ideas, even though you are
interested in collective thoughts, there will still be individuals that might think about issues in a different way. In my case the interviewees were at all times unanimous in their thoughts and answers to my questions.

Even though it was at mostly a discussion, sometimes the interviewees did speak one at a time, where as I could pick out some quotations from an individual that summarized what the group together discussed. In this case the number of participants in the focus group was fairly low, due to limited time and access to organizing discussions with several focus groups. Therefore both individual aspects as collective statements are considered and discussed.

As there are several different theoretical aspects of place identity, I feel that, in the case of the empirical results that I have presented, Rose (1995) has the closest perception of place identity that fits in to how the interviewed refugees understand the meaning of feeling at home. This due to Rose seeing the concept as more of a way how people form the place after their own experiences instead of the place forming the people. This however probably differs depending on the place and its characteristics.

Umeå is comparably large while at the same time, Umeå municipality receives comparably small amounts of refugees than for example the municipality of Boden, which is a small town that receives large amounts of refugees considering the population size. As place identity is at times diffuse and can be explained, discussed and analyzed into eternity, a selection of the most appropriate perspectives must be made.

Even though the argument can be made that people often form a place, in some ways, people are also formed by places. Considering for example how the interviewed refugees now are able to cope with the cold weather
and that they are able to walk and jog outside are factors that have come after their move to Umeå.

There seems to have been a tendency in Sweden, from stake holders and similar authoritative notions, to not ask or even discuss matters with refugees. Instead, decisions that can have great affect for migrants and refugees seem to have been based on preconceptions. This has been for example clear through two bigger events that were captured by the Media and shown in chapter 4.7. One of them was the planning of the Swedish National day celebrations in Umeå where the municipal board assumed that new refugees in Umeå would feel uncomfortable if the Swedish Defence Force was to join in the celebrations. This assumption was made without asking the refugees about their point of view on the issue.

What must be clear is that this research is based on what the refugees believe right now. This can change quickly due to different happenings in in either the refugees own life conditions or events that happen around them. Some critical factors can be public opinion, regulations and laws from the Swedish government and/or the municipal boards. This has been an exploratory approach to the question of how new citizens feel in our cities and can be an idea and stepping stone for future research in the area.

When moving from one place to another, the identity an individual has to the former location can be either positive or negative for an integrational process in the new place. The question however that is touched upon here is whether the change is large depending on where the move is from and where it is to. One might believe that moving from places that are similar physically might make the process of integration easier and quicker, and therefore making the process hard if the places are significantly different. Concluding from the discussion with the
interviewees, this might be the fact in the very beginning of an individual’s life in the new place. However, if factors such as social activities and the feeling of being safe are acquired, the feeling of home can have nothing or little to do with the physical surrounding.

7 Summary
The aim of this thesis has been to examine place identity amongst refugees in Umeå. This was done through focus group discussions with refugees that have lived in Sweden for more than five years, and in Umeå for approximately three years. In summary, the interviewed refugees feel at home in Umeå. The reason for this is mostly due to the fact that they have been able to maintain the same type of social and traditional lives that they had in their home countries. Sports activities and family traditions have played a large role in feeling at home and in pursuing a place identity in Umeå. Other, outside factors such as safety, have also played a significant role for the interviewed refugees as to how they cope to both the new country of residence as a whole but mainly to Umeå as their new city of residence.

The theoretical perspectives that were brought up handled issues such as migration laws in the EU and Sweden, integrational processes and factors for refugees and different aspects on place identity. The theoretical aspects have been linked to the results from the discussion with the refugees and shows that in fact, place identity is mainly linked to how individuals are able to connect to the place through social aspects rather than certain physical attributes that the place might have.
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Annex 1

Discussion points for focus group discussion

1. Is there anything that makes you feel at home in Umeå?
   - Why, why not?

   (The smells, sounds, people, buildings (for example churches, club rooms), social activities (sports), climate, food, accommodation)

   Follow-up question: Do you feel that you belong here?

2. Do you remember how you felt in the beginning when you arrived in Sweden/Umeå? (Feelings, thoughts)

3. How have you been treated by different people around you?
   Inhabitants in Umeå? Migration Board? Adult School?

4. How do you believe you treated people around you here in Umeå?
   Specific enthusiasts alternatively the public?

5. Has the move to Umeå changed the way you look at your life as compared with before you moved to Umeå?

   Follow-up question: Does the everyday life differ?

6. How do you see the future? (Stay in Umeå, move to another city in Sweden, move back to your home country or alternatively another country within the EU).